

Moleskine: Integrating the techno and the retro

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Rapid advances in modern technology have meant that marketers now have an increasing range of communication tools to promote their products and brands. Typically, the more contemporary tools, such as social media and interactive websites, have been used by technology and fashion brands with younger-generation consumers as their target audience. However, with a sound understanding of consumers it is possible for a brand to 'break the rules'. Moleskine is one such brand. The company has successfully grown its brand by concentrating on products that have an old fashioned appeal that harks to a traditional way of doing things, while simultaneously linking to the technology of today. The company also uses modern marketing communication tools to connect with consumers, making extensive use of social media, interactive websites and online/offline integration. In addition to these activities, Moleskine's range of brand extensions, brand partnerships and limited edition products demonstrate it has a very good understanding of the modern consumer.

Moleskine is an example of a brand that fully grasps the concept of market segmentation and uses an effective approach to analysing their defined market, within which consumers share the desire for a product that allows them to be creative in a sophisticated way. As much as anything, then, Moleskine's market segmentation strategies are centred around style, and a way of life that is aspirational—Moleskine notebooks have been called 'the default prop of the digital chic'.¹ The company's consumers 'desires' a certain lifestyle, and Moleskine aims to help them fulfil that desire with a range of products

and importantly, a range of communication strategies that resonate with such a consumer.

Moleskine today

The original Moleskine notebook is reputed to have been a favourite of Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso and Ernest Hemingway. It was perhaps made famous by English novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin. A plain black journal featuring rounded corners, an elastic page-holder and an internal expandable pocket, it was produced by a small, family-owned company in the French city of Tours and apparently supplied to Parisian stationery shops. Though mentioned by Chatwin in his writing it is uncertain how much the original notebook actually was 'a favourite' of the literary and artistic avant-garde of France as promoted. However, to an extent, that is not important. The name 'Moleskine' does have a history, and this forms the basis for the modern brand, which Moleskine consistently reinforces: 'It all started many years ago, with a pocket-sized black object, the product of a great tradition.'²

The modern-era for Moleskine began with the launch of a range of diaries and notebooks in 1997, with the brand essentially re-inventing a product from the past. The Italian firm Modo&Modo chose the name Moleskine precisely because it had an artistic and literary history, though the firm itself had no connection to the original manufacturer at all.

Since the acquisition by Syntegra Capital in 2006, the Moleskine brand has grown considerably. In 2006 turnover was €80 million.³ This grew to €200 million in 2010, with the number of countries where Moleskine products are sold rising from 40 to 70. In the same period the product range tripled, and is now sold through over 22,000 retailers around the world. Company partner Marco Arielle attributes this strong growth to 'the unique positioning of Moleskine, which has been bolstered by an extraordinary capacity to innovate and to dialogue with the consumer'.⁴

Still based in Modo&Modo's home city of Milan, Moleskine SpA has the affiliates Moleskine America, Inc. (established in 2008), and Moleskine Asia, Ltd. (established in 2011). These affiliations in the two largest markets outside Europe reflect Moleskine SpA's clear strategy of 'fully developing the Moleskine brand'.⁵ The successful development of a brand such as Moleskine comes from an understanding of consumer needs and wants in relation to the product range on offer. With this understanding a firm can provide a value proposition that will resonate with its market segments.

The Moleskine consumer

It is now almost a truism to say that every consumer has different needs, wants, resources and attitudes. Nonetheless, the key issue for marketers is to effectively segment the market to identify groups of consumers who will respond to a brand's marketing mix in much the same way. The issue for brands like Moleskine, which link to consumer lifestyle choices, is how best to segment the broader market, and how best to determine which segment would be the most rewarding in a business profit sense. Basic segmentation strategies involving age, gender and even geodemographic analysis may not reveal the innate qualities of either existing product users or the potential market.

Central to understanding the Moleskine approach is the global nature of its strategies. The idea of a global consumer culture is not a new idea: the arguments about whether a segmentation strategy can 'work'

Under the retail image



Moleskine places considerable emphasis on 'point of purchase' displays that reinforce the stylish aspects of the brand.

Source: Kim Lehman.

Under the product image:



Having a product range that meets the needs of Moleskine consumers is key to the brand's success.

