



profile



Brand New

‘It’s all about gaining one customer at a time, talking to them individually about how your products can help fulfil their design needs.’

We’re talking brand communication. And we’re really lucky to be talking to an expert. A real live top marketer, a man who’s conceived and run amazing campaigns for some of the world’s great brands, such as Louis Vuitton, Prada, Comme des Garçons, Levi Strauss, Coca Cola and Sony.

Michele Iacovitti is VP Marketing & Branding at InterfaceFLOR. His background, particularly in retail and fashion brand communication, might seem to be incongruous for a global B2B player like InterfaceFLOR. But the more Michele describes his vision, the how and why he’s communicating the brand messages, the clearer it becomes. As he says, it’s all about talking to one customer at a time.

Before we get onto that vision, it’s instructive to know about Michele’s background. So, in time honoured Mix style, we went back to the beginning.

‘I am Italian born and bred. I was lucky enough to be born in a little village right on the coast, so every morning I’d wake up and have the most beautiful view of ‘my’ sea from the window. My mother’s parents spent their time between the town and their farm land, so I spent a huge amount of time in the countryside. I still consider myself a country boy and the memories that I cherish the most are those associated with years of vintages and harvests.

‘I went to the Università delgi studi di Bologna to study an MBA specialising in marketing, communication and corporate business management. When I finished, I decided to venture a bit further afield to Canada to undertake a Master’s Diploma in marketing, communication and management at the McGill University.

‘My grandfather owned his own construction company, which he then passed on to my father and his brothers; watching my father build his business instilled in me a sense of ambition and determination to succeed. When I was a bit older and I had finished university I spent a bit of time working for the family company and that’s when I got my first real taste of retail, branding and marketing communications, and have had a passion for these disciplines ever since. In my career many people have inspired me, but my father, and the way he built his business, has been my main inspiration. If there’s one thing that he taught me it is to treat everyone you work with, regardless of skills or experience, with the same respect. He also taught me that money doesn’t grow on trees and you need to work hard for what you want – it’s a simple saying but it’s been a key mantra for me.

‘After a couple of years I was presented with an amazing opportunity to join Dockers Europe (a division of Levi Strauss & Co) in Amsterdam, working as the Manager of EMEA Retail Coordination. Part of my remit was brand and product



profile

►►►communication at the point of sale, so this gave me some great branding and communications experience.

‘About three years later, I moved on to a marketing, branding and communications company based in Amsterdam, called BrownKSDP. Here I started to focus on retail marketing communications, branding and corporate identity – working on some really high profile campaigns for companies such as Levi’s, Coca Cola and Sony. Moving back to fashion I relocated to Barcelona to work as Director of Retail Marketing for Antonio Puig SA, which owns fashion and beauty brands such as Carolina Herrera, Comme Des Garcons and Prada. This was only an interim position, during which the CEO of Loewe in Madrid, the international luxury goods and fashion company (part of Louis Vuitton), offered me the board position of Retail Marketing Director. I gladly accepted and moved to Madrid, where I spent the following three years. I then moved back to Holland, where I worked for international lingerie and body fashion company, Hunkemoller, also as Retail Marketing Director.

‘And that’s when I got the call from InterfaceFLOR – everything about the company automatically grabbed me; the interiors sector, the design credentials, the embedded sustainability ethos and the quality of the products. I was ready for a change, my years in the fashion industry had been extremely valuable and taught me a lot but I wanted a new challenge. Actually, it was specifically my fashion and

business to consumer experience that InterfaceFLOR was interested in. Although it’s a predominantly business to business company, InterfaceFLOR realised that its main audience was architects and designers, and as such, needed to communicate with them in a language that would inspire and grab them.

‘When I was first introduced to the company, it was clear to me that it was already a true design leader. The concepts and products were truly innovative, but that just wasn’t being communicated as effectively as it could be through the marketing and branding, so people didn’t necessarily make that connection. The company is an obvious pioneer for sustainability, and this was also one of the things that attracted me to it in the first place. But I could see that it was so much more than just that at the same time – the InterfaceFLOR designers were producing such cutting edge designs, but because the company was so well known for sustainability, this was getting a bit lost.

