

COLUMNS

## Making a heritage brand more contemporary

September 17, 2014



*Rebecca Miller speaking at Luxury Daily's Luxury FirstLook: Strategy 2014 conference in New York*

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*"Make a better future by developing elements from the past." – German writer and poet Goethe*

Words that designer Karl Lagerfeld espouses as his mantra, while ever-evolving the House of Chanel. Words provide the foundation for driving a heritage brand successfully forward, without sacrificing the authentic core from which it was established.

There is no one definition of heritage. However, it does evoke a feeling of history, credibility, trust and authenticity in the consumer's mind.

Cresting

The concept of heritage, in the luxury milieu, speaks to craftsmanship, to the artisan, and to quality.

Critical to heritage brands are both the physical attributes of their construction and quality as well as the intangible markers with which we associate them. It is these consistencies that one must balance when bringing a heritage brand into a more contemporary arena.

When we see a heritage brand make that creative leap into the future, we know this

transference has one significant act: having the courage to let others paint on the canvas of your brand. This requires change, innovation, discipline, process, structure, talent and resources.

For family-owned businesses, there are the additional elements, the ties of history, as well as the dynamics of entrepreneurial and generational shifts.

Too often, businesses want to keep the brand “as is,” determined not to disrupt the DNA.

This heritage brand DNA has a significant investment in structure, talent and processes instituted and built into the corporate entity, specifically to retain its authentic heritage and current clients.

What a past visionary and today’s protector of the Grail fail to realize is the cyclical nature of the brand. Its current mature buyer may have crested, and by clinging to the past in this manner, it is obstructing the ability for the brand to be relevant to the future consumers and, perhaps, its survival.

Gearing for shift

To avoid the abyss, a shift from aspiring to attract new clients to intentionally attracting new clients is required.

A successful transformation provides renewed appreciation of a brand’s heritage as it engages a new audience. The courage I speak of is determining where and how the original DNA needs to be married with emerging concepts.

Transformations for heritage brands require unique new talent, often from outside the company and or the industry. It means keeping the critical elements that are core to the company and layering over them the talents of new perspectives, honoring the integrity of the brand the current client base has come to expect, while expanding the offerings to meet the eye of a younger client.

Clearly, this melding of old and new is a delicate balance of art and science, and one that must be an ongoing initiative.

Courage takes practice. It does not guarantee a win every time, but it is the right choice if you intend to remain relevant.

It is important that the culture of an organization embrace this philosophy so that their employees understand the past through the history and roots of the brand. This allows management and colleagues to make both the product and the experience more pertinent for today and tomorrow and, in many ways, they can be equally important.

The philosophy and process required uses the lens and principles of a turnaround. By doing so, emotions and assumptions are converted to hard disciplined processes. These become the gears, the nuts and bolts of business, providing structure and discipline to every facet of the business.

Superseding the structure and discipline exists the obvious: passion for the heritage of the

brand and its product line requiring a personal and professional commitment to quality and excellence.

Intellectual curiosity: Dynamic model for generational growth of heritage brands

The process begins by having the organization engage in the practice of intellectual curiosity to become more valuable to the company and, ultimately, to clients.

Next comes passion, the foundation for understanding ourselves and that which launches us into new territories, followed by journey, the experiential path we take.

Key components of the journey include raw, the first element of quality; hand, the tool that transforms the raw; and design, the structure that transforms raw and hand into its final use or product.

Intellectual curiosity unfolds the passion from which the heritage brand was built, providing a platform for passion, the common language that enables all teams to communicate as one voice internally and externally. Passion gives us a point of view.

Journey lays out the path, a fundamental strategic tool, articulating direction, analysis and appropriate investments.

The journey allows for growth and supports development and retention that affect the bottom line.

The journey begins with raw so the organization has full command of the materials and resources that makes its brand unique.

Hand reveals the human aspect of the artisans involved in the products.

Design contributes not only the creative aspect of the product but follows through to sales and marketing.

This process provides a common language that enables all teams to communicate as one voice, internally and externally.

Show the hand

The process begins with supply chain, through creation to production, marketing, sales and, finally, to the end user.

Building intellectual curiosity provides authentic stories that create the aura that all luxury brands require to better serve the consumer.

The entire journey is to engage the frontline ambassadors with the creative teams to work together, allowing for the best thinking and execution, translating actions into bottom line results.

Each heritage brand must adapt the fundamentals of this model to its brand.

The solution outlined above serves the two most important clients: those you have and those you intend to secure.

Each step will support the support strand of personnel through to the consumer and to

Speak directly to their respective audience without negating the other.

Let us not forget the final act: to edit.

Once the organization has created, produced and brought to market its offerings, the final step is to close the sale.

One can no longer effectively assist clients during the editing and selection process unless the organization has clear knowledge of its client's intentions and this depth of understanding, accompanied by the appropriate tools and resources to give exemplary customized service.

THIS MODEL IS a fundamental structure for enriching exposure, appreciation, education and the creation and maintenance of intellectual curiosity within organizations that are – or intend to become – heritage brands.

Heritage brands determined to become more contemporary must do so with courage and impassioned discipline, never losing sight of today's client and his or her wish to know "why this specific item is perfect – for me."

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