CHAPTER 2

Harmont & Blaine: A Successful Dachshund to Build the Values and Brand Identity

Maria Colurcio and Monia Melia

Abstract Harmont and Blaine is one of the most dynamic and successful companies in the Italian fashion industry, with about 100 mono-brand stores throughout the world. Born as a small family business in Caivano, a small city in the Naples province, the company has achieved successful competitive performance in less than 10 years despite competing with international fashion giants. The brand enjoys international recognition as being synonymous with top quality casualwear. The company’s philosophy reinterprets the Italian sartorial tradition through creative combinations of different colors, fibers, and patterns, in order to offer a high quality total look solution to its customers. Over the years, Harmont and Blaine has invested various resources in the building of a brand identity consistent with this philosophy. This case explains how the building of a strong brand identity requires the management of visual identity, brand promise, brand personality, and brand communication.

Keywords Brand promise · Brand personality · Brand communication · Made in Italy · Retailing

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Introduction

Established in 1993 by an Italian glove manufacturer, Harmont & Blaine (H&B) is an Italian sportswear brand recognized and appreciated all over the world, with 100 exclusive boutiques spanning 50 countries across five continents. The brand, visually depicted by a small dachshund, evokes images of a casual luxurious lifestyle characterized by a marked unconventional personality, particularly through its *Made in Italy* label. It expresses the company’s continuous search for originality and innovation since its birth at the beginning of the nineties, at a time when the Italian fashion house Giorgio Armani was promoting fashionable trends based on black and white colors. However, H&B made a breakthrough by introducing vivid colors such as blue, yellow, and red in the production of luxury casualwear clothes, as well as patterns such as stripes, flowers, or butterflies and fibers such as silk, cotton, wool, and leather. Such styles were unconceivable at that time for male consumers, except for certain items of beachwear.

The success of the brand over time has depended mainly on the combination of these choices with a *Made in Italy* strategy and with a Mediterranean style that allows the construction of a strong product identity. The H&B brand highlights a complex product concept that offers a trendy style and guarantees the quality of Italian sartorial craftsmanship. "The idea behind all Harmont & Blaine products is the *leisurewear*; that is, the synthesis of usefulness and chic attributes. They are expression of elegance and quality of the manufacturing, and shine respect to the competitors’ products such as Ralph Lauren, since they offer creative details and excellent craftsmanship of the finishing" (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

H&B provides a “total look,” offering shoes and accessories that complement an already well-assorted clothing product portfolio. Nevertheless, the shirt remains the queen of the collections, as it was the product primarily responsible for increasing the brand’s reputation. Indeed, the H&B shirt conveys the product concept of the brand by combining its distinctive creative design (yarns, colors, patterns, fibers) with the sartorial tradition belonging to the shirt of the Neapolitan school,¹ which differs in terms of the high number of stitching and handmade embroideries. The use of another Neapolitan technique for handmade tailored jackets results in a typical fold at the shoulder, allowing for superior softness and comfort. Furthermore, some efforts toward innovation address the enhancement of product performance. For instance, an innovative active sweater has been manufactured using a special patented yarn that releases a lavender scent when worn.
In little more than two decades, H&B has achieved significant market goals and excellent performance. The company was awarded the Dun & Bradstreet “Rating 1—Index of Highest Reliability” for extraordinary performances in financial management, both in 2008 and 2011. Its brand strategy can be examined as an evolutionary path. The first stage of brand management lasted several years: it focused on the building of visual identity through the choice of a logo and its colors (the blue dachshund). The second stage, until the end of the nineties, identified the refining of the brand promise: the company improved the definition of its features and refined the attributes of its brand identity. The third stage, up to 2010, infused emotional characteristics into the brand to strengthen the brand’s personality. The fourth stage, still in progress, is characterized by brand extension: Harmont & Blaine cafés have opened in Europe, women’s and children’s collections have been launched, and accessories lines have been added.

This case study explains how the building of a strong brand identity can support small manufacturing businesses when approaching the international market and when coping with global competitors. This chapter illustrates H&B’s history, business activities, and branding and communication strategies since its birth. It concludes with a discussion about implications for both researchers and managers. This case was written using both primary and secondary data. Primary data comes from two interviews with H&B’s CEO, Domenico Menniti (September, 2015; January, 2016); one interview with Marco Montefusco (AGB Company Spa Marketing Director); visits to the H&B headquarters in Naples; and stores visits in Italy and Europe. Secondary data was gathered from trade, academic journals, and newspapers, as well as from company documents such as annual reports, annual financial statements, industry research, corporate websites, and social media.

