

Moving Forward as a Lifestyle Brand

TO SAY THAT COLE HAAN'S brand identity changed over the past three years would be an understatement. It's been revitalized, bringing Cole Haan's formerly minimalist stores and solid reputation into the modern age. Started as a Chicago-based men's footwear manufacturer in 1928 by Trafton Cole and Eddie Haan, the company, from its inception, earned a reputation for quality and craftsmanship.

For 26 years, beginning in 1975, the owner, George Denney, built the brand into a successful men's and women's footwear and accessories company while opening Cole Haan retail stores. Cole Haan currently has 33 factory stores and 30 first-quality stores, with expansion in the plans.

Nike, Inc., bought Cole Haan in 1988, and Denney continued as its chair until 1999, when Matt Rubel was named chairman and CEO and Denney became chairman emeritus. "Until recently, Nike hadn't done much with Cole Haan," said Bill Ceitz, vice president of brand marketing. "Then three years ago there was a decision made to invest in Cole Haan. We weren't so much reinventing the brand, but renovating it."

The change began with research. "We wanted to know what people thought of the brand," said Ceitz. So he and his team informally interviewed more than 100 people—from consumers across the country to vendors, such as Nordstrom, to company personnel. "From that research we could create a map. Here is where we are today and here is where we want to be in three years," said Ceitz. The changes Cole Haan eventually made would encompass everything from how it approached advertising, to brand identity, to retail store design and new products.

The first step was to encourage younger consumers to use the brand without alienating its loyal customers. Cole Haan

sought to reposition itself as a "Casual American Luxury" brand, first signaling this new image to consumers through print advertising. Aiding them was Doug Lloyd from Lloyd & Co., a well-known design studio, which already dealt with high-end fashion brands. Prior to the new campaign, Cole Haan tended to take a practical approach to marketing, just showing beautiful photographs of shoes.

The intention was to move the perception of Cole Haan beyond a shoe company," said Ceitz. "What we're trying to

a story by using environmental cues. The whole intent of that was to give the brand an emotional reaction."

The response from all the new advertising was immediate. "People could see that Cole Haan was moving forward," said Ceitz. "They came into the stores with ripped out ads and we saw an increase in sales. We also saw new customers coming through the door and talking to store managers."

Gradually Cole Haan began widening the scope of the pictures—showing more



An image from the fall 2001 campaign shot near San Francisco.

communicate is that Cole Haan is an American Lifestyle Brand.

The first campaign was shot in black and white and later evolved to include color photographs as other advertisers began taking the same approach. The ads emphasized storytelling without giving an ending. The photographs achieved this by shooting images of the product from the knee down, backdropped by interesting settings.

"People could interpret things their own way," said Ceitz. "We brought people

of the "characters" and settings in the images. "We were thinking about the lifestyle of the people we wanted to attract," said Ceitz. "We wanted to reveal more of the story. It also kept the campaign fresh and new."

The "story" behind the fall 2001 campaign, shot near San Francisco, was a weekend road trip. The campaign featured scenes from a picnic and travel via a vintage Mercedes Benz convertible. "It drew people in and connected them to our product," said Ceitz.

The six-part series of one-page advertisements was so popular that Cole Haan created a separate minicatalog of just the ads and sent 100,000 copies to retail stores and their best customers, as well as to mailing lists provided by the company's media partners. "After the first season," said Ceitz, "one lesson we learned is the advertisement was more interesting if we showed more of the



The inclusion of Nike Air technology is promoted in direct-mail catalogs (above) and in magazine ads (right).

people and their location."

The newest campaign, Spring 2002, gave a different twist to the themes of travel and escapism. "The pictures are both inspirational and aspirational," said Ceitz. "I look at those images and I really want to be in the places photographed."

Shot in a private villa in Acapulco, Mexico, it reflected the activities that could occur during a vacation in a villa—relaxing moments such as playing dominos and stretching out on a hammock. "We wanted to capture the different moods of being in that place and the dimensions of all the activities you might participate in," said Ceitz.

Generally, the creative team at Cole Haan and its design studio considers three or four ideas before choosing one to implement. Possible images for photographs are discussed as they talk about the key messages they want to convey for that season. "We knew, for instance, that white would be a big fashion story for the season," said Ceitz. Consequently, the spring campaign featured much white.

The lifestyle shots used in Cole Haan's

consumer advertising are continually evolving, with new images created each season. Every season—Fall and Spring—Cole Haan creates new materials. The lifestyle shots used in consumer advertising campaigns are incorporated into almost everything the company does.

