

Ralph Lauren's American Dream

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Ralph Lauren has embedded his name into fashion culture and history. Ralph Laurens influence spread past just clothing, his innovations and visions provided society and culture with new trends and influence that shaped a new lifestyle. The film “Very Ralph” does a great job in showcasing Ralph’s upbringing and rise into a fashion icon through various endeavors and unique approach. As Joseph Hancock states in *Fashion Brand Stories*, “Lauren’s method is known as lifestyle merchandising, which builds associations and gives historically practical garments an elevation to the luxury market (Hancock, 2002, p. 60). Ralph Lauren’s name and brands are synonymous with elegance, luxury, and sophistication while adding a touch of simplicity with timeless appeals. Through his creative brand marketing strategies, Ralph Laurens brand connected with consumers in new ways that related with their aspirations while influencing culture and trends to seek this new lifestyle. Ralph isn’t the traditional fashion designers who creates garments from scratch, instead using his unique artistic and creative vision he revolutionized and transforms traditional garments into new Ralph Lauren lifestyle fashions and products. Using the film “Very Ralph” and Joseph Hancock’s *Fashion Brand Stories*, Ralph Laurens branding powers and brilliance is showcased to signify Ralphs importance to fashion and American culture. Ralph’s continued devotion to establish a great brand beyond its products has allowed its consumer base to remain loyal and ever growing while establishing new cultural trends with its unique branding image and marketing.

“Ralph Lauren was born on October 14, 1939, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants. His real name was Ralph Lifshitz, but in his late teens, he and his brothers had their names changed to Lauren” (Hancock, 2002, p. 61). Growing up in the Bronx in New York City, Ralph was exposed to the fashion capital of the world that catered to females yet had a hard time in connecting with men’s fashion of his time that was non-existent. Ralph’s start into his fashion endeavors started from his home with his innovative suit ties that put a new modern flair on the uniform ties from the past. His artistic vision hadn’t been expressed within men’s fashion as this sector was still disregarded and unthought of. While keeping his simplistic desires intact, Ralph employed a unique twist to the conformist fashion of the past, applying a modern flair that allowed for men to express their personalities through fashion just as women have. Ralph filled the void of his fashion ideas first starting with his unique unusual ties that he sold from his home, eventually leading to a store that showcased men fashion within the iconic luxury designer department store chain Bloomingdales, the first of its kind leading an innovative vision that pushed Men’s fashion into a new endeavor. With his life story and rise to the fashion and philanthropic icon, Ralph Lauren personifies the American dream, rising from an immigrant to creating one of fashions most important and iconic brands. Ralph Laurens personal experiences resonated through his fashion, expressing new visions that allowed for males to express themselves through fashion striving away from the traditional and conservative past. Starting with the ties, Ralph later expanded to the rest of the male garments, suits and shirts to revolutionize and create a new Men’s look and lifestyle aspiration. Ralphs clothing created a new designer reality that told a story that was a new vision that aligned with the fashion designers for females and created a new strategy for males to resonate with. The brand embodied the American lifestyle, living this way through his clothes and energy promoting a new aspiration for consumers to draw to and want to be a part of.

“To Lauren, brand image was everything. In 1967, Beau Brummel, the Cincinnati-based tie firm, gave Lauren an opportunity to launch his own line of ties by looking beyond the fashion trends of the time” (Hancock, 2002, p. 62). Clothing and fashion expressed much more than its simple utility for Ralph, it was a form of self-expression that created an image that could be understood and relatable to. Ralph incorporated his company Ralph Lauren in 1967, later becoming a publicly traded company on the New York Stock Exchange that vindicated its iconic rise and prominent status. His vision to associate his brand with high quality, luxury and excellence reverberated through the unique styles but also higher pricing that would perceive better than that of his competitors. His vision sold consumers on the dreams and hyper realistic blending of their perceived interests of the images portrayed by Hollywood and celebrities. Through the 1970s, Ralph Lauren flourished, expanding his brand from just being made for men, but selling women’s garments and enlarging his lifestyle branding approach for Ralph Lauren Polo. He created a new trend within American culture to construct the new cool lifestyle that was embodied within this brand, simplistic fashion with great attention to detail, very sophisticated and timeless appeal. Ralph Lauren Polo drew on Ralph’s interest in sports and aligned with America’s sophistication of sports, affiliating its brand image with the niche rich sport. Expanding beyond ties, the first Ralph Lauren store was the first in store boutique that specifically catered to men’s fashion with a new vision that modern males could resonate with. After the Great Gatsby film of 1974, Lauren suits were worn by the star Robert Redford, gaining global recognition that further the brand while also aligning itself with the Hollywood nostalgic aspirations that consumers would be drawn to. The blending of reality with the fiction of Hollywood films and his American cowboy lifestyle vision allowed for consumers attention to ultimately be captured by the creative designs and images that were engrained into their heads to create a desire and need of his brand. The story behind the marketing is bigger than the garments themselves, the consumers resonate with the messages, designs and lifestyle images that are promoted while drawing on their aspirations and desires.