**Company Overview**

With its headquarters in Caivano, a small city in the Naples province, H&B is an international group comprising Harmont & Blaine SPA (the holding company) and its subsidiaries—Harmont & Blaine Switzerland (founded in 2010) and Harmont & Blaine France (founded in 2015). The company was founded in 1986 as PDM for gloves manufacturing; in 1993, with the registration of the brand Harmont & Blaine, it changed its name and type of production to focus on the production of shirts. It currently employs more than 500 workers.
H&B’s offering consists of an innovative and casual-wear look for men, women, and children, conveying elegance through a combination of Made in Italy quality with some creative details. H&B apparel targets dynamic people who prefer informal clothing and enjoy novelties. Its products provide an innovative mix of shapes, colors, patterns, and clothes, evoking the Italian sartorial traditional: “We aim to satisfy the customer’s needs, more and more exacting in the search for a specific style, distinguishing us from our competitors, for creativity, innovation, and quality” (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

The H&B portfolio consists of men’s, women’s, and baby/junior lines with four brand names. H&B is characterized by its high quality and high price. Its benchmark is Ralph Lauren. Harmont & Blaine Jeans is a basic collection mainly sold through online boutiques, allowing for lower price and originality. Harmont & Blaine Sport is for outlet collections and does not display the dachshund logo. Harmont & Blaine Junior is the kids’ collection (Table 2.1). In terms of product portfolio, men’s shirts constitute 28% of their business, followed by men’s t-shirts at 25%, men’s slacks at 15%, women’s clothing at 18%, and baby/junior clothing at 4% (Harmont & Blaine, 2015b).

H&B’s production is 100% Made in Italy; 93% is outsourced to selected Italian artisanal workshops and 7% is made in-house, including certain stages of cutting, assembly and finish. Men’s and women’s products are realized by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Product lines and categories</th>
<th>Brand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men (20–45 years)</td>
<td>Clothing (shirts, polo, sweatshirts, coats, slacks, jackets, T-shirts)</td>
<td>H&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shoes and accessories (shoes, belts, scarves, hats, bags, leather goods, gloves, socks)</td>
<td>H&amp;B Jeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>H&amp;B Jeans (hats, scarves, belts, T-shirt)</td>
<td>H&amp;B Sport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women (20–45 years)</td>
<td>Clothing (shirts, polo, T-shirts, coats, jackets, slacks, dresses, skirts)</td>
<td>H&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shoes and accessories (shoes, belts, scarves, gloves, hats, bags, leather goods)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby (1–12 months)</td>
<td>Baby (blankets, sheets, peluches, hats, rompers)</td>
<td>H&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (2 months to 16 years)</td>
<td>Junior (shirts, polo, coats, slacks, T-shirts, accessories, belts, dresses)</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Authors based on trade publications and corporate website
subcontractors, which are exclusively located in the Campania region (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015). This outsourcing is deployed through a collaborative relationship that allows H&B to control the quality of the products and the entire production process. Subcontractors are selected and trained by the H&B production staff and belong to a list of accredited partners that is updated every 2 years on the basis of company inspections and quality control reports. The relationship between company and craftsmen can be defined as a partnership: they share a common goal (high-quality production according to the Neapolitan sartorial tradition), collaborate to achieve that goal, and subsequently extract value from such a relationship. Awards are planned for artisans depending on the performance achieved by H&B every year. This strategically promotes the maintenance of quality attributes regarding Made in Italy with which H&B brand identifies. Indeed, Campania is very important for the Italian fashion system, being renowned for the sartorial tradition and for subcontractors that work for large companies and internationally successful brands, such as Marinella and Kiton. Selected subcontractors also produce accessories and junior products. Specifically, “Harmont & Blaine shoes are realized with great care by a third-generation artisan company located in the heart of the Marche region, famous for shoes district in Italy. Indeed, the quality of the manufacturing and the craftsmanship of the finishing are the distinguishing elements of this entirely Made in Italy product” (Harmont & Blaine Facebook, 2015). The junior line is produced by AGB Company through an exclusive subcontractor agreement.

The Harmont & Blaine brand has developed a successful marketing strategy based on four pillars (Harmont & Blaine website, 2015): (a) Extension of the range and business lines, (b) Penetration of new markets, (c) Development of direct and indirect retail channels, and (d) Focus on direct dialogue with customers.

The extension of the range and lines has been a step-by-step process that drives the evolution of H&B’s offering. Paying respect to the early stages of man shirt production, today the brand pursues a “total look” strategy offering new product categories (i.e., shoes and accessories) for new targets (women and 0–16-year-old children). As shown in Fig. 2.1, H&B has addressed new targets by adding “Harmont & Blaine Junior” in 2005, “Harmont & Blaine Sport” in 2010, and “Harmont & Blaine Jeans” in 2012. New categories were added by launching two “Harmont & Blaine Cafés” in 2009. The first is located in Porto Rotondo, one of the most exclusive and chic places of Sardinia, a well-known Italian luxury tourism destination (Fig. 2.2); the
second can be found in Eboli, Campania, the region of the company headquarters. The Harmon & Blaine Cafés allow for total immersion for consumers into the lifestyle that the company has always sought.8

The second pillar, the penetration of new markets, refers to the beginning of the internationalization process that started in 2001. Although Italy remains its premier market, H&B sells its products throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Oceania (Table 2.2). Indeed, since the early twenty-first century, the founders aspired to transform the brand from a local business into a global company. Through the “Global Cities” project, the company has penetrated the world’s tourism and shopping capitals as strategic points for its worldwide development and visibility9 (Fig. 2.3).

