

MARKETING

## Heritage luxury brands need to prove relevancy to today's consumer: Air Paris CEO

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*Longchamp's Paris Premier handbag modeled by Alexa Chung. Longchamp is a client of Air Paris*

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK New luxury brands have an advantage on more established players, as they are launching in today's fragmented marketing environment rather than being forced to adapt.

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During a panel discussion titled "Investing in Brand Value" at law firm Dorsey & Whitney on June 21, speakers shared their personal experiences building a brand, whether a relatively new name in spirits or a tailoring label that takes inspiration from legendary suit makers. Establishing a luxury brand today is a different game than it was even a few decades ago, calling for a revised market entry strategy as well as evolving marketing tactics from existing players.

"You don't start from a concept," said Dimitri Katsachnias, CEO of **Air Paris**, Paris. "You don't start from what a brand thinks and what it's all about, but you start from what it does and you understand the brand from the usage rather than the concept.

"It's much more about what we do than who we really are," he said. "It's much more about the present rather than history. If we can make history relevant, that's great, but it's got to be about now.

"So brands will have built a whole history about their 150-year-old heritage have to show how they are relevant today."

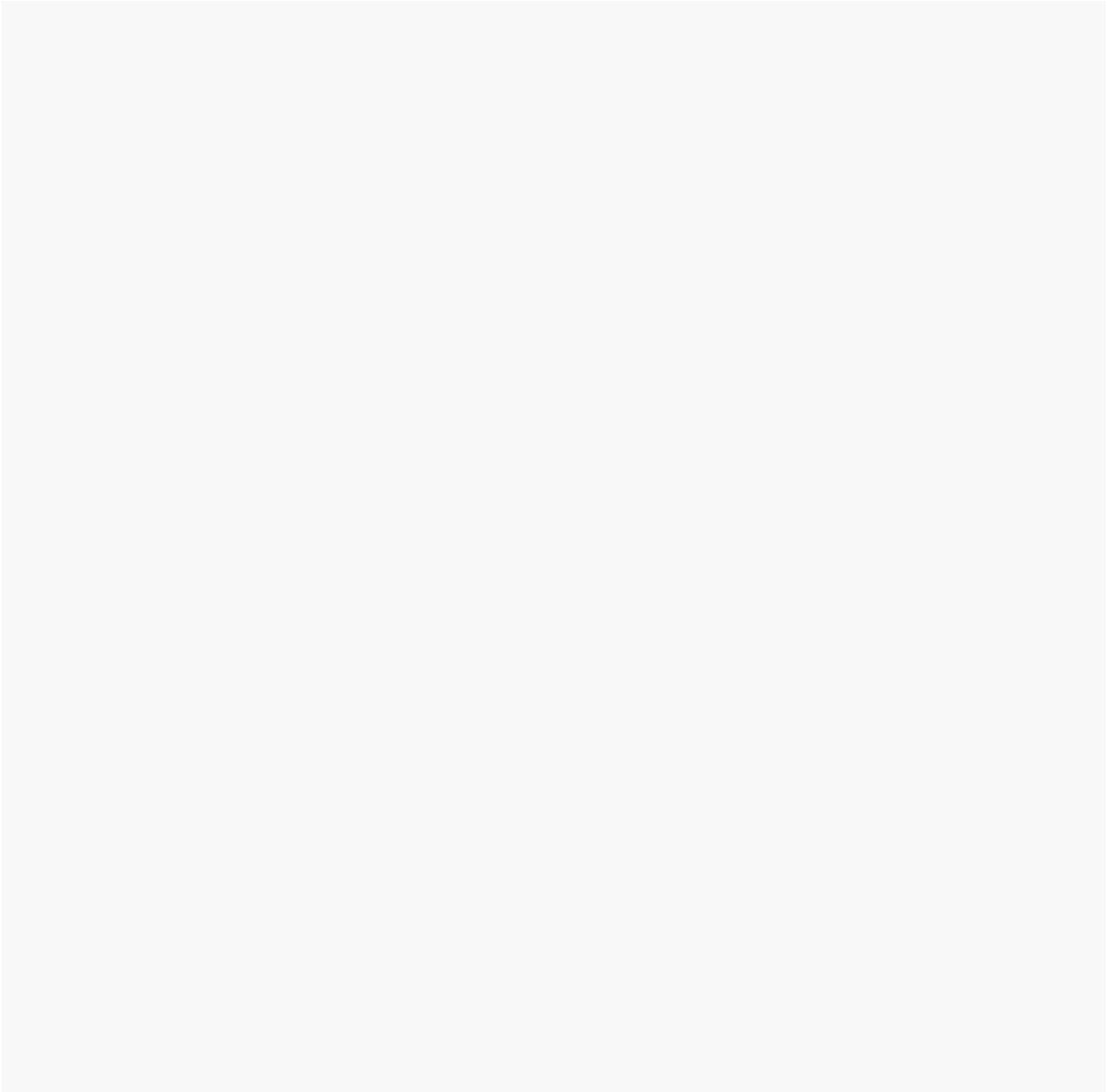
Origin stories

Mexican tequila producer Casa Dragones, launched in 2008 and is targeted at the growing craft spirit trend. While the sipping tequila label came onto the scene less than a decade ago, its roots are in history and heritage.

