L’esperienza di Vespa

Being a lady who prefers to be chauffeured around whilst wearing six-inch Christian Louboutins, especially in traffic, the thought of riding a scooter or even learning how to ‘work’ one never crossed my mind. I had always had an idea of what Vespa stood for – a lifestyle brand that embodied metropolitan culture and an Italian icon of panache – but the actual riding component did not form part of my vocabulary nor my understanding of the benefits of riding a ‘two-wheel type of transport’, where the chances of me getting wet were the opposite of ‘slim to none’. However, after a memorable (and entertaining) brand experience with my colleagues Kerryn Le Cordeur and Sabrina Scherf, my unenthusiastic desire to own a Vespa speedily changed.

Le Cordeur admits she was a bit nervous driving to Design Quarter for the ‘mouseketeers’ Vespa driving experience. “I’m not known for my balance and have never even sat on a motorbike. But after spending five minutes in the Vespa showroom, sipping espresso and learning the history of the brand all the way back to post World War II, I was ready to give it a try – if I died, at least I would go in style.” She adds: “I was quickly assured I would be just fine, as long as I could cast my mind back to the days of riding my little pink bike through the neighbourhood. I felt a little sorry for our very patient instructor, Thorsten, who had to take three silly girls through the steps of learning to balance the Vespa, free-wheeling down a hill (with Thorsten following closely behind) and getting a feel for the very sensitive accelerator. But I think we proved any girly stereotypes wrong, as before long we were racing along on our own - well, more like going at 10km/h with Thorsten once again close on hand.”

“Seeing is believing” and Vespa really created a personal brand experience for us mouseketeers, amplifying its brand message of ‘Vespa Love’. Vespa South Africa Managing Director, Andy Reid believes a brand experience is all about the way a consumer perceives the brand upon interaction with it. Scherf has always dreamt of moving back to Italy one day, living in a small village and driving a Vespa to work each day. “This gorgeous piece of machinery epitomizes all that is Italian, and learning to drive a Vespa in Fourways was a really great experience and initiated a love affair I don’t think will ever end. One day I’ll be driving up and down my vineyard in northern Italy and zooming through the vines in my bright blue Vespa. You’ve really started something Vespa.”

It’s strange to think that from a company that designed aircraft and trains, came the world’s first and most-loved scooter. Reid says, “This highly innovative two-wheeler, which was the answer to a broad range of transportation challenges, epitomizes organic design in layout, comfort and safety, and has become an icon of freedom and mobility.” He explains that the originality of Vespa’s form lies in its synthesis of stylish looks, innovation, hi-technology and superior production processes. “With all this, it’s no wonder Vespa is one of the most successful examples of Italian industrial design, unchanged in the original qualities that made it one of the most important design icons of our time, then and now.”

Reid describes Vespa as the ultimate lifestyle accessory that echoes style and class, and is a brand desired by both young and old. “The brand experience, therefore, is one that enhances its desirability. From the website to the show rooms, the Vespas are showcased in such a way that you can’t help but to admire their sleek and stylish design. Added to the look of the scooter, we are also actively working to eradicate two-wheeler fears, by offering interested individuals the opportunity to learn to ride for free. This is a brand experience in its own, as anyone has the opportunity to experience the scooter first-hand, in a safe and controlled environment, without the obligation of purchasing a scooter.” He understands the only way to truly understand a brand is by experiencing what it has to offer with all the senses, and this is what the brand is trying to achieve with its ‘Vespa Experiences’.

Speaking to the universal needs of the consumer is what makes a brand experience successful. Reid says, ‘Whether practical, to get from A to B and dodge traffic; or emotive, to look
über-stylish on a style icon, most people speak the same language when it comes to their needs.” He advises that in order for a brand to create an unforgettable encounter with its consumer, it is important to understand what the consumer’s needs are and from here indulge their senses to create the complete experience. “On a Vespa, you can feel the power of a solid and safe scooter, smell the open air, hear the bustle of the streets around you, see the jealous glares of onlookers, and almost taste the wind rushing past you. All the senses are involved, which ensures that the brand truly is experienced in its entirety.” This said, Le Cordeaur adds: “That feeling of being in control of this beautiful, stylish scooter, with the wind in your hair, is indescribable.” Although the Vespa experience has changed over the years, in the sense that the brand is now not only promoting its scooters as lifestyle items, but also as a solution for companies, Reid maintains it is not a follower but rather a trendsetter, constantly moving the edge of modernity forward. “We stay true to who we are, but also keep up with the times and work to identify the needs of consumers around us.” Vespa has become iconic on many levels. What makes the brand iconic, explains Reid is that the world’s most loved two-wheeler has proven its longevity over many generations. He concludes: “By remaining steadfast in its promise of safe, efficient mobility yet evolving with the times to ensure front of wave product excellence, the Vespa has become the ultimate lifestyle accessory that is eternally fashionable.”