‘My vision is that the two things – sustainability and design – need not exist in isolation. InterfaceFLOR produces top end, premium designs that are truly up-to-date with current trends, but it also produces the most sustainable products.

‘InterfaceFLOR has the potential to be a truly global brand as the company already exists internationally. The challenge for us now is to streamline our activities and make our products and campaigns global►►►



profile

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'In fashion and retail, it's all about the finish and the textiles. This is something that we want to communicate in relation to InterfaceFLOR products too.

'One of the reasons that my fashion and retail experience is so relevant is because of the way in which we interact with our audience. As I mentioned before, even though InterfaceFLOR is a B2B brand, the audience for our products is very different to the traditional B2B customer. My aim was to make our inspiration and communication much more visual – I wanted them to represent the luxury of the carpet tiles that we produce. As with the retail industry, it's all about gaining one customer at a time, talking to them individually about how your products can help fulfil their design needs – and it's my aim to fulfil this through our marketing and communications; a key example of this strategy in action is our Collections Magazine.'

It's so unusual, in our sector, for fashion to influence the way the brand is projected. We asked Michele to tell us more.



'The latest Collections Magazine provides an in-depth look at some of the key trends and themes currently influencing design, discussing how these are being translated into the creation of products. These trends are often derived from fashion – you can't get away from it. And vice versa, trends in fashion can be influenced by architecture and interior design. What we've tried to do with Collections is explain the inspiration behind our new range and how these relate to current trends and issues.

'It also invites key influencers in the design industry to give their views on how trends and cultures are being captured by design. Contributors include Janine Benyus, the world leader in the science of Biomimicry, Gunter Henn, of HennArchitekten, and the team at leading international design practice, HOK.

'The design element of InterfaceFLOR was something that really struck me when I first joined the company. The designers work around 18 months in advance, which means they really have to be ahead of the game when it comes to interpreting trends.

'For me, it was about pulling together all of their inspiration and designs into one recognisable campaign – one theme. One of the prevailing topics this year was fairy tales. You only have to look at Hollywood to see how many fairy tale inspired movies have been released recently. The Once Upon a Time concept is, of course, nothing new, but I saw in this theme an opportunity to make our collection relevant for a modern audience.

'The Once Upon a Tile campaign is built around some magical photography of eight fairy tales. To achieve them took months of planning and preparation and the shoots were hard work and very eventful – almost stories in themselves.

'The shoots for Hansel and Gretel, Red Riding Hood, Goldilocks and Rapunzel took place in purpose-built studios, however, for Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Beauty and the Beast and Snow White, I travelled with the team to some gothic (and in some cases, spooky) locations around the UK, including the crypt of Rochester Cathedral (Sleeping Beauty). One of the sessions involved a Border Canary, which was brought in for the Cinderella shoot. Animals were actually a running theme – on the Red Riding Hood set we had our hands full feeding some very hungry huskies sausages between shoots to try and keep them happy, and making sure they were ready in the studio when the photographer needed them.

'When I originally proposed the Once Upon a Tile theme, I had a very specific idea about how I wanted it to look, so it was important that I was there to work with the creative agency staff and the photographer, help dress the sets and position the models, as the vision was predominately in my head. The results and the stunning photography though are the results of a tremendous team effort and everybody who worked on the project. Everybody brought their own magic to the set, and their own creativity, which really helped to make the results truly special and inspiring.'

As you would expect from such a well travelled and erudite individual as Michele, there's plenty away from work that he enjoys. Antiques, art, cooking, horse riding, science fiction movies...we could have filled these pages with stories about Michele's wide-ranging interests alone.

Just hearing the man talk about the vision, planning and execution of the photo shoots tells you plenty about a man born to communicate! ●