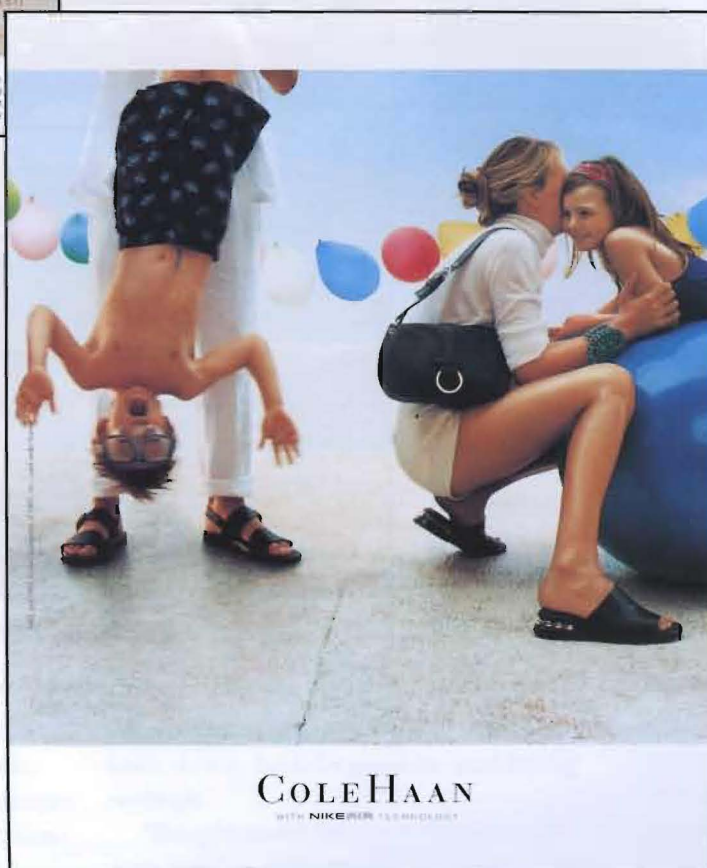
Each season, Cole Haan takes six to seven photographs from its print advertising and uses them for visual merchandising—sometimes blowing them up and placing them in windows and, often, matting and framing the images in simple wood—much like fine photographs shown in a gallery. "They are hung in the store like art in a home," said Ceitz.

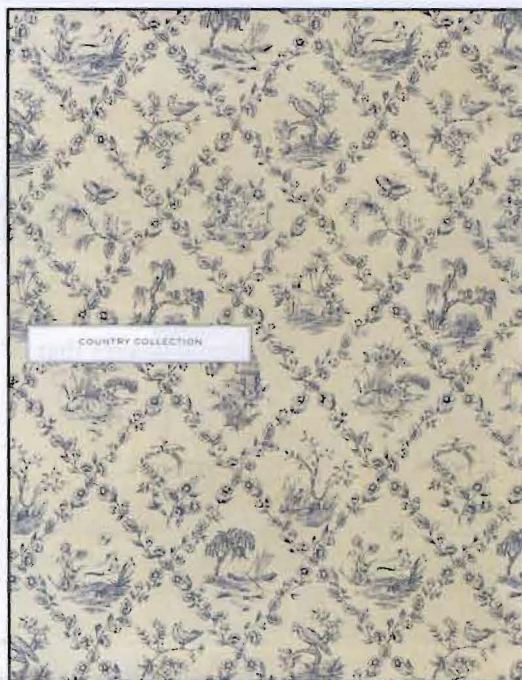
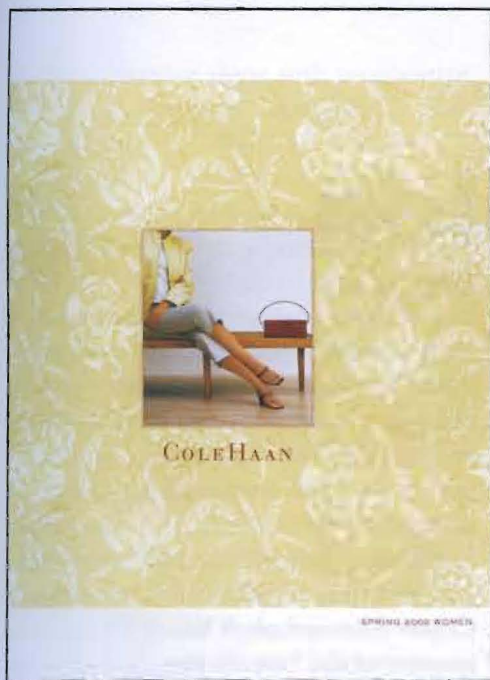
The company also produces postcards, incorporating images from the current campaign. The reverse sides are either left blank for in-store use, or, in partnership with a retailer, printed with invitations to various events.

