



Brand Perfect:

Omotesando Koffee, Tokyo

A Case Study by Mobile Observations, January 2012
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Passion

In order to stand out in arguably the world's most crowded brand environment many businesses do everything to grab fleeting moments of attention from passers-by. However, tapping into the minimalist design of traditional Japan, one Tokyo coffee shop has managed to become noted worldwide for its branding approach of quietness and seclusion.

The cafe, named after its current location in the Omotesando area of Tokyo opened in January 2011, and by summer it had been discovered by several Tokyo based trend and design bloggers and agencies, as well as international lifestyle magazines like Monocle.

Owner and master barista Eiichi Kunitomo kindly took the time to explain his thoughts about coffee and the cafe business over a cup of Espresso when Mobile Observations visited Omotesando Koffee in July 2011.





Reproducible

The driving force behind Omotesando Koffee is impermanence. Set up in an old house originally scheduled for demolition in early 2012, the whole concept is built around the idea of a pop-up shop.

A common theme throughout the brand is the square shape. It is found in signage, graphics, products as well as in the whole spatial design. Visual identity was conceptualized and created by the owner, Kunitomo -san, together with Tokyo design agency Eding-Post, while another local studio, 14sd, created the spatial elements.

Recent reports suggest that the old building where Omotesando Koffee currently is located has got a two year postponement to its demolition, allowing the cafe to stay where it is.

Should things have proceeded as first thought, the idea of Kunitomo -san was to be able to move his cafe to any suitable location, taking the black metal cubic frame with him. Everything the cafe needs is inside the box, and thus can be set up in e.g. stations, shopping malls, lobbies, schools or vacant shops. Space allowing several boxes could be interconnected, providing more customer space.

Quality

While the spatial concept of the cafe is built on impermanence and mobility, the products sold are of solid quality. As the premises are simple and efficient (the only seats are a bench in the garden) value is added by carefully selected coffees and cakes, the latter naturally cubic in shape.

The serving style takes inspiration from fast take-away cafes in that no trays or plates are used. Instead, the cakes are served in Omotesando Koffee branded coffee filters. This ties together the idea of take-away food and high quality coffee in a nice and innovative manner.

As the location of the cafe is challenging for customers, being located in a nondescript old house inside a maze of small residential streets, calling cards are of high importance. Also these are printed on unbleached coffee filters, immediately setting the right tone for potential customers who see them the first time.



Thorough

As the time of customer contact in a cafe like this is short, implementing a thorough brand experience in all details is of highest importance.

The customer is reminded of the cube theme central to Omotesando Koffee at all touchpoints: In the space, in the products sold, in the packaging and in the accessories and few gift wares on display.

Also the colour scheme of brown and black is consistent throughout all items, adding to the effect. The only element of a different colour is the coffee machine, highlighting the core product of the establishment with its red colour.

Good coffee can arguably be had at several locations in Tokyo and elsewhere, but the understated, stylish and thorough branding of Omotesando Koffee sets it apart from the others, and ensures the customer will remember his or her visit; Perhaps with enough fondness to even recommend it to others.

Simple

Continuing on the branding theme, it is worth noting that the space is highly simplified and even bare. Of all items offered for sale there is only one or a few samples on display. Often cafe's can be noisy places both in terms of the aural experience, but also in the sense of the visual presentation. Omotesando Koffee is again making it's mark by being decidedly uncluttered.

The sense of calm brought on by the sparse display suits the current location very well, as old Japanese houses traditionally tend to be sparsely decorated. However, should the cafe someday be moved to another location according to plan, the few displayed items will be easier to integrate into that space too compared to a more richly filled point of sale concept.

Another benefit from not filling up the space available for display is that it allows each item to be elevated to a special status, instead of being lost in a mass. This enhances the perception of quality, and encourages the customer to enjoy the items visually while making a purchase decision.





Conclusions

Creating a strong and memorable brand does not need to be a complicated operation for an establishment of this scale. The hardest part can actually be to fight the urge to add elements, when the best brand impact can be achieved by stripping away everything unnecessary.

This approach to spatial design and product display should not be seen as a solution only for a cafe and only for this location. Many smaller shops could implement the core branding ideas presented here in order to elevate themselves above the competition, and adding a feeling of refinement and luxury without large investment. As for the good principles of branding presented here; They are universal.

More images and information:
<http://ooo-koffee.com/>

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