

The Brand Image Evolution of Vera Wang

Course: BUF 3500 Brand Image Marketing

Assignment Topic: The career of designer Vera Wang

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Vera Wang is one of the most iconic figures in the modern-day fashion industry, still crafting and influencing beyond just fashion expanding her brand and name into various celebrated product lines. Vera Wang's brand evolution launched from an unconventional path, starting her legacy with prominent success in the sports world to later transitioning into a modern-day fashion symbol. Born on June 27, 1949, in New York City, Wang's early life can be characterized by her upbringing by her Chinese immigrants' parents who infused a profound appreciation for fashion, arts along with traits of determination and creativity that lay the foundations of her many successes that followed. In her youth, Wang's pursuit of excellence in figure skating was notable by her ability to reach top tier status having competed in the 1968 US Figure Skating Championships as well as being a featured athlete in the January 8, 1968 issue of *Sports Illustrated* (Hancock, 2002, p. 97). Unfortunately, her athletic career didn't prosper beyond these heights, but it ultimately redirected her path towards the illustrious fashion career she embarked on allowing for her name and brand image to span beyond those of her first dreams. While never envisioning herself as a fashion designer and with the hopes of her figure skater dreams coming to an end, Wang enrolled in the Chapin School in Manhattan and later enrolling at Sarah Lawrence College that allowed for semesters and time in Paris, she subsequently discovered her love of designing and greater interests in fashion.

Wang's transition from the world of sports to the fashion industry redefined her identity and created a new lane to becoming the iconic figure she is today. Vera Wang's first taste of the fashion industry came in her college days as she worked as a sales associate at Yves Saint Laurent. Turning her

attention to fashion journalism, she studied art history and started her fashion career working at *Vogue* magazine, assisting the legendary fashion editor Diana Vreeland upon graduation (Tbh, 2023). At the age of 23, Wang became the youngest editor *Vogue* had ever commissioned. Her stint at *Vogue*, developed Wang's understanding of the fashion industry while also allowing her artistic background and aesthetic taste to foster. Wang served as an editor at *Vogue* for over 15 years, culminated in her role as senior editor and design director for accessories at the magazine (Hancock, 2002, p. 97). Unfortunately, Vera Wang was overshadowed in becoming the editor in chief for the magazine, a role given to Anna Wintour, but this setback didn't impede her aspirations for success and instead fueled her drive to create a new path. The combination of her artistic background and attention to detail blended with her editorial experience and creative aptitude for design merged into creating the uniqueness of the Vera Wang brand that exists today. Wang's educational background along with her early career learnings and experiences at *Vogue* and later complemented by her tenure at Ralph Lauren, sculpted the brand image of Vera Wang that would fascinate the fashion world and captivate other ventures she endeavored in.

In search of the perfect wedding dress for her own wedding, Wang struggled in finding this perfect dress, discovering that bridal dresses in the market were plain, ordinarily and lacking flair and sophistication. Wang's personal style, experience in the fashion industry and lack of quality in the bridal dress market forced Wang to design her own wedding dress. This discovery also revealed a new market upon which Wang found her true fashion passion. Vera Wang embarked on a new path in creating new wedding dresses that transformed bridal couture. In 1990, Wang opened her first bridal boutique in New York City within the Carlyle Hotel, showcasing a collection that departed from traditional wedding attire. Vera Wang's personal style for her brand was the driving force for her bridal boutique, her modern designs of wedding gowns departed from the traditional and ordinary. Wang's gowns are characterized by her unique vision, creating aspirational looks that alludes to sensuality and youthful sophistication, highlighting exquisite detailing with elegant yet nonchalant sense of styles (*World of Vera*, n.d.). Wang's personal admiration of contemporary elegance fused with a timeless lifestyle appeal became the

trademark of her brand, represented through her many creations and brand image. Departing from the prevailing norms of bridal fashion, Wang influenced a new vision for bridal couture, imploring modern meticulous fabrics to non-traditional colors for gowns, Wang challenged wedding couture to redefine the bridal story. Her designs display a blend of luxury and innovation, while capturing the sophistication, romance and individuality of the bride.

The evolution of Vera Wang's brand has expanded beyond bridal wear and fashion couture. Through strategic partnerships and collaborations, Vera Wang has diversified her brand to encompass a variety of lifestyle products that carry on the brand values she established years ago. Inspired by bridal clients who asked for Wang's recommendations for weddings and other events, Wang once again found herself venturing into a new creative world, expanding into home goods, fragrances, eyewear and ready to wear fashion to cater and reach a broader audience who appeals for her creativity. Recognizing another void where Wang's aesthetic vision and style can be employed, the Vera Wang brand has diversified and broken the bridal couture boundaries, expanding into new ventures while maintaining brand consistency across varied products and markets. Transitioning into everyday fashion and ready to wear attires, Wang's signature style of sophistication, meticulous detailing and extravagance easily translated from her bridal creations to elegant evening gowns and modern daywear wardrobe. The brand has established itself through values such as quality, luxury and lifestyle aspirations that carries on through each product.