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globally can be found in international marketing texts.⁸ Should a firm standardise its product across all countries, or should it tailor specific models for each country? For products such as food, where national and/or ethnic tastes vary, the issue is quite clear. But for products that are more of a lifestyle choice, the issues are less so. A good example is smartphone technology. With such products it is possible to segment the market on the basis of people with similar interests and lifestyles; separate from their geographic area. Similarly, while these consumers may be male or female, or in their early twenties or mid-thirties, they would be technologically literate, and likely to be white collar workers. Such lifestyle criteria can be applicable whether the consumer is in London, Shanghai or Melbourne.

The marketing mix that can be developed from this understanding will call to that segment: the product, the pricing, the location for distribution, and the promotion tools, will all resonate with this global 'techno' consumer. Firms such as Samsung and Apple can roll out marketing communication strategies across multiple international markets. But it is not just technology that works across countries. The key for Moleskine is that 'art', 'culture' and 'creativity' are also significant features of many consumer's lifestyles. Again, if a brand views these components as part of its market segment's value system, it can design and market a product range to fit across a range of countries.

In a sense, then, Moleskine takes a similar approach to segmenting as can be seen in the VALS program, and in Australia, the Roy Morgan Values Segments. Core to its segmentation strategies is an understanding of how a consumer 'feels' about creativity and art, as well as technology. The company is interested in its consumers' philosophies, their personality traits and how they view the world. Importantly for Moleskine these values can be found in a global consumer segment—the opportunity to market your product internationally means the segment is viable and profitable.

Products, communication strategies and brand

The issue for any firm with a paper-based product range, or even one simply linked to a paper-based form, is staying relevant to changing consumer tastes. The analogue versus digital divide can be insurmountable if a firm is not either willing to change or to take chances. Moleskine has done both, extending its product range, using cutting-edge communication strategies, and combining both to position the brand as creative and fashionable and in many ways 'international'.

Products

As noted above, Moleskine launched its modern-era range of diaries and notebooks in 1997, around the time when laptop computers and personal telecommunication devices were breaking into the market. Since that time, the company has significantly expanded its suite of traditional writing and drawing products. It has also made significant inroads into the smartphone and tablet space, with a range of accessories and now a branded app (a free notebook app for the iPad).

Overall, Moleskine divides its product into three categories: travelling, writing and reading. Within these categories are variations and styles of the notebook and journal (journals to record food, wine, travel, baby experiences; diaries and city guides; artist visual diaries and sketchbooks; and more traditional ruled 'reporter' journals and notebooks). Recent 'analogue' additions have been a range of messenger/laptop bag and tablet/smartphone cases, writing instruments, and reading and writing accessories.

A recently announced product (launched in September 2012) was the photo book, allowing consumers to design their own hardcopy photo album online, upload their images and have the finished product delivered to their door. There have been a number of such online services. What makes the Moleskine version different is that they can draw on the brand attributes of the current product line to

sell to their current market—the Moleskine Photo Book looks and feels like a Moleskine journal. The other distinguishing feature is that this product offering is a collaboration with an existing player in the market. New Zealand-based publishers PQ Blackwell, the creators of the MILK Photo Book.

Communication strategies

As we have seen, the key issue for Moleskine is to stay relevant to its market segments in a digital era, with a range of core products that are not digital! Moleskine has done this by moving quickly into both communicating with the consumer via new media, and by integrating its analogue products with a digital interface. One example of the latter is MSK 2, which allows users to transfer and print digital content (page templates provided by Moleskine or created by other users and shared) from the Moleskine website for use in their notebook—it allows users to create and customise their own notebook. While being a product of sorts, MSK 2 is a means, and free at that, by which Moleskine can build on relationships with its consumers.

MSK 2 is part of the myMoleskine section of the Moleskine company website. Here users can submit their artwork, videos and 'hacks' (modifications to their notebook); they can access templates to design various aspects of the product; and they can download official 'widgets'. The widget is, in fact, a source code that bloggers and web designers can insert into their own content that provides a direct link to Moleskine company news and information. This strategy is not uncommon, and provides an opportunity for brands to stimulate consumer community 'buzz' around their products.

Moleskine also does this in what is now almost a mainstream space: social media. The company utilises YouTube and Vimeo channels, as well as Facebook, Flickr and Twitter. The approach, however, is to always combine user stories, which act as testimonials with company content that provides advice, hints and tips. In this way the digital content is useful to the consumer. The emphasis is on linking the consumer to the brand within the digital world.

