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If the product is right, luxury is a matter of positioning

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Glenfiddich Scotch

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

LONDON When a company wants to establish itself as a luxury brand, sometimes everything but the product needs to be changed, according to a Glenfiddich executive at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 28.

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Glenfiddich is a single malt Scotch distiller owned by William Grant & Sons, which dates back to 1887, but only recently has the brand moved to position itself as luxury. Working from the quality and heritage already present, Glenfiddich is altering packaging and positioning to make itself stand out from competitors.

"When I joined seven years ago the brand was in a very different place," said Sarah Macaulay, global marketing manager for **William Grant & Sons**. "It was very very expensive in some markets and viewed kind of as a commodity so we really had to look at how to shift the brand from something that was viewed as a commodity to something that was viewed as a true luxury product."

Paying homage

The first step the brand took was to cement a consistent visual identity, ensuring that whichever market the consumer was in, a Glenfiddich bottle would be recognizable next to any other. Luxury brands thrive on creating recognizable and consistent visual identities to assure consumers that even if the product, market or geography changes, the quality will not.



Image from presentation

With a concentrated identity comes differentiation. In the world of single malt Scotch, many brands are based on Scottish heritage because of the drink's national origin, so Glenfiddich needed to both create that connection to Scotland and also set itself apart from competition.

To do so, Ms. Macaulay says the brand looked both at competitors, notably Johnnie Walker, but also brands in other sectors, citing Herms as a particularly good example of a label that creates an immediately identifiable experience.

Influenced by these and other brands, Glenfiddich changed the tones and colors on its bottles, opting for copper with a white name to emphasize its name and modifying the stag icon.



Glenfiddich Scotch

"If you knew Glenfiddich a number of years ago, you never would have expected it to look like this," Ms. Macaulay said. "That was a real hard project in a number of ways because you're shifting the brand in so many ways, but you have to be respectful of tradition."

That respect for tradition came in the form of the font. The font was modeled after the founder's handwriting and a signature 1963 bottle. To show a willingness to move forward, the color was changed to a modern-looking red.

Having established a consistent visual identity, Glenfiddich then looked to the ecommerce world. The Web site, launched last November, contains videos, taste profiles and even guided selling, helping consumers differentiate between sharp and sweet whiskeys to select the perfect gift.

Glenfiddich 21 Year Old Whisky "The Finishing Touch"

Additionally, bottles can be personalized, with names embedded in copper plaques.

After a consumer makes a purchase, Glenfiddich will follow-up to find out how he discovered the site and if there is anything else the brand can do for him. This kind of personalized outreach is another trademark of premium and luxury brands and helps Glenfiddich establish a similar credibility.

"Ecommerce has been a huge and difficult undertaking, but one that has reaped many rewards for the brand," Ms. Macaulay said.



Glenfiddich ecommerce site

In each case, it was not the product that needed to be altered, but rather its presentation and positioning, underscoring that true luxury is not merely about great quality, but about great service, regardless of where the consumer is.

Risk and reward

When faced with lacking awareness and a "dusty" image, LVMH-owned Champagne house Krug saw the potential in digital outreach to court consumers, said a brand executive at Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 27.

During the "Creating an Addictive App Your Customers Will Actually Want to Use" session, Aude Beauvallet, head of international digital marketing at Krug, explained that the spirits brand's digital marketing has vetted the challenges faced by the sector, especially since this industry does not often have a direct link to its consumers due to distribution models. To deal with these challenges, Krug created its Krug ID platform and follow-up mobile application that use digital in a relative way while respecting the essence of the house ([see story](#)).

Brands in other industries have also repositioned themselves and seen great rewards through an ecommerce platform.

British apparel and accessories label Belstaff has seen great results in its journey to track its clientele, according to a brand executive during Luxury Interactive Europe 2015 on Oct. 27.

When Belstaff was acquired by JAB in 2012, the brand was given a clean slate, which it took advantage of to collect data on its clientele for targeted outreach. Integrating sales channels and knowing the consumer are by now essential components for a brand's continued success ([see story](#)).

There are obstacles for Glenfiddich as there are for any brand, as alcohol is especially difficult to transport international due to taxes and regulations, but once the product has been established, the quest up the perception ladder never ends.

"To make a brand more premium, to make a brand more luxury, is an ongoing thing," Ms. Macaulay said. "There are always things you need to do and always things you need to work on to make sure the brand is in the right place.

"Every touchpoint the consumer has needs to be a good one," she said. "Consistency whether you touch the brand in Germany or Austria, it should be the same that's a huge policing job."

Final Take

Forrest Cardamenis, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York