The third pillar comprises distribution through both direct (retail and e-commerce) and indirect retail channels (wholesale) (Table 2.3). The direct retail channel contributes 55.2% to net sales (Harmon & Blaine, 2015a), including the exclusive boutiques (mono-brand stores), flagship stores, shops-in-shops, and factory outlets. The mono-brand stores, located
Fig. 2.2 Harmont & Blaine Café of Porto Rotondo, Italy (Note: Harmont & Blaine website)

in city centers or prominent international airports, are the main sources of influence for brand image. These stores are conceived as effective relational and experiential places (Melia, Colurcio, & Caridà, 2014), nurturing relationships with consumers and allowing their engagement in the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Continents</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Austria, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Malta, Republic of San Marino, Romania, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, Cyprus, Belarus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Albania, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia, Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Japan, Iraq, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Uzbekistan, Russia, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Jordan, Israel, South Korea, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Authors based on corporate website

Fig. 2.3 Harmont & Blaine’s presence in major global cities (Note: Developed by authors based on Harmont & Blaine website)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution channel</th>
<th>Type of store</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Main cities and countries—partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>Exclusive boutiques</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Turin, Naples, Rome, Milan, Florence, Palermo, Genova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>58</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Yerevan (Armenia), Baku (Azerbaijan), Bogotá (Colombia), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Cannes and Paris (France), Casablanca (Morocco), Mexico City (Mexico), Moscow (Russia), Madrid (Spain), Miami (United States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shops in shopping mall</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Catanzaro, Bergamo, Forlì-Cesena, Chieti, Mantova</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Almaty (Kazakhstan), Bucharest (Romania), Beijing (China), Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Almaty (Kazakhstan), Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Doha (Qatar), Istanbul (Turkey), Panama City (Panama), Miami (United States), Beirut (Lebanon), El Cairo (Egypt), Bogotá (Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flagship stores</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Milan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Prague, Madrid, Moscow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlets</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution channel</th>
<th>Type of store</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Main cities and countries—partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale</td>
<td>“Corner” within department stores or luxury Hotels</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>La Rinascente</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Galeries Lafayette (Dubai in United Arab Emirates), Sogo (Hong Kong in China), Casa del Estanco and Le Collezioni (Cartagena in Colombia), Palacio de Hierro (Mexico City in Mexico), El Corte Ingles (Madrid in Spain), Harry &amp; Sons Werner Schuller (Wien in Austria), The Venetian Hotel (Macau in China).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-brand stores</td>
<td>About</td>
<td></td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Milan, Pavia, Turin, Rome, Agrigento, Palermo, Messina, Reggio Calabria, Catania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>600</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>About</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>World</td>
<td>Albania, Algeria, Armenia, China, Egypt, Germany, Iraq, Panama, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e-commerce</td>
<td>Virtual Boutique</td>
<td>1</td>
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*Note: Authors based on corporate website*
Harmont & Blaine “total look” experience. They are elegant places enhancing the Mediterranean roots of the brand without overlooking the local context. All H&B mono-brand stores reflect the Mediterranean blue and white color schemes that recall houses in Capri and Ischia, wood furniture inspired by Sardinia, and ceramics fulfilled in Vietri, in the province of Salerno near Naples (Fig. 2.4). Moreover, the mono-brand stores in international markets highlight the link between Italy and the host country.¹⁰

Fig. 2.4 Harmont & Blaine boutiques (Note: Harmont & Blaine website)
The flagship stores develop and reinforce market relationships and enhance business in international markets. From 2010 to the present, the company has opened four flagship stores in traditional fashion cities such as Madrid and Milan, as well as “emerging” cities such as Prague and Moscow. The H&B flagship stores enjoy prestigious spaces on the main fashion avenues, which facilitates advertising for all dachshund collections, footwear, and accessories, as well as entertainment elements. They offer large and well-lit environments of about 550 square meters in Milan and Madrid, designed with colors and materials that recall the Mediterranean essence and represent a “lifestyle store.” The Prague flagship store is the largest of all H&B flagship stores in the world. Developed on four levels in the city center, the new store covers over 1,000 square meters of the historical Palace of the Golden Lira “Zlatá Lyra,” a building protected by cultural heritage and characterized by a precious wooden facade with gold decorations (Fig. 2.5).