Brand

Clearly, then, Moleskine consistently aligns itself with current consumer trends: 'The Moleskine brand is synonymous with culture, travel, memory, imagination and personal identity—in both the real world and the digital world.' The essence of brand equity is that it represents value to both the organisation and to its customer.⁶ Moleskine's strategies include aligning itself with other products that resonate with its market segments, and with the global consumer that it targets, thus creating value for both the consumer and the brand.

In the past Moleskine produced special edition notebooks co-branded with famous museums and art galleries—for example, The National Gallery in London and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Notable recent alignments have been various notebook ranges co-branded with international franchises: Peanuts, Star Wars, Lego and Le Petit Prince (a story by French writer Antonie Saint-Exupéry). Perhaps the initiative most indicative of Moleskine's co-branding strategies is the partnership with Evernote, the diary software that allows users to sync, through the 'cloud', notes, images and other digital content. As the first product by Moleskine Digital, the Evernote Smart Notebook combines a physical Moleskine notebook with a subscription to Evernote and links to Evernote's iPhone and iPad App.

In many ways Moleskine drives the online discussion of its brand. For example, the company has nurtured the concept of 'hacking' a Moleskine notebook, saying that 'Moleskine hacking is a deeply embedded and organic online meme'.⁷ Moleskine regularly posts new content on its various social media channels, and pushes out advertising and promotional messages to current and potential consumers. Such strategies keep the brand top of mind, but also reinforces the relationships that consumers need to have with a product that is essentially about lifestyle—at the time of writing Moleskine was Number 6 on the Lovemarks ranking.⁸

Conclusion

The seamless integration between the digital and the analogue—the techno and the retro—is at the heart of Moleskine's product range, and its communication and branding strategies, as is the strategy that a close relationship must exist between product and consumer built through online connections. This

CASE STUDY 3.1

has not always worked for Moleskine. In 2011 there was a considerable outcry within the Moleskine user community when the brand conducted an online competition to design a new logo for the Moleskine blog. Artists felt they were being taken advantage of, with Moleskine claiming copyright of all entries.⁸ However, Moleskine responded to the social media comments, modified the competition rules, and moved on. Though only a relatively minor dent in the brand's image, it is indicative of how powerful the support of the consumer can be, particularly when the brand's marketing strategies rest so heavily on the relationships it builds with its consumers on a global scale. Moleskine certainly has a thorough understanding of the segmentation concept, and works hard to connect to its market. But it is as well for all brands to remember that what the consumer can give, it can also take away.

Notes

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2. Moleskine, 2012a. 'Moleskine World', <<http://www.moleskine.com/web/us/moleskine-world>> (accessed 7 October 2012).
3. Syntegra Capital, 2011. 'Press release' 19 January 2011, available from <http://www.syntegracapital.com/_documents/News/Moleskine%20190111.pdf>
4. Moleskine, 2012b. 'Company Information', <<http://www.moleskine.com/web/en/about-us>> (accessed 7 October 2012).
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6. K. Keller, 2008, *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (3rd ed), Pearson, Upper Saddle River, N.J.
7. Moleskine, 2012c. 'Media Release—Syncing Imagination and Memories', <<http://www.moleskine.com/web/us/press-release>> (accessed 9 October 2012).
8. Lovemarks.com, 2012. 'The top 200 Lovemarks', <<http://www.lovemarks.com/index.php?pageID>

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9. Mumbrella, 2011. 'Moleskine logo contest dubbed 'Molescheme' by angry designers', <<http://mumbrella.com.au/moleskine-logo-contest-dubbed-molescheme-by-angry-designers-62312>> (accessed 8 October 2012).

Questions

1. Describe the characteristics of the Moleskine consumer. Write down a list of the various personalities you think they might possess. Do they have anything in common with other consumers?
2. Outline the VALS program and Roy Morgan Values Segments. Where do you think Moleskine consumers fit into these systems? How could these systems assist marketers in planning the marketing mix?
3. What marketing communication tools does Moleskine use to connect with the modern consumer? What additional strategies could it use, and how would these resonate with a global market?
4. Is it possible for other traditional products (paper-based or other analogue) to use similar segmentation and marketing strategies as Moleskine? If so, what products could? If not, why?