The shift from function focused branding to lifestyle and aspirational branding advanced as the world drove away from the war sentiments and towards peace and signifying individuality. After Ralph Lauren, men’s fashion mattered. Ralph defined how men would dress and the lifestyle that they desired to be associated with. After expanding into women’s clothing, the brand continues to express these same values that resonated with females in the same way allowing for the simplistic traditional garments to be revolutionized into this new lifestyle vision. The endorsement and use of celebrities to brand products resonated with individuals that found these sports stars, actors and important figures by creating an identity with the brand that consumers resonated with. His marketing strategies and ads were powerful while always striving to be different. Through their branding strategies, the brand created this lifestyle and the clothing and products had to align with this world that was being created. The brand strove to showcase simplicity, relatability and luxury through its stories that consumers resonated with. The vision of the marketing strategy promoted a lifestyle that consumers would desire. He created a perfect world, showcasing beautiful clothing’s, models and ideas that Americans and consumers would crave and want to be a part of. Through the films, marketing and branding, Ralph used models such as Tyson Beckford that showcased the classical vintage looks that appealed to all consumers that wanted the American image and look. It was innovative for one of the biggest

fashion brands to be inclusive in those early days as it signaled Ralph's vision to connect with all individuals and not close off its brand to a particular social class.

Strategic partnerships with the U.S. Olympics becoming the official gear provider while sponsoring the Olympics for America further establishes Ralph Lauren's empire and alignment with his personal love for sports that consumers too can relate with. The Polo Ralph Lauren further assimilated this brand with the elitist image and luxury class, while allowing for all consumers to relate with the lifestyle desires. It represented the love for sports through its Polo horse logo while also aligning with the U.S. Olympics to expand its international reach and representing America as its clothing for sport athletes. The brand image further established this created existence and image into consumers' mind, allowing for those who wore the products to belong to this Ralph lifestyle. The celebrities and brands that it has partnered with also showcase the same values that the brand promotes. While drawing inspirations from Hollywood films and sport athletes and celebrities, Ralph Lauren then used these same inspirations to promote and license his brand and unite the images together, further fostering its brand and lifestyle associations with the high class. Learning from his past marketing strategies at Bloomingdale's to the expansion of his story telling advertisements and branding, Ralph Lauren perfectly combined his love for fashion and America to create an iconic brand that has enamored consumers for decades and for years to come.

In the early 70s, Ralph Lauren first survived a challenge of overextending his business and nearly collapsing into bankruptcy. It was an early test of many endeavors and challenges that Ralph, and his brand experienced through their history, but one of the many obstacles that were defeated to contribute to the furtherance of the brand. As Hancock stated, Ralph's brand also dealt with cultural appropriation in regard to Native Americans and improper use of their image, with the brand quickly apologizing and making amends to fix this crucial fashion issue (Hancock, 2002, p. 74). While Ralph inspired this new men's fashion line, competition grew fierce from the other luxury brands who also expanded to compete with Ralph, but his innovation and creative visions continued to promote the American lifestyle that many desired. Expanding into designing home collections, fragrances and various clothing lines that each reach a specific consumer need allowed for the growth of the company and Ralph Lauren branding that lives strong in today's fashion and American culture. To grow internationally and expand the brand's reach with growing competition, Ralph Lauren has continuously innovated creatively while staying true to consistent image and story of the American lifestyle. The values of high quality and luxury is expressed through all Ralph Lauren ventures and products. Continued investments into sustainability, inclusivity and into modern technology will help the brand navigate the future while always staying true to its original values. Ralph Lauren's vision to always stay ahead of the trends and continuously anticipate products and desires that consumers will connect with will allow Ralph Lauren to sustain its legacy in the ever-changing fashion industry amongst its other ventures as well.

Ralph Lauren has instilled a legacy for his brand that continues to be carried on in today's creation and brand value with consumers. The Ralph Lauren name and brands project the aura of the fabulous American lifestyle and timeless appeal. The brand image embodies the luxuries of the American lifestyle while holding true to many American values and morals. The creative process

and inspirations are still drawn from traditional simple muses from which a new flamboyant American lifestyle twist would be created. Being inclusive and embodying the company story that allows for consumers to reach their aspirations and align with this brand that portrays a lot of the morals and values that they too relate with. Ralph blended suit tailoring with his American lifestyle visions that created a new approach for this Men's fashion lane he was creating. The theme of American West cowboys and the American lifestyle was integrated into high end fashion because of Ralph Lauren. His visions, interest and personal life has been represented through his brands image, values and consumers trust and loyalty through his years within fashion. The revolutionary marketing approaches are still employed by others within fashion, while still capturing consumers attention and desires as they originally were intended for. Storytelling is an important tool that creates emotional connection and a sense of belonging and identity for consumers with fashion brands that communicate their visions successfully. As society evolves and cultural values and sentiments shift, the Ralph Lauren company and brands have aligned with consumers values to continuously remain an American staple and always be an aspiration for consumers that resemble the American identity. Ralphs legacy from being an immigrant to starting his fashion endeavors by selling ties to becoming one of the wealthiest individuals through the immense growth of his corporation exemplifies the rags to riches American dream and the value of branding successfully and truthfully.

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