Shops-in-shops depend on an agreement with department stores to rent retail space where H&B runs another independent store. This type of arrangement is becoming increasingly popular among high fashion brands such as Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, and Armani. H&B already holds an agreement with well-known American department stores. During the last 5 years, the company has opened many “shops in shops” in Turkey, United States, China, the Dominican Republic, Kazakhstan, Panama, Egypt, and Colombia, where the cheaper Harmont & Blaine Jeans collection is sold.

Recent factory outlets and shops-in-shops have followed the general trend of fashion distribution and mirror the behaviour of the main competitor.
“From 2010, there isn’t a prestigious and luxury brand or a fashion giant that is not present in some outlets. Well-known brands such as Valentino, Prada, Ferragamo, Gucci, Tod’s, Ralph Lauren, Dolce and Gabbana, Burberry, Hugo Boss, Max Mara, Tommy Hilfiger, Brooks Brothers, Tom Tailor and others find the outlets an additional channel for their product offerings” (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015). The company has opened 22 factory outlet stores where consumers can find products discounted by 35 %.11 The e-commerce channel is recent, but its performance is flourishing. “Shop.harmontblaine.it” is a new direct way for the company to deal the dachshund products and reinforce its relationships with consumers; it yielded €972,000 of revenue in 2014 (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

H&B’s indirect channels include multi-brand stores and “corners.” Multi-brand boutiques contribute to cover key markets especially in Europe (Spain, Romania, Ukraine), the Middle East (Lebanon, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia), and Asia (Russia, China, Kazakhstan). H&B “corners” are well-defined, smaller sales spaces within department stores and luxury hotels run by prestigious partners all over the world, such as the Palacio de Hierro in Mexico City (Mexico), the Galeries Lafayette in Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Sogo in Hong Kong (China), and The Venetian Hotel in Macao (China).

The latest pillar of the company’s marketing strategy consists of building and fostering dialogue and interaction with customers all over the world. Collectively, the products, branding, and stores make up a magical triad, as identified by H&B’s CEO, necessary for building and maintaining a “tacit” dialogue with customers. Additionally, personal pages on social networks enable interaction and appraisal of needs and suggestions. The development of these four pillars has enabled Harmont & Blaine Spa to achieve significant growth rates from 2001 to the present (Fig. 2.6). In 2015, revenues amounted to €74.8 million for Harmont & Blaine Spa, €1.1 million for Harmont & Blaine Switzerland, and €0.3 million for Harmont & Blaine France. The revenues for the Junior and shoes categories were €12 million and €8 million, respectively (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2016 and Marco Montefusco, 2015).

Table 2.4 provides a detailed view of H&B’s key business indices from 2009 to 2014. Specifically, despite the worldwide economic crisis, EBITDA (Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization) amounted to €7.4 million (9.9 % of revenues) in 2014, compared to €11.8 million (18.4 % of revenues) in 2013. EBIT (Earnings before Interest and Taxes) amounted to €4.5 million (6 % of net sales) (Harmont & Blaine, 2015a).
Fig. 2.6 Revenues of Harmont & Blaine Spa from 2001 to 2014 (Note: Harmont & Blaine, 2015 annual report)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>75.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4 Key business indices of Harmont & Blaine from 2009 to 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EBITDA (% on turnover)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBIT (% on turnover)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROE (%)</td>
<td>21.83</td>
<td>16.95</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>5.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROI (%)</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>8.92</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>5.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Harmont & Blaine, 2015 annual report

The trend of financial performance shown in Table 2.4 highlights a decrease consistent with the general trend of international fashion and luxury. Nevertheless, the table shows significant growth of ROI in 2013, contrasting the overall industry’s decreasing performance. Furthermore, H&B has opened 10 new stores in the past 3 years (Fashion and Luxury Insight Report 2015). H&B’s main market in Italy comprised 81 % of revenue (€59.3 million) in 2014, an increase of 3.7 % from 2013 (€57.1 million) (Harmont & Blaine, 2015a). H&B’s financial performance and
Table 2.5  Awards given to Harmont & Blaine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Organizations and research institutes</th>
<th>Awards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Cribis, D&amp;B</td>
<td>Company with the highest business reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Industrial Union of Naples</td>
<td>Innovative company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Ernst &amp; Young</td>
<td>Businessman of the Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Pambianco</td>
<td>Company with the highest growth rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Dun &amp; Bradstreet</td>
<td>Company with the highest reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Confindustria (Confederation of Italian Industry)</td>
<td>Excellence of Made in Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Eurispes</td>
<td>Italian Excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Pambianco/Il Sole 24 Ore</td>
<td>Company with the highest growth rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Unicredit Bank</td>
<td>Champion of Italian Excellence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Harmont & Blaine, 2015 annual report

International growth have drawn the attention of organizations and research institutions, yielding several awards for the company (Table 2.5).

