



Lee Applbaum
CMO at Patrón Spirits
CREATIVITY AWARD

How to Launch a New Product with Patrón's CMO Lee Applbaum

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Many CMOs make it their mission to leave a mark on their brand and take the company in an entirely new direction. This is not Lee's mission. [Lee Applbaum](#), CMO of [Patrón Spirits](#), will be the first to admit that when he took over marketing for Patrón just last year he was sticking with a “don't fix what's not broken” model. In Part 1 of this interview, Lee discusses how he has been able to amplify what's been working for Patrón while also showcasing his own talent — specifically with the Roca Patrón launch, which happened this past July. Lee shares his experiential marketing success story, “Roca on the Rails”, where he was able to create a retro experience in a world of digital marketing and explains the ever so trendy garden-to-glass movement to me. With a guy as innovative as Lee, it's not wonder he was a recipient [The CMO Club's Creativity Award](#).

Drew: You were nominated in the creativity category. There are a lot of different ways to consider oneself creative – whether it's how you problem-solve or the ability to inspire, creative thinking or creative marketing campaigns. So it would be helpful for me to understand how you are being creative in your current role, and how is that helping your overall marketing efforts?

Lee: It's a very fair question with great kind of background context because there are the very traditional definitions of creative. But I think we are being particularly creative in the way in which we are thinking about and re-imagining the conversation both in our category, which is ultra-premium wine and spirits and, more specifically, tequila.

When I think about creativity, I usually use a different word – innovation – and try to reimagine how to interact with our consumers. It's not just about another page in a magazine or another billboard with clever imagery or copy. It's

what can we do that's disruptive in digital, social, mobile ecosystem, what can we do that's innovative and creative in experiential marketing, for example.

Drew: Can you point to one or two programs you've done, say in the digital, social or mobile spaces, which are innovative or disruptive that you're proud of?

Lee: We recently launched a new line of artisanal tequilas called the Roca Patrón, which means rock in Spanish. Historically, we haven't launched new products very often or in a very thoughtful, very strategic way. When we launched this line a few months ago, we were introducing three tequilas that had been in development for many, many years.

The traditional approach for this brand and for the industry would have been to splash it out in magazines, maybe advertise a little on T.V. and you're off to the races. But we quickly realized and understood that a majority of media is being consumed digitally, which presented a unique opportunity here.

One of the things that is very true within the spirits industry is the consumer's interest in sharing stories and experiences. We latched onto the insight that consumers in the luxury space now feel that it's not just enough to have a big bold logo. Consumers want to know the backstory. They want to know the history, they want to understand the authenticity and integrity of a brand.. And maybe equally importantly, they want to share that backstory with others because it gives them inherent credibility.

To leverage this knowledge, we rebuilt all of our web assets, including building experiential microsites (all mobile optimized) for Roca Patrón to help consumers learn about

the product. We explained the artisanal process that goes into making Roca Patrón through a series of vignettes and then allowed that content to be curated and shared. We also created a tool that allows both consumers and the trade to share and comment on cocktail recipes featuring Roca Patrón.

Drew: And how has the response been?

Lee: Short-term, we look at sales. Long-term, we look at sales, profit and brand health. It's too short-term right now to be able to gauge the long-term impact on perceptions of our brand but from paying attention to the social conversation, the initial response has been nothing short of phenomenal.

We launched it in July and we've already beaten our annualized sales goal by 50 percent. Now is that attributable to the digital piece alone? No. But I absolutely think that having really innovative and contextually relevant messaging helped to drive early acceptance of the new line.

Drew: You created this digital experience where consumers and industry players can make and use these dynamic tools. Did you then rely on organic discovery of the site or did you "market" the marketing?

Lee: Yes we did market the marketing. Obviously with the spirits business, we don't sell direct to consumers. We don't sell directly to spirits retailers or restaurants and bars. In some cases there are two layers within our media. We marketed the marketing to distributors who in turn marketed our marketing to the retailers, on and off premise.

We wanted to inspire confidence for a bar-owner, restaurateur or spirit storeowner that there's going to be an ample amount of media gravity owned, earned and paid for out there that's going to help me pull this through, sell it through once I bring it in. We make the selling easy for them.

Drew: It's interesting that you talked about this story becoming social currency. Can you explain this idea a bit more?

Lee: This particular launch for this particular product line was rooted in this handmade, artisanal, very traditional production process. We're talking to a very specific artisanal audience; the same people who follow the farm-to-table movement. This is a garden-to-glass movement.

We're unapologetic about the success of our marketing. There are cynics who believe that, because the core product can't deliver, they just have to be clever. But the truth is we don't. We've got a very honest, real, great artisanal product, and we developed really great marketing to go with it. We wanted to make sure that everything was really rooted in authenticity, and that we never got accused of just fancy window-dressing.

About the author

Drew Neisser is the CEO and founder of Renegade, the NYC-based social media and marketing agency that helps inspired CMOs cut through. He is the champion of Marketing as Service, a philosophy he espouses in his writings on FastCompany.com, PSFK, TheDrewBlog and The Cut, a much-appreciated monthly newsletter. If you have a CMO success story to tell, let Drew know at dneisser@renegade.com.

