

How to grow your lifestyle brand – stop designing for consumers

At the heart of the Ginza district in Tokyo, on the corner of a busy junction, you'll find the eleven-storey headquarters of cosmetics giant Shiseido.

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On the opposite corner, a twin building houses 'Shiseido Parlour', eleven floors of cultural spaces, restaurants, bars, cafés and dessert counters. Here, you can pop into an exhibition on Geisha culture (and the Japanese sensibility of beauty from which the brand draws much of its inspiration), while sipping a Shiseido cocktail (strawberry pink), before heading to the lacquered salon for Japanese high tea on Shiseido patterned tableware. As you leave through the ground floor shop, feel free to pick up colourful branded pastries and candy in popping lipstick shades.

Here's a cosmetic giant able to provide a full day of hospitality and cultural diversion with absolute credibility. A brand that's elastic enough to be printed on a bottle of makeup and a box of madeleines alike. Customers happily flashing Shiseido branded totes and buying Shiseido packaged gifts for their mums. That's the very definition of a lifestyle brand.

So how do you get there? How do you capture the hearts and minds of your customers to become a true lifestyle brand? The answer is to stop second-guessing what consumers want, and start building on your values.

Tell your own story

The Shiseido experience is credible because it's coherent. It builds on the company's traditional Kabuki origins and the inspiration of its original Geisha customer to tell a story about Japanese beauty that informs everything it does. From the theme of its exhibitions to the presentation of its food and the packaging of its product.

Another example?

Monocle. What began as a magazine is now firmly a lifestyle brand, with shops, live events, perfume, clothes and merchandise. This diversification is rooted in the brand's distinctive creative view - a world seen through the lens of mid-century Swiss-Japanese style as espoused by its founder, Tyler Brûlé. This informs all its aesthetic choices, from the furniture in its shops (606 shelving by Dieter Rams) to fragrance (Hinoki wood), even the nature of events it holds (Mittel-European christmas craft markets).

Play to your strengths

When you expand as a lifestyle brand in this way, it's important to have a sense of what adjacent areas you can legitimately play in. Household and consumer brand retailer Muji, for example, has carved a reputation as an organiser of space, of clean, well-ordered living. So when it launched its own branded hotel, offering a taste of the Marie Kondo-ed lifestyle, customers had no problem accepting that it would offer an experience as elevated as any other hotel. Not every retailer can diversify into hotels - but for Muji it made perfect sense.

Similarly, when luxury gym and health club brand Third Space decided to launch its own food offer, its focus on functional and bespoke ingredients and healthy living gave it the credibility it needed. This allowed it to turn its brand Natural Fitness Food into a £2 million business.

And it should come as no surprise that Moomins, the beloved Finnish cartoon characters created by Tove Jansson, can stretch and morph into the realm of language schools for children. It's a natural extension of the brand.

Surprise the audience

But sometimes, an element of surprise is exactly what lifestyle brands need for success. After all, every customer loves sharing a surprising new lifestyle experience they've personally discovered - they crave the dinner table cachet of asking "Did you know about this new restaurant, shop, experience?". Show them something they weren't expecting, and they will thank you for it.

Part of the enduring success of restaurant brand Wahaca was that it transformed perceptions of Mexico. It introduced the world of Frieda Kahlo, Luis Barragán, Escamoles and Huitlacoche to the mainstream in a fresh vision of vibrant street food and colour. It went way beyond preconceptions of sombreros and nachos to offer something truly novel.

Give them something to believe in

Ultimately, at the heart of every successful lifestyle brand is a philosophy that people can connect with. The choices we make say something about us, so a lifestyle brand is a product, service or place that we are proud to have in our lives. Do people want to be seen with your tote? Would they even be prepared to tattoo your logo on their arm? Road cycling brand Rapha, for example, has built a fervent community around life on two wheels - its followers totally embrace and identify with its ambition to 'live life by bike'.

This fervour is what makes a lifestyle brand grow. It's what allows a brand to succeed commercially. If you get it right, you build loyalty, can

command a premium and embrace opportunities to diversify and upsell. It allows you to nurture true brand advocates and build brand awareness.

To earn the right to be a part of your customers' lives, remember this: in a world where consumers know that their choices reflect their values, they want these choices to be rooted in authenticity, not what you think they want to hear.

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