**Company History**

The company began as a family business in 1986 under the name PDM, created by four brothers named Domenico and Enzo Menniti and Paolo and Massimo Montefusco. PDM initially produced leather gloves primarily through OEM, an old family tradition and a quintessential product from the Naples area. However, in the early 1990s, prompted by a series of negative events and changes in consumer lifestyles, PDM decided to extend its product range with high-quality ties and register a new brand called "Harmont & Blaine," its logo identified by a small dachshund. The brand’s name and image recalls the legendary Duke of Harmont, who in 1700 used to travel together with his dog Blaine to search for fine fabric that he later brought to Neapolitan tailors to produce elegant and unique clothing. Furthermore, the dachshund is known to be an excellent bloodhound with a keen nose and sharp intelligence.

Nevertheless, fashion trends were hard to predict: avant-garde stylists declared the tie “out of style.” The company again declined due to a negative sales trend. The four brothers then decided to focus their core business on the production of clothing for men. A funny and colorful collection of men’s swimming trunks served as their first attempt to redirect the company.
Positive market responses encouraged the firm to extend its range of products again. Taking advantage of creative insights from retailers and the entrepreneurial intuition of the founders, the company presented in Capri the first “Harmont & Blaine” shirt collection in 1995, thus entering a new business area and positioning its products strategically between the well-known sport style of Ralph Lauren and the stylish and expensive Façonnable. The “Harmont & Blaine” shirt collection led to a true breakthrough in the fashion world of the 1990s, a time when elegance was identified uniquely by absolute and dark colors, such as grey and black. H&B’s shirts were colorful and fashionable, proposing a new multi-chromatic and smart clothing style that invoked the tailored elegance of Made in Italy. Furthermore, the products retained the typical sartorial technique, guaranteeing softness and wearability.

In the following years, the brand’s visibility and reputation increased considerably, during which the company expanded both in Italy and abroad by opening its own mono-brand boutiques: the first opened in the province of Naples in April 2000, followed by several others throughout Italy and in Miami in 2001. To build upon its steady brand identity, the firm changed its name from PDM to Harmont & Blaine SpA in 2006. The fit between brand name and company name functioned as a message of transparency and perfect compatibility between the brand and company values, a reinterpretation of traditional Made in Italy quality according to innovative and creative designs.

In 2009, the firm launched the “Harmont & Blaine Café” project with the creation of coffee shops. This initiative allowed the firm to expand its business not only to sell sandwiches, croissants, and coffee, but more so to offer its consumers pleasant places where they could relax. In effect, the firm pursued its wider aim of enhancing the value proposition for its customers.

Two years later, in response to remarkable opportunities regarding collaboration and partnership, the firm engaged in co-branding activity with Honda Automobili Italia SpA, which led to the creation of the first Honda “CR-V 4WD limited edition by Harmont & Blaine.” This collaboration enhanced the brand’s visibility, increased brand awareness, and strengthened its brand positioning (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

In 2014, H&B opened its first online boutique and created several pages on social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram) to dialogue interactively with consumers through the sharing of updated information, experiences, and ideas while also receiving suggestions and fruitful insights.

In February 2014, H&B finally closed the “Chinese battle” regarding illegal uses of its brand name and logo that severely undermined the brand’s
reputation and revenues in China. The brand has been widely counterfeited in the past few years. As affirmed by CEO Domenico Menniti,

Since 2008, the company has been involved in over 800 criminal acts following seizures of Harmont & Blaine products. In January 2016, police have also confiscates an unauthorized boutique with the Harmont & Blaine sign and many fake products in Lebanon. For the brand’s protection, the company has strengthened collaboration with the police, its monitoring systems, and the quality of its products in order to make them even more recognizable by the customer. (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2016)

In 10 years of legal disputes, H&B closed its 12 boutiques and halted agreement with its local partners. Only after the Chinese Patent Office recognized the rights of this international brand to the Harmont & Blaine society did H&B relaunch these 12 boutiques and reopen five mono-brand stores selling “Harmont & Blaine Junior.” Figure 2.7 summarizes Harmont & Blaine’s milestones from 1986 to the present.

Fig. 2.7  Milestones of Harmont & Blaine  (Note: Authors based on trade publications and corporate website)
THE HARMONT & BLAINE BRANDING STRATEGY

The creation and communication of a strong and internationally recognized brand has been one of the most important strategic objectives pursued by the company’s founders since 1993. Strong brand identity (Abratt & Kley, 2012; Keller, Busacca, & Ostillio, 2005) and brand equity (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000) are extremely critical, which explains why H&B has devoted various efforts to such developments since 1993. Strong brand identity emerges as the result of managing four aspects of corporate branding: visual identity, brand promise, brand personality, and brand communication (Abratt & Kley, 2012). The following explains how H&B performed in each aspect.

