

Free case study on the braun kf40: style and substance

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Summary: The Innovative Use of Polypropylene

Braun, a German consumer electronics company has been known for their innovative designs and sleek styling since the 1950's. One of Braun's chief designers, Dieter Rams, has become a design icon and his trademark minimalist style has influenced Apple products. Braun was always about the design and quality of their products, a source of corporate pride and identity. In 1983, they were bringing a major new design to market, the KF40 coffee machine. There was a disagreement over the plastic used between the industrial designer, who wanted absolute perfection, and a business director, who was willing to make compromises to start selling coffee makers. Braun were known for white appliances with an absolutely smooth surfaces, aimed at middle to upper class consumers. To achieve this look, they used expensive polycarbonate, which was a stylish, smooth plastic that was both tough and cosmetically pleasing. However, to meet cost targets, the KF-40 needed to be built with a newer and much cheaper material, polypropylene, which was not smooth and impossible to mold into the complex shapes required to manufacture the KF40. There was a conflict between the head of development, who wanted to meet time and cost targets and the lead designer, and stipulated the use of polypropylene, and the lead industrial designer, who came up with a solution that was both cheap and elegant, a non-smooth, ridged design that utilized polypropylene, but maintained Braun's reputation for style and minimalism.

History of Braun

Braun has a specific brand identity associated with German design, and a long history of creating innovative products. Nearly destroyed during WW2, the company has a unique culture and its history can help explain its reliance of innovative industrial design.

In 1921, engineer Max Braun create company in Frankfurt, manufacturing radio parts

Braun was one of the first manufacturers in Europe to combine radios and record players in a single unit. They created a version of the modern “boombox”.

During WW II, Braun factories were nearly entirely destroyed. Max Braun rebuilt Braun on the popularity of first electric shaver, which made made Braun an international household name. Innovation saved Braun.

Today, Braun is owned by Proctor and Gamble, but left an enduring legacy in the world of manufacturing and industrial design.

Braun Corporate Structure: A Culture of Communication and Interaction

The KF40 project had to hit a mid-level price point, have a single heater, stylish aesthetics and use innovative new technologies. All of these goals required communication between sales, marketing, R&D and manufacturing. To reach all these goals, with compromising Bruan’s values and corporate identity required communication and interactivity between many departments. Braun was already efficient, their vertical integration, innovation in automation, and corporate culture was fastidious. A

cooperative climate enabled Braun to produce the KF40 with very few compromises. Instead of creating conflict, a constructive dynamic between the conservative and more adventurous made the project successful. Finally, German consumer protection laws meant there was another layer of restrictions and testing that forced Braun to make a product that met outside standards. Close communication allowed for fine tuning and avoiding problems before they started.

Analysis

The Braun design ethos is grounded in Bauhaus precepts, which involve, in the words of Dieter Rams, “as little design as possible.” This minimalism, however, does not preclude profits or utility to the consumer. Braun also embraced reaching the largest market possible, because “good design is for everyone.” The German mentality of quality of quantity is evident in the painstaking attention to detail the designers of the KF40 put into creating a coffee machine that was both inexpensive, high quality, beautiful, and profitable. This is part of Braun’s corporate identity, which explains the level of intense debate that existed over a decision as basic as picking which kind of plastic to use. Looking “cool”, being high quality, and not “too” expensive is part of why people would buy a Braun product. Therefore, they could lose their market share if they failed to meet their market expectations. Ultimately, with the KF40, they met the strict goals of business by using a newer cheaper form of plastic, and the requirements of the designers, who wanted an elegant looking machine. From a business perspective, the two goals were intertwined. Braun were innovators, and

were extensively copied by their two major competitors, Krups and Rowenta, and along with style, price point (between DM 76 and 136DM) was crucial. Krups actively targeted the middle to upper end of the consumer coffee machine market, therefore, compromising the integrity of the design would have been a mistake. New innovative technology should make a product better.

Polycarbonate Vs. Polypropylene

Braun Research and Development teams were responsible for the use of polypropylene over the traditional and more expensive polycarbonate. Polycarbonate are a much older plastic, developed in the late 1800's, and ideal for molding into complex shapes, like the parts for a coffee machine. It is versatile, and very smooth and aesthetically pleasing. However, it is expensive. Polypropylene is much cheaper, but is harder to mold into shapes, and harder to finish smoothly. Braun industrial designers were afraid a coffee machine made of Polypropylene would not be smooth. The lead designer, Hartwig Kahcke, made the large parts with ridges, which eliminated the need for a completely smooth surface. As a result, all project goals were met, it was a stylish coffee maker, that met cost and time goals of the project manager. All stakeholders were involved in these decisions, including the Research and Development team members, head of development, and industrial designers.

Options for Business or Entrepreneur

Braun could have used polycarbonate, but would have been forced to price the KF40 at too high a price point.

Braun could have used polypropylene with an inferior finish, which would not meet their quality standards.

Using good design (ridged surface) with R&D (innovative use of plastic) met business goals.

Sales, business managers, engineers, designers, and all chains can be connected, and communicate regularly. The Braun corporate structure (Exhibit 3) is efficient and clear. Working together is not only good business, it can be creative and “ fun.”

Materials can be exploited if they improve the product, without sacrificing quality. Innovation and research and design is important. It can keep products both modern, and use technologies that reduce price, increase profit, reduce weight, increase reliability, and increase ecological friendliness. Keeping current on technological advances, and evaluating and using all options keep business profitable and popular with consumers.

Recommendations

Established companies must stay innovative and utilize new technologies in a way that protects their brand identity. Braun could have delivered the KM40 with a semi-smooth surface. This would have disappointed their customers. They delivered an innovative ridged design, which pleased their customers. Innovation can protect brand identity.

Design is an essential part of many businesses. Good design sells. For companies that are not manufacturing products, putting research and style into brand identity into services or goods will establish brand identity.

Stay innovative, but copy icons of design and business. Braun had a style

that was copied by their competitors, and is imitated to this day by companies like Apple.

Conclusions

The Braun KF40 project was a collaborative effort that highlights the strengths of innovation, branding, and sticking to a corporate philosophy. Classic Braun quality and design was maintained, sales and manufacturing requirements were met, and governmental regulations and testing were met. Close collaboration meant problems were solved or avoided early in the design process. Form met function, and made a profit. Today, analyzing this thirty year old project offers valuable insights for business and entrepreneurs about positive corporate culture, cutting edge innovation and customer satisfaction.