With this expanded business strategy, Vera Wang decided to cater to the mass, expanding beyond her bridal luxury customers to provide quality products while maintaining the integrity and values of the Vera Wang brand image at lower prices. In striving to make luxury accessible to the mass, *Simply Vera*, further emphasized this mission statement from the brand in partnering with Kohls to create a new product line licensed by Menomonee that brought a full product line at moderate prices (Hancock, 2002, p. 104). This product line emphasized inclusivity, priced fairly while being fashionable and well-designed reflective of the Vera Wang brand image. Making her signature style accessible to a wider audience

challenges the traditional atmosphere of luxury branding, Wang challenged traditional fashion standards and instead pursued to cater to the demand for high quality yet affordable fashion that expands the Wang brand globally to a bigger audience. Continuing to branch beyond fashion, Vera Wang has designed perfumes and home good products that continue to carry her style and values. Designing a line of fragrances as part of the Vera Wang branding image through exclusive licensing deals with Coty, Wang has ventured into mass production partnerships that allow for mass consumers to own Vera Wang products with many being priced at less than \$100 (Hancock, 2002, p. 101). It's a difficult task to be valued by both the high-end couture and mass production clothing, but Vera Wang through her determination does a great job in employing her values and unique taste to all products that represent her name. While always ensuring that the brand embodies the sophistication and design excellence of her previous work, this expansion into providing clothing for different demographics speaks of Vera Wang's ideals of inclusivity and providing high end fashion for the mass and not just confined to a select few.

The brand image of Vera Wang has been successful in ensuring the integrity and morals it values through all products. "Not everyone can own a couture Vera Wang gown, which is why the designer decided to team with David's Bridal. In 2011, Wang and the bridal chain collaborated on White by Vera Wang: a line of affordable wedding dresses priced between \$600 and \$1,400" (Malach, 2023). Expanding beyond the luxury and bridal high couture boundaries has allowed for the brand to grow globally. The simplistic, sophisticated and perfect style of Vera Wang has transitioned from bridal dresses to be expressed through all designs. In expanding the brand, the strategic companies and partnerships that Vera Wang has partnered with play a pivotal role in valuing her dedication to these values, ensuring that her name and brand continue to express the reputation they have earned through the many years of great work. By embracing a new challenge of mass production partnerships, the Vera Wang brand has extending into new territories and markets, allowing for Vera Wang to continue to showcase her visionary senses, while also demonstrating that both luxury and accessibility can coexist comfortably for brands.

Celebrity endorsements and red-carpet appearances of Wang's designs have had a lasting impact on the brand's image and legacy. From designing gowns for high profile weddings to her influence and acceptance by the world of celebrities, this continued support has been essential in furthering the brand's image and shaping its importance in culture. Celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez, Mariah Carey and Kim Kardashian have all worn Vera Wang designed bridal dresses, establishing Vera Wang as the epitome of wedding fashion. "Vera Wang was introduced to Hollywood through Sharon Stone when Stone wore a Vera Wang sarong on the red carpet" (Hancock, 2002, p. 99). Her influence and admiration have carried on throughout Hollywood with many celebrities desiring to be styled and outfitted by Vera Wang at the Oscars and other distinguished events. The notable celebrity associations with Vera Wang's brand has established a level of prestige with these highly visible and illustrious events showcasing her designs with the most famous social personalities. The red carpets are synonymous with high end fashion, glamour and sophistication, all qualities that Vera Wang strives to provide with her creations, allowing for these events to showcase her vision and aesthetic talents with the biggest celebrities adorning her works. The extensive lists of celebrities and notable individuals who have donned her works have added to the brand's image and cultural significance. The designs that have been showcased with these celebrities further reflect the brand integrity and values, gaining an iconic label for the celebrity endorsements especially in establishing Wang as the archetype and influence of modern wedding fashion couture. This association with society's most iconic figures has contributed to the timeless and iconic status of Vera Wang and her brand image, becoming an integral part of not only bridal prominence, but a prominent high fashion couture symbol.