Visual Identity

Visual identity enhances recognition and association abilities of stakeholders, enabling them to associate an experience with a specific brand and to develop a perception of the organization’s reputation over time (Abratt & Kley, 2012). Visual identity depends on three elements: the brand name, logo, and color (Abratt & Kley, 2012; Melewar & Saunders, 1998). The most significant element of H&B’s visual identity has proven to be its logo: the dachshund (Fig. 2.8). This symbol quintessentially reflects the company’s philosophy and values, since the dachshund is an excellent bloodhound known for developing keen instincts and intelligence that compensate for its small size and short legs. Similarly, the firm might be said to have hone its senses and intelligence to penetrate the Italian fashion market successfully during times of economic crisis. The original color of the brand name and logo was blue (Fig. 2.3), meant to express dependability, trustworthiness, and high quality. However, grey,

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![Logos and symbol colors by Harmont & Blaine brands](Note: Authors based on corporate website)
yellow, and red-purple have since been used to differentiate the main brand name from its more economical product lines: Harmont & Blaine Jeans and Harmont & Blaine Sport. These colors bring associations with dependability, high quality, happiness, and inexpensiveness. Gray and fuchsia distinguish the Harmont & Blaine Café brand.

**Brand Promise**

The brand promise is both functional and emotional (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012), guaranteeing satisfactory value relevant for customers and other stakeholders (Hameide, 2011). The Harmont & Blaine promise also reflects a set of functional and experiential features (Fig. 2.9).

Functional features are based on the quality/peculiarity of raw materials and processing techniques. The H&B brand evokes fine fabric (e.g., pure silk, cotton, linen, cashmere), special attention to detail (e.g., the dachshund logo on all products is embroidered), and quality stitching and finishing. High levels of quality are guaranteed by outsourcing production only from selected Neapolitan craft businesses. The expertise and know-how of these business partners form a crucial point of trust for the creation of luxury products characterized by high quality and a continuous search for new textile solutions. For example, recent news concerns a reversible and waterproof jacket for women completely realized in pure silk in the fabrics, padding, and buttons.

Emotional benefits concern the lifestyle proposed by the firm and its *Made in Italy* concept: “The firm is not only a leader in the search for new methods of using clothes and colors, but also in the offering of a new style

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**Fig. 2.9** Promise of Harmont & Blaine (*Note: Developed by authors based on Abratt and Kleyn (2012)*)
that meets the needs of those people that in clothing look for new elements of design and functionality” (Harmont & Blaine, 2015a). All product lines express a value proposition packed with experiential and emotional attributes that recall a lifestyle with which the customer prefers to identify himself/herself. These features are based on a winning mixture of colors, clothes, and nuances that has revolutionized monochrome casual clothing: “Models, clothes, buttons, and accessories are combined to create something unique” (Harmont & Blaine, 2013). H&B has indeed achieved true breakthrough into traditional styles for men, for instance proposing polo-shirts with patterned details (neck and turn up) and shirts with stripes and flowers.

Daring creativity, trendiness, and smart elegance define the essence of the H&B brand promise. It offers not only a fashion product, but also a lifestyle: “We offer a line of clothing coherent with the lifestyle of people that wish to express their personality in what they wear” (Harmont & Blaine, 2015a). It promises a combination of ideas, emotions, and experiences: “elements of coherence respecting the lifestyle they aspire to” (Harmont & Blaine, 2015a).

**Brand Personality**

Personality is linked to the brand’s emotional characteristics (Mindrut, Manolica, & Roman, 2015), expressing the feelings, thoughts, and actions of the whole firm (Keller & Richey, 2006). It reflects the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker, 1997). H&B’s brand conveys a strong personality reinforced by its products, founders, and the actions taken by the company. It also evokes the characteristics of sincerity, competence, excitement, and sophistication (Fig. 2.10). The first brand characteristic of H&B, its sincerity, is linked both to the honesty and morality of its founders and the cheerfulness of its products. Messages of honesty and morality emerge from the slogan, “From Naples it’s possible,” a slogan chosen by company founders to highlight the possibility of conducting business with honesty and without compromise, even in a location known for crime. The sincerity of this brand also emerges from its cheerful collections, which exalt the colors of the Mediterranean.

The next characteristic, the competence of the brand, emerges from tradition and collaboration. Its success, indeed, is highly dependent on a strong textile tradition and highly specialized SMEs’ that produce for famous brands and foster collaboration among them to serve the entire supply chain. Collaboration also embodies the H&B
Fig. 2.10  Personality of Harmont & Blaine (Note: Developed by the authors based on Aaker (1997))

philosophy. Employees are accustomed to teamwork and harbor a strong group identity: they are part of a “family,” as H&B’s CEO loves to say. For 5 years, the company has implemented “people satisfaction action,” aimed at motivating and giving gratification to the staff on the basis of a reward system. However, the true point of strength depends on a multi-year relationship with employees: to show gratitude to their employees, H&B provides grants to the design academy for deserving children of employees. The purpose of this action is twofold: (i) it strengthens the bond between company and employee, and (ii) it teaches skills to young people with the potential to be employed by the company. Furthermore, the company supports the families of employees during health-related and economic difficulties.

