

THE LACK OF STYLE by Meyer Janet
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We have moved into a new millennium. We have seen the licensing industry grow in terms of retail sales by leaps and bounds. LIMA has become more professional as an industry body and the Licensing Show award dinner has become an orgy of self congratulatory fervor and yet licensing still remains the red headed step child of the marketing mix and many programs still come to market ill prepared, ill advised and doomed to perpetuate the "tchatchkie" stigma attached to the industry.

After all the success and ballyhoo why should this be? There are several reasons and the analysis of all of them would take a book. So for the sake of brevity of this article I will concentrate on one: THE LACK OF STYLE.

Style as defined in the dictionary is "the correct way of designating a person or a thing" and is representative of a "superior quality or manner"

A licensor would not dream of starting a licensing program if they were not convinced that brand names and images are important to consumers. They are the very fabric around which the core values of the brand are protected and promoted. The whole principle of licensing is built around this understanding. Yet most programs outside of the entertainment industry refuse to spend any money on the development of effective style guides.

Effective style guides must connect emotionally with the core brand equities of the property and reflect fashion trends through icons, borders, patterns and more. The objective of a well-executed style guide is to create a consistency of look and feel - essential to consumer success - keeping the brand fresh and seasonally relevant at retail.

Food store franchisors would never expect to sell any franchises if they had no idea on how the stores should look. Yet licensors are convinced they can pull off it's equivalent in the licensing industry.

The truth is that except for the entertainment industry, most programs start with nothing more than a name, a character or frame stills from an advertising campaign. Hardly the stuff that a licensee should be expected to pay royalties on and certainly nothing to get excited about at retail. Because of cash flow constraints from day one programs gravitate to the same ol' same ol' categories as a quick fix in the hope that something will get the guarantees in and the royalties flowing.

This is clearly not a recipe for success and yet most programs stumble on, not doing much but surviving, because of the lack of investment in establishing and promoting the brand. The hesitance to invest is, however, the ultimate root of the whole problem.

Industry practitioners still cannot bring themselves to tell the licensors that licensing is a cost center and not a profit center. There is no free lunch. Before you start a program you

need to have a budget and plenty of it. The reasons why you would want to start a program come under much harsher scrutiny, when it's not for free.

Licensors "marketing departments" by and large still don't get it. Licensing is about protecting the brand, creating brand awareness and maybe making some profit - If you don't see it as part of your marketing mix - Don't do it! But if you do - Do it properly!

In the Brand and Trademark sector of the industry outside agents and inside departments are mostly treated to lack of communication, poor funding and a sense of mistrust and unease by the brand managers,
So, what is the solution?

The solution is in EDUCATION. An education in understanding the value of style guides and the ability to effectively share this knowledge with the relevant brand and marketing people, who hold the budget purse strings.

Globally this should form part of a LIMA based Certification and Education program that covers all elements necessary to help support the professional development of the practitioners and the industry.