Along with a focus on craftsmanship, the brand's name is derived from the Dragones from San Miguel de Allende, activists who inspired Mexican independence from Spain. However, even with this nod to history, the small batch producer is modern in its approach to sustainability, focusing on its use of water and energy.

With limited marketing budget, the brand turned to social media to get the word out when it launched, and its co-

founder and CEO Bertha Gonzalez Nieves credits the Internet with the spirit maker's success. Rather than focusing on creating a story, Casa Dragones' digital strategy revolves around opening the doors on its operations, creating content that will excite those looking to discover new labels.



Each and every bottle of Casa Dragones Joven sees the attention of Mexican hands. #MadeinMexico  
#MexicanCraftsmanship #handengraved

A post shared by Tequila Casa Dragones (@casadragones) on Jun 22, 2017 at 9:35am PDT

An additional boost to the business has been the support of celebrities such as Madonna and Oprah, who organically mentioned the brand after coming across it.

Another brand rests on celebrity clientele of the past to create appeal.

David Mason, founder of Mason & Sons, has been in the tailoring business most of his life, it was only more recently that he really thought of establishing a brand. Rather than building a label from the ground up, he looked to reinvigorate iconic Savile Row tailors that had gone out of business.

Showing the potential challenges that can arise in establishing a brand, Mr. Mason's first acquisition led to an

intellectual property dispute. After starting a business under the name Tommy Nutter, bringing back the essence of the tailor to Michael Jackson and Elton John, the entrepreneur was sued and eventually settled with the plaintiff.

However, his next acquisition was more successful, and he revived Anthony Sinclair, bringing back the style of James Bond as played by actor Sean Connery as the film franchise turned 50. He has since relaunched Mr. Fish, motoring apparel label Motoluxe's alpaca coats and eyewear maker Curry & Paxton.



*Cary Grant wearing Curry & Paxton eyewear. Image credit: Mason & Sons*

While originally Mason & Sons' ecommerce was limited to accessories such as ties and pocket squares, the brand has found that it can also sell ready-to-wear suits online, showing consumers' increasing comfort with ecommerce.

Coming at brand building from the agency side, Air Paris' Mr. Katsachnias has worked with clients such as Swarovski, Este Lauder and Dior. During his days in-house at companies such as L'Oreal, the conversation was more about product than brand, but that has since shifted.

The traditional ways in which shoppers discovered brands are dissolving as consumers have more say in what channels they will turn to. For instance, a beauty brand that used to get discovered at a department store counter has to contend with shoppers whose behavior has shifted to different types of stores or online.

Mr. Katsachnias estimates that about two-thirds of brands still operate in what is now an outdated format, giving new players a leg up.

The agency executive also cautioned that market research is inherently outdated by the time it comes out, with changes happening so quickly. Instead, marketers should be leveraging data about consumers to figure out where they are going next, looking at patterns of behavior.

#### Protection and investment

When starting a business, some of the major hurdles revolve around legal and financial concerns.

Sarah Robertson, partner at Dorsey & Whitney, said that brands should plan on getting legal protection as soon as possible. While it may seem a great expense at the start, registering correctly can ease problems later.

When it comes to selecting a trademark, the lawyer advised against generic names or descriptive brands that might not immediately cement themselves in consumers' minds. These take more effort to establish in the market.

Having established IP can also make a brand more appealing to investors, another focus of fledgling labels.

Casa Dragonos' Ms. Gonzalez Nieves, whose company was founded with private capital from co-founder and MTV entrepreneur Bob Pittman, said that her goals in financing are to find partners who bring something else to the table besides cash. This could mean beneficial relationships and connections, an understanding of the key markets for

the tequila or other positives.

Despite the emphasis on digital, traditional marketing still has its place in the luxury world, according to an executive from Watchfinder & Co. at Luxury Interactive Europe in 2015.

Watchfinder deals in second-hand watches and has found that physical stores have improved the credibility of the venture. Although digital marketing is the focus of many brands' efforts, focusing offline may establish a name and lay the groundwork for future success ([see story](#)).

Luxury brands' decades or centuries of history act as a key selling point, but this heritage can also prove a challenge as they look to adapt a more modern strategy.

Across the industry, luxury was slow to adapt to new selling channels and messaging opportunities, and now brands are playing catch up as they seek the attention and business of younger generations. During a session at Luxury Roundtable: Engaging Gens X, Y & Z on May 3, panelists tackled "How to Manage Generational Differences In Building a Luxury Brand," explaining how they have navigated extending their brands to generations beyond boomers ([see story](#)).

"A brand is a living entity that you breathe in life on a daily basis," Casa Dragones' Ms. Gonzalez Nieves said. "There's no such thing as being attentive or not attentive, that is what you do so focus on your brand is critical."

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