Third, the excitement of the brand emerges from the daring of its founders and their ability to cope with negative events and changes in consumer lifestyles. Over time, they successfully identified new market opportunities, deciding for instance to produce ties and shirts and to offer “total look” products for men. For this reason, H&B has proven to be a dynamic brand able to capture new trends and consumer needs. The company offers more than 10,000 polo models and about 750 shirt models. The CEO loves to tell about the launch of the first collection of shirts in the early nineties. To cope with the drastic reduction in market consumption of gloves, the company decided to make a breakthrough by
launching a collection, completely unconventional, that could capture *innovator customers* who were tired of the black and white colors that predominated fashion collections at that time. However, in the early nineties, the range of textile fibers was not that rich or varied. The fabrics differed by quality, craftsmanship, and rarity, but the chromatic universe of patterns was rather limited. As with the Duke of Harcourt, the four brothers began searching for novelty with their dachshund logo, but no pattern book met their expectations. They persevered and finally reached an agreement with Inglesina, a company produces baby prams that provided imaginative and daring fabrics, totally new to clothing. Its wearability was further improved after an agreement with a textile company.

The last characteristic of H&B, the sophistication of the brand, is strongly linked to its products, which express elegance, exclusivity, and the Italian style. Fine and innovative fabric, attention to detail, and quality of stitching and finishing make H&B products synonymous with Italian excellence.

**Brand Communication**

Brand communication functions as the key element when managing brand relationships with customers, employees, suppliers, retailers, media, and the community (Zehir, Sahina, Kitapc, & Özsahin, 2011). H&B’s communication always aims to link feelings of quality, prestige, and style with the brand. The company thus allocated about 9% of its revenue to communication activities until it was reduced to 3% this year due to the global economic crisis (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015). Based on Van Riel (1995), H&B’s communication activities are categorized as (i) organizational communication with various stakeholders, (ii) management communication within the company, and (iii) marketing communication with consumers to foster product sales.

First, organizational communication with stakeholders stimulates interest, attention, wide consensus, and approval from the media for the brand, products, company, and founders. These activities consist of public relations, sponsorships, corporate advertising, and advertising partnerships with celebrities. In particular, the involvement of about 30 celebrities over time with both formal and informal agreements from the world of fashion, sport, and entertainment has contributed to strengthened brand awareness, brand image and consumer perceptions, as celebrities are typically associated with a “quality guarantee.” The H&B brand has been associated with success and good fortune thanks to Italian soccer player Fabio Cannavaro, who became
the official testimonial of the company and in 2006 won the title of World Champion, as well as the prestigious recognitions of the Golden Ball and FIFA World Player. Furthermore, each firm’s activities, such as the opening of a new store, the promotion of a new collection, or the organization of a fashion event, serves as an influential means of communication to reinforce brand image and diffuse the brand’s essence as aligning with the Mediterranean lifestyle. Moreover, “fashion nights” at its exclusive boutiques celebrate the Mediterranean and Italian lifestyle evoked by the brand (Fig. 2.11). Social media complete the communication plan designed by the firm, supporting and integrating the issues communicated by the corporate website. Each type of social media provides interaction with a multitude of stakeholders and allows information to be updated in real time. H&B uses the company website and social network pages as storytelling tools to illustrate the brand’s history and values (Russo Spena, Colurcio, & Melia, 2013).

Second, management communication aims to strengthen the organization’s group identity and engage all employees in the sharing of values, missions, and objectives. Despite its market performance and its large size, H&B, like many large Italian firms that began as family businesses, maintains a family leadership style, and prioritizes the affection of employees toward the company. The strong link between the company and its employees was demonstrated by huge efforts made by the founders not to dismiss employees during the crisis of the late eighties. Employees reciprocate the relationship through maximum commitment on special occasions, such participation in events, new openings, and the launch of
new collections. On these occasions, all employees collaborate to maximize results, regardless of rewards: “Cooperation is in the DNA of Harmont & Blaine” (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015). The main tool by which to achieve people’s satisfaction is dialogue, through formal and informal meetings. Some incentives reward commitment to achieving company and departmental goals.

Third, marketing communication activities are consistent with corporate communication objectives. Advertising mainly stresses well-defined moments of the firm’s life, such as the launch of a new collection, the inauguration of a new boutique, the promotion of fashion events, and participation in influential fashion events. Advertising in daily newspapers and magazines worldwide (Fig. 2.12) also supports institutional communication. Product placement is another way to promote the brand. H&B products have appeared in numerous TV and cinema productions. Outdoor advertising is a traditional communication tool used mainly by H&B to spread brand knowledge and enhance brand image. It was used effectively in China when it expanded markets there (Fig. 2.13).

