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Apple hires Yves Saint Laurent CEO to head special projects

Smart watches, content for a TV and a new line of more luxurious products could be on Paul Deneve's plate

By Mikael Ricknas | 03 July 13

Apple has hired Paul Deneve, until Tuesday the [CEO](#) of French luxury brand Yves Saint Laurent, to work as its vice president for special projects, igniting fresh speculation about possible new product launches including a TV or wearable computing devices such as a smart watch.

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"We're thrilled to welcome Paul Deneve to Apple. He'll be working on special projects as a vice president reporting directly to Tim Cook," said Apple spokesman Alan Hely via email.

Unsurprisingly, the company doesn't want to elaborate on what kind of special projects Deneve, who has worked at [Apple](#) in the past, will be working on. But the hire has resulted in analysts speculating, and wearable computing is on top of the list, according to CCS Insight's Ben Wood and IDC's Francisco Jeronimo.

Apple CEO Tim Cook has said the field of wearable computing is "ripe for exploration" and, said CCS Insight's Wood, "Wearable computing means fashion."

Jeronimo agreed: hiring someone with Deneve's background makes sense if Apple wants to enter the burgeoning sector, he said.

"This is an area that will explode in the next couple of years," Jeronimo said.

He expects to see new wearable devices that combine integration with smartphones to allow users to view messages and answer phone calls with the functionality offered by bands like Nike's Fuelband, which tracks each step taken and estimates calorie burned.

"Many [people](#) today just look at their phone to see if they have a new message, and that behavior could be replaced by one of these devices," Jeronimo said.

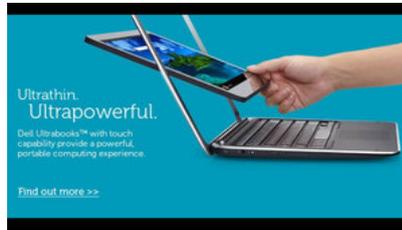
The smartphone market in many developed parts of the world is saturated, so device makers such as Apple have to come up with new products to ensure growth. Apple is good at putting out products that consumers don't know what to do with when they first see them, but still want to buy, according to Jeronimo.

But there are other potential "special projects" that Deneve could get involved with, including shoring up content deals for the long-rumored Apple [smart](#) TV set, according to Jeronimo. Some others that crossed Wood's mind when hearing the news were working on Apple's brand and a range of more luxurious products.

"I think Apple may be a little concerned that as the iPhone becomes more ubiquitous and everyone you know has one it becomes more difficult to retain that premium luster," Wood said.

If Apple can't remain a company whose products users aren't willing to pay more for, it risks getting involved in a race to the bottom, and it wants to avoid that, according to Wood. Apple could also be pondering a range of more luxurious products in the same vein as Nokia's Vertu phones. A number of third party vendors are already offering that, Wood said.

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This is Deneve's second stint at Apple: Between 1990 and 1997 he worked as a sales manager and a marketing manager for Apple Europe.

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