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America's Hottest Brands

Advertising Age Honors the Top Brands of the Year -- and the Brains Behind Them

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Tony Pettinato

Consumer spending may have gone cold in 2009, but that didn't stop these marketers from turning up the temperature. Here Ad Age chooses the upstarts and established brands that are setting the pace for innovation -- and getting results -- right now.

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Tria Beauty: an America's Hottest Brands Case Study

By [Jack Neff](#)

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A recession might seem like the wrong time to launch a \$795 home laser hair-removal gadget, but it's turned out fine for Tria Beauty.

If it was behind on the macroeconomic trend, it was ahead of other players breaking into the U.S. home-laser market.

The privately held brand's sales have met forecasts, logging 50,000 units sold globally by mid-2009. That includes Japan, where Tria got regulatory approval to launch in 2005. It means retail sales are \$10 million to \$20 million annually.

Orchestrating Tria's U.S. launch has been Drake Stimson, 45, VP-sales and marketing and a veteran of Procter & Gamble Co., where he helped launch another new brand a decade earlier -- Febreze. He joined Tria in 2007.

Mr. Stimson's experience at P&G led him to the belief that "the greatest breakthroughs and biggest innovations in the beauty market are going to come through these energy-based devices. ... The degree of benefit they will bring is significantly greater than any new ingredient or product upgrade in the traditional topical [skin treatment] market."

Tria sells through its own website (TriaBeauty.com), home shopping network QVC and about 70 Nordstrom and Nieman Marcus doors nationwide. Online, search marketing and PR have been key, Mr. Stimson said. But the brand launched magazine advertising earlier this year too, helping to quadruple website traffic to 40,000 unique monthly visitors in September compared to a year ago,

according to Compete.com. PR shop Rpr, New York, has led efforts since the U.S. launch began, with ad agency RBG Marketing, Walnut Creek, Calif., recently joining to help on print.

"A lot of people expected the business to do poorly because of the recession, but really all it's done is amplify the value to the consumer," Mr. Stimson said. "If you go to the dermatologist to get professional hair removal done, it can cost you ... \$5,000 to \$7,000 to do your full body. Or you could buy this device for \$795."

It's a potentially huge market, Mr. Stimson said, with 95% of women shaving and 30% waxing or doing some other form of hair removal, though the key target is women who place particular importance on hair removal. Ultimately, Tria expects FDA approval and a growing market for other areas of skin care, including anti-aging and acne treatment.



NEXT

Drake Stimson, VP, sales and marketing, Tria Beauty

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Tesla Motors: an America's Hottest Brands Case Study

By [Jean Halliday](#)

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Unusual in the car business, Tesla Motors does no advertising and has no agency of record. Instead, the private, plug-in electric car outfit in Silicon Valley's San Carlos, has relied on the internet, word-of-mouth and CEO-co-founder Elon Musk. The South African-born entrepreneur is the reluctant face of Tesla. He described himself as "basically an engineer" whose "intrinsic nature is to be introverted."

Mr. Musk is regularly out stumping for his electric cars at conferences, with reporters and at the handful of company-owned dealerships in the U.S. and abroad. He made an appearance this year on David Letterman, who invited him after buying a Tesla Roadster. Tesla's Roadster has gotten visibility from appearing for free in 2008's "Iron Man" movie, BlackBerry ads and a coming California Tourism blitz.

From late March to mid-May, Tesla attracted more than 1,000 people to plunk down \$5,000 to reserve its next model, the all-electric Model S sedan, which will cost just under \$50,000. It's a seven-seater, and production is planned to start in late 2011. There's now more than 800 Roadsters on the streets in the U.S. and Europe. Mr. Musk hopes it will be in the thousands soon.

Owners include Arnold Schwarzenegger and "Who Killed the Electric Car" director Chris Paine, movie stars, Silicon Valley techies and business leaders. Podcaster and owner Adam Carolla dedicated a show to the car. "Our owners become our ambassadors," said Mr. Musk.

Tesla, named for inventor Nikola Tesla, recently reported \$1 million of earnings on revenue of \$20 million. Mr. Musk said he's never given a car away for free or at a discount -- an amazing situation in today's current auto climate.

Mr. Musk figures Tesla is getting "brand resonance" due to the rise in the environmental movement. "We're fortunate because we are at the center of the confluence of a product with high sexual appeal that in a sense helps save the world."

NEXT



Elon Musk, CEO, Tesla
Motors

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