Catalogs, typically sent to 8,000 people a season, are produced primarily to serve as sales support material, summarizing the product line for both sales staff and customers. The front of the book features

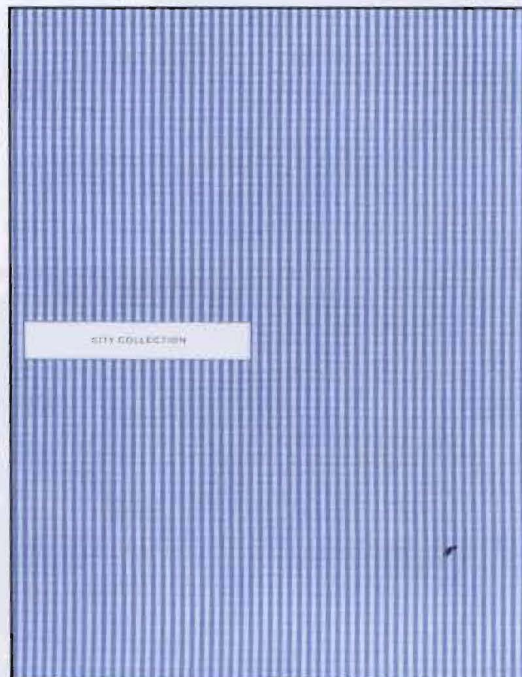
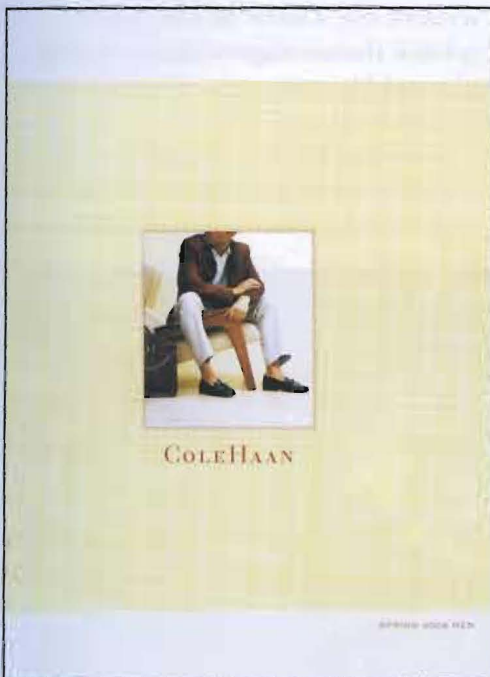
images in line with the print advertising campaign—shots that show people and product without revealing their identity. The back consists of "the workbook," smaller shots of the product and pertinent details. Catalogs are placed on the selling floor in specialty shops to enable customers to shop the entire line. Retail stores can also send the catalog to their better customers.

The Spring 2002 catalogs use blocked images of sumptuous fabrics as backdrops. "It was a way to add some visual interest and keep the women's catalogs feminine with flowered patterns and the men's catalogs masculine using traditional fabrics, such as gingham or plaid, found in men's clothing," said Ceitz. Workbook photography is shot digitally and placed in an image bank so Cole Haan can draw from the pictures for other uses.





The Spring 2002 catalogs incorporate patterned backgrounds and small lifestyle photos. (Women's catalog shown above, men's below.)



Cole Haan also used its partnership with Nike to advantage, putting Nike Air technology into Cole Haan shoes. "It's the best of both worlds," said Ceitz, "an infusion of technology with craftsmanship. It's a great blend." Cole Haan ran a dedicated campaign promoting the new collection in specially targeted publications such as *Sports Illustrated*. Now the Nike Air technology products are incorporated into the seasonal brand campaign with a separate logo that calls out that the shoe contains Nike Air.

Cole Haan also created a website

about two years ago. "We treat it as another door," said Ceitz. The site allows users to see products by gender and collection and also has a store locator. Besides purchasing product online, customers can email the company questions. "Right now it's performing in the vicinity of one of our smaller, first-quality stores," said Ceitz. "It's profitable and we've been very happy with it from the start." Like, with all of Cole Haan's ventures, the website is continually being

retooled—with the company currently exploring enhancing its site navigation and adding new creative twists such as three-dimensional photography. "You want to keep it fresh," said Ceitz, "and give people reasons to stop more often."

Cole Haan,
CHAIRMAN AND CEO: **Matt Rubel**
EXECUTIVE VP/CREATIVE DIRECTOR: **Gordon Thompson III**
VP BRAND MARKETING: **Bill Ceitz**
CREATIVE AGENCY: **Lloyd & Co.**
PHOTOGRAPHERS: **Colin Faulkner, Bob Nash**