How Isaac Mizrahi and Liz Claiborne Use Omnichannel Marketing

By Marshall Sponder | *Jun 2, 2014*

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You may not recognize the name Robert D'Loren — or even his company, Xcel Brands. But odds are you're familiar with the company's fashion apparel: It owns the Isaac Mizrahi brand and has an interest in Liz Claiborne New York.

Xcel is a champion of the omnichannel strategy and is helping to take fashion brands to more than 150 consumer products categories. The company engages in the acquisition, design, licensing and marketing of consumer brands by incorporating a sales strategy that includes interactive and social media, digital and brick-and-mortar retail.

D'Loren successfully led the restructure and recapitalization of some of the world's most widely recognized fashion, retail, consumer brands and entertainment companies including: Bill Blass, The Athlete's Foot, Maggie Moo's, Pretzelmaker/Pretzel Time, Waverly Home and The Great American Cookie Company.

His expertise earned him a spot as the keynote speaker at the recent IRCE Focus Conference in New York City, where he shared his ideas on the convergence of the customer experience through brands, stores, web, mobile and TV.

As he stressed at the three-day conference, customers are everywhere — and brands, retailers and all modern businesses need to be everywhere, too. Today, in the first of a two-part series, we'll hear what he had to say.

Great Marketing + Great Products

Three years ago Xcel took a step back from its traditional marketing strategies to reassess the changing landscape. The conclusion it reached won't surprise anyone now: Companies have to change their game plans to account for social media and mobile technologies, along with more empowered customers and their demands for greater corporate transparency.

Just last month, Xcel announced the launch of the first Isaac Mizrahi New York e-commerce website. The website encompasses "the world of Isaac Mizrahi, showcasing bold color, iconic print and pattern, wit, art, culture and more," the company claims.

To better reach its customers, Xcel adopted a multichannel marketing approach while keeping its focus on its products. "You can have the greatest marketing and technology in the world to drive your business, but if you fail on your products, it's over," D'Loren said.

While customer service and social media can help sell products, they only help companies sell products that people want, he explained. Think about it: First you give customers products they want — and then you use every channel possible to provide opportunities to engage with them.

It was a salient point, especially at an omnichannel conference — held to spread the gospel that brands and manufacturers must manage consistently across all experiences and ensure that customers receive valuable, high quality and consistent interaction.

The Beat Goes On

But is the focus on products over marketing a valid point? I brought up the case of Beats By Dre, the line of headphones, earbuds and other audio devices inspired by hip-hop artist Dr. Dre and music label executive Jimmy Iovine. It's a line of products that has more spin than substance, in my opinion. But that isn't preventing Apple from dropping $3 billion to acquire the brand.

Does audio equipment regarded less for its sound and more as a fashion statement have sustainable value? D'Loren didn't hesitate.

"Yes," he said. People want Beats products: *therefore, it's a good product by that measure*. Beats aren't on the same quality spectrum as Sennheiser or Bose, but the marketing engine that Dre and his team wrapped around the product make it desirable enough to be successful.

Omnichannel success is really all about the product — and the most important measure of a product is not quality or durability, but customer desire and demand. You gotta give people what they want.

Fear of Innovation

This new social era has thrust great change onto every industry. But some things remain the same. Successful companies talk *with* their customers, not *at* them, D'Loren explained.

What technology has enabled is simply the opportunity to extend the reach of good customer service and engagement.

As D'Loren noted, "We all have this fear of risk that comes with innovation. As a serial entrepreneur, when this starts to get in the back of my head, I have to close that thought down and move to where I think business is going. And then, I have to stop worrying about it. Ultimately, an idea is only 'weird' if it doesn't work."

Tomorrow: The future of omnichannel marketing.

About the Author

For more than a decade, Marshall Sponder has influenced the development of the digital analytics field with his industry blog, WebMetricsGuru, which focuses on social media metrics and web intelligence. He is the author of Social Media Analytics and possesses considerable in-house corporate experience as a visionary at IBM and Monster, combined with contract work for Porter Novelli PR, small businesses and start-ups.

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