

# Mass with Class

Masstige transcends categories and consumer demographics to deliver premium products at affordable prices...it's luxury for the masses!

by Jackie DeLise



Let's begin with the phrase "the new luxury," coined by James B. Twitchell in *Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury* (2002). The boom in the luxury market since the early 2000s has largely been due to this new luxury, as conveyed by brands that position themselves above mass-market brands but at prices similar or slightly higher.

Hence the idea of "Masstige." An article in a recent issue of the *Journal of Brand Management* discusses how Masstige brands, placed between traditional luxury brands such as Armani, Gucci, or Versace and consumer brands such as H & M, Mango, and Zara, enjoy the prestige of luxury but are still accessible to ordinary consumers.

As a result, these "new luxury" brands can be difficult to categorize or distinguish. The complexity is amplified by the strategies of traditional luxury brands that offer less elitist versions of their products, such as Armani Jeans vs. Armani Haute Couture. Further complicating the picture are low-cost brands, such as H & M, that offer exclusive products

designed by the big names in luxury: for example, Karl Lagerfeld or Stella McCartney.

There used to be only two types of consumers: the rich and the poor. Today, the boundary has become increasingly blurred as more and more people are able to afford luxury products from the big names. Consumers of this new affordable luxury belong to the middle class. Thus, Masstige is prestige for the masses.

The term was popularized by Michael Silverstein and Neil Fiske in their book *Trading Up: The New American Luxury* Massaging "Masstige." For "new luxury" brands, it's about being a class act with mass appeal. Masstige products have two key characteristics: they are considered luxury or premium products; and their price points fill the gap between mid-market and super premium.

Silverstein and Fiske cite several examples: Bath & Body Lotion that sells for \$1.13 per ounce vs. \$0.30 per ounce; Pottery Barn housewares that are considered premium but are widely available at attainable price points, well below super premium brands; and Kendall Jackson Wines that entered the market at \$5 per bottle vs. the standard \$2 per bottle.

## Crossing Over

Masstige isn't restricted to the consumer goods categories, as even carmakers such as

BMW and Porsche offer smaller, entry-level versions of their super-premium, luxury priced cars. They're aimed at the aspiring enthusiast who wants to be behind the wheel but doesn't trade on status, engineering, or safety.

A famous fashion brand that masterfully straddles both the mass and prestige channels is Ralph Lauren. Customers can buy the brand at a variety of price points, starting with the super premium Couture RL Collection and moving down the luxury continuum with Black Label, Blue Label and then into Masstige with Lauren. Finally, the Chaps sub brand provides the mass option.

Customers of the Target chain are both affluent and middle class, and the store environment is the key element of a favorable brand shopping experience. Target sets the stage by including fashion designers who have created exclusive lines of products in an environment designed to be customer-centric. When Isaac Mizrahi launched his clothing line at Target in 2003, he accurately pegged the essence of Masstige by stating: "This new collection will offer affordable luxury for every woman, everywhere."

These products are now available to a wider range of consumers, enabling them to access less expensive versions of luxury brands. But this "affordable luxury" also dilutes the very idea of what luxury is and how society perceives product exclusivity.

### **Affordable "Luxury"**

In recent years, many brand-name and store-brand product innovations have elevated quality in the health, beauty, and personal care aisles to a level rivaling that of premium brands at department store counters. These brands

expertly deliver everything expected from a premium offering—innovative design, unique delivery systems, and premium product performance—to a mass audience of consumers.

When Procter & Gamble's Olay Total Effects face cream entered the mass retail drug channels in 2000 at a premium price of \$20, consumers demonstrated that they would pay extra for a product that promised to "reduce the seven signs of aging." This was a bold departure from other brands in the category at the time, both in charging such a high price and in making such lavish claims. Fast forward to products such as Total Effects, Definity, and Regenerist that have joined the Olay brand family, and the cycling-in of products touting powerful benefits seems almost ubiquitous.

Dove's Cream Oil Body Wash is a line of premium moisturizing body washes from Unilever that blends oil and cream. The products, available in Delicate, Creamy, and Ultra-Rich, retail for \$3.69 to \$5.99. Dove claims that they have more moisture than any other regular body wash, delivered in a "surprisingly indulgent way."

Packaging design visually communicates the soft, light, and delicate nature of the brand while emphasizing the swirling blend of indulgent moisturizing ingredients. Visual equity drivers such as white and swirls link consumers to the brand by tapping into hidden emotional triggers. The packaging also reinforces the premium proposition of the line as it appeals to the mass market consumer who seeks an indulgent, pampering experience but expects to pay less for the small pleasure.

## Spinning Copper into Gold

Neutrogena educated its Masstige consumers by building awareness of the skin-firming effects of copper. It introduced Visibly Firm Eye Cream, an anti-aging moisturizer meant for twice-daily use around the eyes. Instead of containing standard ingredients like retinol, the product touted the benefits of something more esoteric: “Active Copper.” The cream sold in a tiny 0.5 oz. glass jar at prices ranging from \$12.99 at stores like Target to \$22 in grocery stores.

Add to this an entire next generation of innovative, premium priced anti-aging products: Advanced Solutions, AgelessEssentials, Ageless Intensives, Ageless Restoratives, and Healthy Defense. Ageless Restoratives claims to “recover, reverse and fortify,” while Ageless Intensives claims to “smooth, repair, and control” deep wrinkles. The promised benefits are perfectly aligned with the needs of today’s aging population as Baby Boomers seek to maintain a youthful look.

## The “Spirit” of Masstige

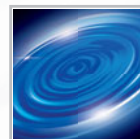
Rising affluence and increasing health consciousness have slowed the growth of alcohol consumption in some markets in recent years. On the other hand, sales of brands perceived as “premium quality” have risen. Lower-income consumers are consuming more beer and branded alcoholic drinks as they are increasingly able to afford them. Especially interesting is the fact that consumption occasions also have changed, with consumers imbibing more at home than in bars or restaurants.

A report in the June issue of Business Insights

states: “Premium strategies in the liquor and spirits category are seeking innovation to drive brand and product enhancement.” Using unique flavors and ingredients has become a focus for differentiating products and adding perceived value. Doing so can enhance a drink’s positioning of authenticity, heritage, quality, and exclusivity.

Increasingly, consumers want to know the story behind a brand as part of the discovery that sets them apart from others and gives them “insider” status in what they perceive to be an exclusive world. For example, Dos Equis premium beer has grown in the U.S. by positioning itself as “interesting,” thus meeting consumers’ need for self-expression. Longtime premium beer brands Heineken and Samuel Adams have responded to competition eroding their points of difference by adding SKUs with new points of difference.

All of the examples cited above epitomize the difference between “old” luxury of the past and the “new” luxury of today. “Old” luxury is about an item’s exclusivity. “New” luxury encompasses a class of goods with distinct characteristics that center around a more attainable and assessable point-of-entry experience for everyone. As consumers seek Masstige products in an economic environment that continues to be challenging, brand manufacturers and retailers are looking beyond price, to compelling packaging and key quality cues that deliver on the promise of an affordable premium experience.



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