

Salon du Chocolat New York gains insights from Columbia, Parsons

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NEW YORK - Students from Columbia Business School and Parsons The New School for Design's interdisciplinary program "The Design and Marketing of Luxury Goods" devised methods for improving the annual Salon du Chocolat trade show in New York.

The team wanted to transform the traditional trade show into an experience conducive to chocolate loving and friendly for exhibitors fishing for new customers. While investigating the project for [Havas Luxe](#) ^[2], luxury event planning company, the team realized that the overall [Salon du Chocolat](#) ^[3] experience was insufficient for the level of chocolate passion present and proposed various steps to maximize enjoyment.

"This was a new challenge for Havas Luxe," said Lauren Lim, MBA candidate at Columbia Business School, New York. "Transferring the meaning of luxury into chocolate was one thing, but meeting three distinct yet all essential expectations by the three stakeholders was another.

"New York City, that was our answer, a city full of culture and heritage, luxury and taste, we wanted the world of chocolate to be fully immersed and melted in the city of New York," she said.

"Imagine walking down a street in New York, finding a local coffee shop at the corner of Seventh Avenue, making friendly acquaintances in a French restaurant, sitting on a bench in Central Park and savoring the taste of your chocolate. We envisioned to transport this life and culture of New York into the trade show."

Additional team members from [Columbia Business School](#) ^[4] included Kasper Putkonen and Punda Lawansiri. Team members from [Parsons New School for Design](#) ^[5] included Alex Tosti, Grace Lauren, Min Kim and Tina Hung. As with the other presentations in the Luxury Education Foundation program, fine details were withheld for the brand's use only.

Finding ingredients

The team first looked at the previous chocolate show to see what determine its spirit and found that it had a polished Web site and was focused mainly on trade with chocolate tasting and cooking demonstrations.



Team members

Next, industry research was conducted to shed light on domestic and international food festivals, parallel

industry, communication and chocolate trends and the New York Chocolate landscape. To round out the preliminary work, the team administered surveys to past trade-show attendees and exhibitors and received 500 responses.

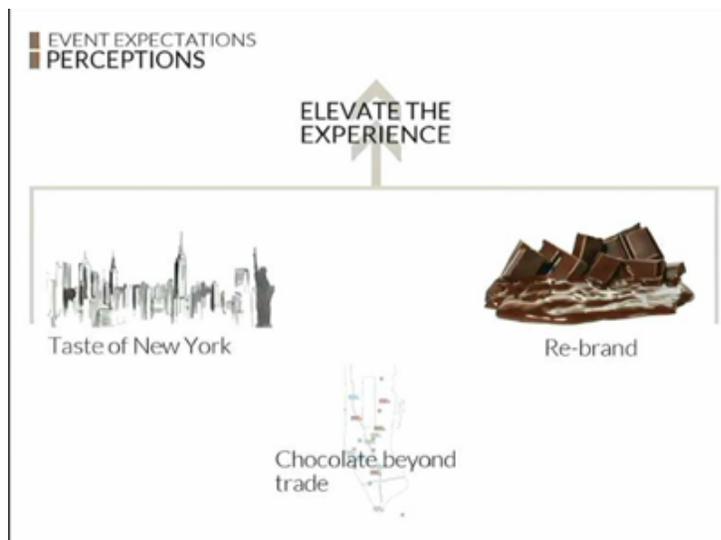
Some flaws were identified by former attendees. First, respondents felt that last year's trade show was too congested, which hampered their ability to explore the venue. Next, respondents called for greater interaction, involvement in activities and diversity of experience. Finally, getting into the trade show proved difficult, so a streamlined entrance and exit system was requested.

Former exhibitors said that they would appreciate more opportunities to increase sales during and after the show.



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After gathering background information, the team outlined three intersecting and mutually dependent groups that needed to be addressed: exhibitors representing the business side, consumers representing the experience side and Salon du Chocolat representing the elevation side.



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Mixing the pot

The students devised a number of solutions to these issues. All attendees will receive a special chocolate box designed with New York symbols such as the Manhattan skyline. The names of trade show chocolatiers will also be visible inside the box to boost brand recognition.

Leading up to the trade show, chocolate related events will sprout up throughout the city. For instance, selected chefs and hotels will host exclusive chocolate events. Also, walking tours will bring prospective attendees to chocolate hot spots where they can learn about the craftsmanship behind the delicious food.

Chocolate trucks will travel throughout the city to disseminate hot chocolate and tickets to the show.

Next, the team's proposal equipped the exhibit floor with street signs and storefronts that resemble the New York landscape, with street musicians evoking the ambience and benches giving participants a place to relax.

The show's date in November also allowed the team to develop a Web site that has plenty of time to build awareness.

"It has been a very intense yet rewarding few months as we worked through probably one of the most luscious and delicious projects we've encountered," said Ms. Lawansiri, Columbia Business School MBA candidate, New York.

Final Take

Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on *Luxury Daily*, New York



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[2] Havas Luxe: <http://havasluxeevents.com/>

[3] Salon du Chocolat: <http://www.salonduchocolat.fr/accueil.aspx>

[4] Columbia Business School: <http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/>

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