

UOB-SMU

Asian Enterprise Institute



Elegance and Fine Performance: RUF by Specialised Automobiles Pte Ltd

Specialised Automobiles Pte Ltd is the exclusive importer and distributor of German car manufacturer RUF Automobiles GmbH, and a parallel importer of Porsche cars.

RUF, which specialises in enhanced Porsches, is recognised as one of the world's most respected international manufacturers of sports cars and car parts. Having established a track record as a luxury carmaker since 1939, RUF has stamped its global footprint in eight countries including the US, China and Thailand. By leveraging the Porsche exterior and enhancing its performance and drivability, as well as giving the customer the option to fully customise the car, RUF provides a world-class performance automobile designed to maximise driving pleasure. With 77 years of performance and experience, RUF continues to push the boundaries of car performance through innovation and technology.

The unsurpassed experience of driving a top-performing RUF car is now possible through Specialised Automobiles. With a showroom in the Leng Kee car belt, Specialised Automobiles aims to bring to car lovers here the unparalleled elegance and understated luxury synonymous with the RUF brand. But as a relatively new brand in the Singapore luxury car market, RUF has yet to gain a high level of brand awareness and recognition.

Specialised Automobiles approached the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI) for a brand audit, and to develop brand strategies to differentiate RUF from the other luxury car brands in the market.

What drives you?

A group of student-consultants, supervised by a Project Adviser and supported by a team from UOB-SMU AEI, undertook the project under the Institute's flagship SME Consulting Programme.

Applying their textbook knowledge to a real-life situation, the team used primary and secondary research techniques to obtain salient information for the brand audit. From one-on-one interviews with current owners of luxury sports cars, the student-consultants got a better understanding of this segment of car owners – what they look for in a luxury car, and their perceptions of the relative positioning of the various brands in the market. To enhance the findings from these in-depth interviews, the team went on to conduct secondary research to gain further insights into the luxury car industry.

The findings were plotted on a perception map, which reflected RUF's brand positioning vis-à-vis its competitors'. The team then evaluated RUF's brand value proposition using several brand assessment frameworks including Keller's Brand Equity model and Brand Asset Valuator model. The methodological and scientific approach enabled the team to identify RUF's brand equity and brand touch points, as well as determine the personal values that the brand appeals to. The knowledge was essential to help the team ascertain areas that could be leveraged upon, so as to position RUF and build its competitive advantage.

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Below the bonnet

RUF is a relatively recent entrant to the Singapore luxury car market as Specialised Automobiles secured the franchise only in 2013. To ensure its business success this time (RUF had a presence in Singapore briefly in the 1990s), the consulting team's recommendations centred on building RUF's brand strength – specifically its brand differentiation – as this would set the foundation for a strong brand equity.

Analysing the brand elements that underline RUF's allure, the team developed a brand proposition for RUF – akin to a description of how RUF should resonate with its target audience – and a set of recommendations to push this to the market. The holistic strategy has both internal and external aspects, and aims to increase customers' awareness and perception of the brand, build greater customer following, and a sense of community among car lovers.

Conspicuous consumption is passé. Accordingly, the team's ideas for an integrated marketing communications plan are aligned with current luxury industry trends in order to heighten their relevance and effectiveness. Connecting with consumers via digital and social media, and through selected events and collaborations with other luxury brands; improving customer experience, and raising the visibility of the brand are all part of the holistic marketing strategy to boost and reinforce RUF's brand image.

For Specialised Automobiles, it seems the quiet humming of a powerful engine will not do. It has to create a compelling brand story that plays up to RUF's archetypal subtlety, and being in the know. The narrative will interest customers who identify with these traits and draw them in to become future RUF car owners.

A beautiful ride

Specialised Automobiles' Business Development Manager Pravin Menon said he was not sure what to expect from the SME Consulting Programme initially. Nonetheless, he was pleased with the "fairly comprehensive report". He especially liked how the project progressed from start to finish, and how the various iterations contributed to a "smooth and streamlined" report. The ideas are relevant and the company is working towards adopting some of the recommendations.

The use of more methodological and scientific approaches to review business issues is a hallmark of the Consulting Programme. While he appreciated that the recommendations were backed by "solid evidence", Mr Pravin noted that the constantly-evolving business environment does not afford companies the luxury of such thorough work in real life.

The student-consultants wanted to gain experience in the field of consulting, particularly in branding and marketing, as it was a potential career option for them. They pronounced the process "extremely fulfilling – from gleaning insights about the industry and consumers, to developing a holistic branding strategy". Although they faced challenges like a lack of knowledge and experience in the luxury car market, and having to develop a strategy in the face of tough competition from established companies, they felt that they have "struck a balance between gaining market presence and awareness while maintaining RUF's exclusive and luxury car status".

The team appreciated the guidance of Project Adviser Marcus Loh, who provided them with useful advice at various junctures, including which brand frameworks to use. "He clarified our doubts and drew on his experience to give us different perspectives," said the student-consultants.

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Mr Loh called the project “another wonderful learning experience for both the students and me”. He said the research was “insightful”, and was glad that Specialised Automobiles could derive “good value” from the work of the consulting team.

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