Vera Wang's branding success is summed up by the perception it instills in consumers and the resulting loyalty it gains from the brand's image and story. Product quality emerges as a cornerstone in the culture of the brand loyalty. From the sophisticated works, quality of fabrics and materials to the attention to detail implanted with each creation, the brand's commitment to providing exceptional customer satisfaction and reassurances of excellence is evident. Vera Wang forms a connection with her

designs being a part of one of the most emotional and important experiences of brides. Her personal story of the start of her boutique and search of the perfect wedding dress aligns with customers seeking this perfect dress for their memorable day. The reputation that the brand has gained through time of fulfilling these expectations, as well as the acceptance by high end couture and celebrity brand endorsement allows for the perception of the brand to be the best at what it does. This commitment to providing excellence has been narrated through all the Vera Wang work has created and the brand messaging it communicates. Celebrating the individuality of each customer is essential in rewarding the promise of the allure and aspirations that the brand image provides. The customer experience is catered to reflect a custom-made, tailored and individualistic approach that values each customer as it were Vera Wang designing her own dress or designs. Her vast experience at *Vogue* and within the fashion industry has created a perception of respected, treasured and valued taste with knowledge that has attracted a loyal consumer base and expanded the target audiences the brand has captured.

The Journey for Vera Wang and her brand has not gained success without its shares of challenges. In starting her boutique and bridal couture, Wang had to challenge traditional values and views of weddings and bridalwear while imposing her innovative flair and distinctive style. Vera Wang was used to overcoming failures and challenges from her past endeavors such as her figure skating aspirations or the overlooking at *Vogue* as editor in chief, but instead of succumbing to these failures, Wang used these as motivating factors to continuing her pursuits of success. While the void in the market for modern dresses for her personal wedding created an opportunity for Wang, it also came with hurdles in trying to establish a new fashion trend and renovate a rigorous event. The perseverance and adaption from previous challenges, has allowed for Vera and the brand to embrace challenges and to be daring in the ultra-competitive fashion industry. The challenge that Vera Wang enacted on the brand to reach a broader target audience also imposed new challenges on the brand, challenging the desires of diversification and growth while also remaining persistent with its integrity and distinctive values. The brand has had to adapt to the new markets it has entered into while remaining true to itself, Wang's ability

to balance her signature aesthetic with the demands of contemporary fashion trends and ever-changing consumer preferences has benefited the company and its global status.

Navigating a dynamic fashion industry full of fierce competition and ever-evolving fashion trends is one of the brand's biggest ongoing challenges. "The industry is difficult. There's a lot of competition. And it's fast. Tom Ford once said that the thing that made him most afraid about the future was that there wasn't enough time" (Beard, 2019). Vera Wang has had to establish herself in a world of high-end couture with designers who have built their legacies long before she emerged. Established fashion powerhouses compete with new designers alike for attention and customer loyalty, establishing the brand as the face of bridal couture was a process that required determination, innovation and acceptance by consumers and the fashion industry alike. The brand's strategic marketing techniques such as the partnerships and collaborations it has featured along with the celebrity endorsements has helped in establishing the brand identity and reaching a broader market. The brand has evolved with modern marketing avenues by embracing digital platforms like social media as well as expanded its e-commerce business to progress from only storefront retail landscape and continue to grow its global audience reach.

Vera Wang's brand stands as a model of enduring elegance, sophistication and innovation in the fashion industry and beyond. Expanding beyond bridal couture the Wang brand has continued to expand the lifestyle aspirations of the brand reflected in areas such as home goods or fragrances that continue to reflect the brand's essence. "Vera Wang isn't just for the bride-to-be, it's for the dreamer, the fashionista, the chic business owner, the savvy homeowner. Wang's collections are about a truly fabulous, complete and elite lifestyle" (May, 2016). The Vera Wang brand has positioned itself to continue to adapt with its consumers and their values, future collections could showcase an emphasis on sustainability and continued inclusivity that resonates with their target audiences. As technology continues to advance, the Wang brand has potential to apply these innovations into its business allowing for better consumer engagement and presentation of its products. With the *Simply Vera* expanding into retail outlets

worldwide, and her flagship stores expanding from New York to Sydney, Australia, Vera Wang has become the leading face for bridal couture as well as a prominent and iconic figure for fashion with her innovative style and vital ethos. Vera Wang's ability to continuously innovate and evolve without sacrificing the brand's value positions herself as an exemplary figure in the fashion industry while also establishing her brand as a global empire. Vera Wang through her brand has become a cultural icon that influences and inspires future generations with her distinctive aesthetics and entrepreneurial spirit. The Vera Wang brand represents empowerment, individuality, modern femininity and self-expression, values that resonate with people across the globe shaping the narrative for brands and fashion for years to come.

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