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A Time for Form and Function: Aries Gold



Aries Gold was established in the 1960s with the goal to offer customers beautiful timepieces for any occasion. Almost 50 years on, the firm designs and manufactures high quality watches that are unique and durable, and in keeping with its philosophy to give customers the best value for their money, the watches are competitively priced.

With a clear focus on watch-making heritage and luxury, the Singapore brand prides itself on the international appeal of its timepieces, in particular, their elegance and alluring designs, and their unparalleled quality.

More than just telling time

It's easy to tell time these days, and it's not necessarily via traditional sources like the watch or clock. Today, the time of day is more likely to be obtained from any number of electronic or digital devices such as the computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. This is especially so among the younger generation that grew up in the digital age.

Ironically, even though there is no critical need for a wrist watch, the global watch industry continues to chalk up impressive annual sales of some US\$60 billion¹, according to a Bloomberg report, with the growth being led by the top five consumer markets of Hong Kong, the US, China, France and Germany respectively. The business of watches is profitable, with gross margins of about 60 per cent – or four times that for television sets. The same report also suggested that Apple's foray into the wrist watch market has the potential of bringing on board a new customer base that is accustomed to using mobile apps in their everyday lives, and therefore receptive to the same functionalities through a wrist watch.

From a fashion standpoint, style meisters will have us know that the right watch is the perfect accessory to complete an outfit as it gives the wearer a "cool edge". Sports enthusiasts, on the other hand, appreciate a wrist watch's functionalities including stop watch, alarm, lap time, pedometer, heart rate monitor, and more, while watch collectors look to watches to fuel their interest and/or investments.

Advertising, high-profile events and strategic planning can work to influence attitudes and buying behaviour. Major players, in any industry, have at their disposal huge resources to launch new products, and maintain a presence in the public eye, such as through celebrity endorsements or carefully-executed associations. Tennis player Maria Sharapova sports a TAG Heuer; fictitious British Secret Service agent James Bond 007 wore an Omega in recent big-screen appearances, while Breitling reinforces its brand as a specialist in chronographs and technical watches through its prominent presence at ground-breaking events or sterling achievements.

But not all companies have the clout nor the resources to go the way of the major players. For SME Aries Gold, which was looking to discern the right target audience for one of its watch collections, the UOB-SMU Asian Enterprise Institute (AEI)'s flagship Consulting Programme was the way to go. "Roughly, I

¹ <http://fortune.com/2013/03/04/how-big-might-the-market-be-for-an-apple-smart-watch/>

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knew the issues, but I needed a second opinion as it would give me the confidence that whatever I had in my heart was correct,” shared Woo Enyi, Export Director, Aries Gold.

Time for action

The team of three student-consultants, supervised by an industry veteran, put the theories they learnt in class to work. “We had to fully understand the industry, as well as the challenges the client faced, so that we can propose suitable solutions,” said a team member. Using a methodical and scientific approach – the basis of the Consulting Programme – the team performed an industry analysis, Porter’s Five Forces Analysis, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), and competitor analysis to determine Aries Gold’s standing in the market, and among its target audience.

The team optimised the use of the project timeline of 12 weeks. In addition to desktop research and analysis using business and marketing theories, they surveyed respondents who were categorised by age bands, and also conducted interviews to elicit views on diverse topics related to time pieces; these range from brand perceptions to preferences, price points, marketing and even geographic reach.

Leveraging existing findings that point to social media as being the most highly-rated platform for media engagement among today’s consumers, the team designed the surveys and interviews to ascertain the most effective mode of social media channel Aries Gold could use to connect with its desired audience. From the findings, the student-consultants crafted a series of short-, mid- and long-term recommendations, as well as topics for future research.

On the dot

“My expectations were to conduct a market survey that was comprehensive, acquiring views of my target customers and sizing them up, then giving some feedback on how to improve in the future,” said Aries Gold’s Mr Woo. Crediting the student-consultants’ analysis as being “65 per cent accurate”, he acknowledged the “limitations of resources, time and the students’ experience” and pronounced himself “more than satisfied with the results”. He added that “this group of students has the critical thinking skills needed to run a company” before calling them “role models” for others to follow.

As the project’s quantitative and qualitative findings corroborated what he knew in his heart, Mr Woo said that the company has proceeded to set things in motion. In fact, he has engaged a lawyer to advise him on some of the changes, and asked the inhouse team to “double up on the work given to them”. In a private arrangement, a student-consultant has continued to assist the SME on its branding journey. For the student-consultants, who had joined the Consulting Programme to “gain valuable insights and exposure to the field of consulting”, the project was a “rewarding experience”. They were able to put their textbook learning to practice, and were grateful for the opportunity to deal with “real problems that needed real, solid solutions”.

Project Advisor Desmond Loh had in mind the smooth delivery and closure of the project when he facilitated the co-development of the project proposal between the SME and student-consultants. Throughout the project proceedings, he helped to ensure that there was strong engagement among the parties, and that activities aligned closely with the objectives set out in the proposal.

While the student-consultants credited him for adding a touch of finesse” to their work, Mr Loh called the team “creative and market savvy”, and was “impressed” by their “never-say-die approach... raw energy and persistence”.

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Project Advisor

Desmond Loh

Student-consultants

Benjamin Chia Qi Nian

Charles Lee Kim Heng

Png Chin Teck