

Blurred Lines

Art Licensing is now Brand Licensing

How The Brand Liaison is transforming two industries and eradicating the distinctions between Art Licensing and Brand Licensing

Broadly speaking, the term “disruptive business model” is used to describe an innovative business concept that creates a new market for itself and eventually disrupts an entire industry. **The Brand Liaison** is just such a disruptive force – shaking up two entire industries by removing the traditional distinctions between art licensing and brand licensing.

Total Art Licensing recently sat down with The Brand Liaison’s Steven Heller, Paul Cohen and Marcy Silverman to discuss how they merged art and brand licensing and created some of the top licensing success stories of the past few years.



TAL: Before we get started, I have to ask, how did this concept of merging art and brand licensing come about?

Heller: We initially didn’t set out to change the world. But we refused to accept the status-quo. My company, **The Brand Liaison**, represented several well-known brands including fashion brands and celebrities, that we were looking to license in the home and gift markets. Paul and Marcy already had a company in this space and an expertise in representing artists for almost 40 years. As we explored a collaboration between our companies, we



realized that the distinctions between art and brand licensing were pure fiction. We needed to move art licensing into brand licensing, including fashion and other categories. We then made a deliberate effort to focus on the branding of our artists and remove the lines between brand and art licensing. Now our artists are our brands and together the brand and the art form one cohesive licensing property.

TAL: Can you give us an example of how art and brand have combined to be one stronger property?

Heller: The Turnowsky Brand is a great example. Turnowsky is a design house based in Israel with a team of artists doing beautiful designs. Their art is breathtaking. But equally

important, is how well known the Turnowsky brand has become. Turnowsky has licensing programs with American Greetings and Papyrus so there is already tremendous brand awareness. Now we are expanding the Turnowsky brand and offering collections of their art, and the brand name, for licenses on products such as bedding, home storage, rugs, accents, fine furniture, and even luggage. Not to mention a collaboration with a major apparel brand in the works.

Silverman: Another great example is **Debra Valencia**. She started licensing her art but is now a very well-known brand name. We have been focusing on building her brand and expanding her licensing program across all categories into fashion, home, bath and body, fabrics, and more. And watch for her coloring books and coloring calendars. Her art is incredible but now her brand is equally as strong and recognized by consumers all over the country, and maybe more importantly, her brand is recognized by the retail store buyers who know her art sells on the retail shelves.

Cohen: It’s the same for **Jessica Flick**. It started as great and catchy art but now the retail store buyers ask for her by name. They know her art sells.

TAL: How has that outlook affected your business goals and strategies?





Cohen: To me its very simple. We now always focus on both the art and the brand. No one on The Brand Liaison team has less than 15 years of brand building and licensing experience. By utilizing our experience and network

of licensing partners, we continue to do more and more deals for each art brand, and in turn, that builds the artist's brand name. It's a snow-ball effect – and it builds very quickly.

Heller: Just look at our success with our artists as proof of that. Their names are now well known along with their unique artistic style. But also look at the converse. By removing these fictional barriers, we also bring some of our brands into the art world. Take our fashion brands **Loudmouth** and **Stephen Joseph** as great examples.



These are fashion brands built on a unique aesthetic. We now license their art, and their brands, on hundreds of products.

I'm sure you all know the outrageous clothing of the Loudmouth brand - which has basically become a hallmark for me personally. I wear Loudmouth at virtually every tradeshow. Loudmouth started as golf and sports brand featuring colorful bold prints and has now become a leading lifestyle licensing property. We

have over 20 licensees around the world in everything from apparel, to accessories, bedding, luggage, and many other products all featuring the bold and unforgettable Loudmouth patterns.

Similarly, look at our newest property, the children's lifestyle brand Stephen Joseph. Stephen Joseph has been a celebrity favorite and a staple for children for over 25 years with their distinct colorful backpacks, rain coats, boats, umbrellas, etc... We are now expanding the brand by licensing the brand and their unique

art through licensing on everything from apparel, sleepwear, and layette to development toys and children's bedding, as well as major programs with big-box retailers.

TAL: Can you tell me about some of your other properties that you are showing at Surtex and Licensing Expo?

Silverman: Yes, we will be showing all of our "art brands" including of course Turnowsky, Debra Valencia, Jessica Flick, Loudmouth and Stephen Joseph as we already discussed, but just to name a few others: Edith Jackson, has created an incredible new collection of water color with hard lines – very unique and was featured in Giftware News. This brand is on fire – we signed almost 10 deals since January – that's extraordinary; **Linda Maron** is always creating fresh new collections with her keen sense of design and vivid mix of color; **Steve Haskamp** is great at spotting new trends and transforming it into exciting products including

over-the-counter fabric, home decor, stationery and giftware. And, we are extremely excited to introduce new collections from **Tracey English**.

Cohen: One other initiative is Coedikit. Its simple cartoon art with sophisticated humor that is appealing to all ages from teens to adults, to grandparents, male, female alike. Everyone can identify with the humor of Coedikit.

As we witness the merger of art and brands, The Brand Liaison sits at the forefront of this disruptive business model. Through its continuing efforts combining brand and art licensing, The Brand Liaison will continue to provide new business opportunities for manufacturers and retailers looking for an edge to generate sales at retail. Parties interested in exploring powerful art and brand licensing should contact The Brand Liaison or should visit The Brand Liaison booth at Surtex and Licensing Expo.

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