![Fig. 2.13](image)

*Fig. 2.13* Outdoor advertising of Harmont & Blaine in China (*Note: Harmont & Blaine website*)
CONCLUSION AND IMPlications

The fashion industry has become highly competitive (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) and requires rapid responsiveness (Wheelright & Clark, 1992) to consumers’ ever-changing lifestyles. H&B illustrates the evolution of an Italian family business into one that has established a successful brand identity all over the world. H&B offers a creative and casual style that expresses smart elegance; the brand prioritizes fine fabrics such as pure silk, cotton, linen, and cashmere, special attention to detail, and quality stitching and finishing. All marketing actions aim to enhance the brand’s reputation and image. Brand name, logo (the dachshund dog), and colors all contribute strongly to brand identity as powerful symbols of the firm’s philosophy and values. The brand’s functional and emotional promise—along with its evocative personality, expression of dynamism, passion, tradition, and exclusivity—favors the creation and strengthening of brand identity. Also, the opening of exclusive stores and flagship stores in “fashion world centres” has contributed to enhancement of brand identity as well (Abratt & Kleyn, 2012; Moore, Doherty, & Doyle, 2010). Over the years, H&B has created positive associations related to high quality and brand loyalty and therefore enjoys a strong reputation and image in the international fashion scene.

H&B’s competitive strength has depended mainly on its marketing strategy of four pillars that increase brand awareness (Aaker, 1997) and sustain superior performance.

Its excellence infuses strong Made in Italy traits into the products by reinterpreting the sartorial tradition through creative designs. As H&B works essentially through subcontractors, this allows for collaborative relationships, as the production director is strongly engaged in the periodic assessment of subcontractors and in training the workers. At the beginning of every new collection’s production, subcontractors are trained on fabrics and techniques for specific markets and/or customer targets. All products are managed according to a checklist set up by H&B production staff. The need for trustworthy relationships (Gummesson, 2004) is also critical considering the confidentiality required for the deployment of new collections, in terms of colors, patterns, typology of items, fabric, and yarns. Collaboration with fabric suppliers is also important for quality excellence: suppliers are often sources of innovation through the proposition of new solution for yarn and fabric and new opportunities that
improve the functional quality of products. Such collaboration enables for learning processes, as different actors work together to integrate resources, knowledge, expertise, and creativity to produce value and innovation (Lusch & Numbisan, 2015).

Cooperation with downstream partners is also critical for the development and protection of brand image for companies like H&B that use significant portions of stores that are not managed directly by H&B. H&B fosters long-lasting relationships with retailers and promotes a favorable reward policy with them (Guercini, 2001). Retailers, department stores, and hotels are H&B partners whom the marketing director visits periodically. Their merchandising, in-store communication actions, and promotions are arranged with the company; recently, H&B has developed a loyalty agenda to motivate and reward its retailing partners.

The case of H&B offers important lessons for SMEs. First, H&B shows that SMEs can perform high quality production while working with subcontractors and fabric providers who strategically achieves a high standard of quality and prompts innovation (Colurcio, 2009). The collaboration reaches beyond business boundaries and prioritizes the sharing of information, knowledge, and competences with new actors (Carida, Melia, & Colurcio, 2016). Another lesson to SMEs is the need for strategic planning of international expansion. The problems that H&B experienced with counterfeit goods in the Chinese market highlighted the company’s oversight. At the beginning, the four brothers were flattered by number of H&B fakes and underestimated their negative effects. The deployment of timely suitable strategies for brand protection, such as awareness campaigns and focused advertising, could have reduced the decrease in revenue.

H&B has coped with challenges thanks to the entrepreneurial insights of its founders. Its communication, however, is not part of its strategic planning. Incidences of unplanned promotion efforts include giving an annual wardrobe of shirts to well-known figures (actors, soccer players, showmen, etc.) at their peak of fame. Such actions do not guarantee systemic effects and depend on the willingness of the spokesperson. From this, a critical question emerges: is such action sustainable without adopting a strategic long-term plan of communication? An additional consideration relates to the increasing diffusion of digital and smart technologies. Companies are compelled to manage their brands digitally, implying the need for developing platforms, to which H&B might dedicate its resources as well.
Notes

1. The Neapolitan school was founded in 1351 with the foundation of the Brotherhood of Tailors and reached its peak in the period during which Naples was the capital of the two Sicilies, as well as a socioeconomic and fashion center reference point rivalling London and Paris. In 1611, 607 tailors in Naples were approved to do the work and recognized by The Brotherhood. In 1887, a Neapolitan tailor wrote the treatise “The Art of the cut,” receiving international recognition. To date, the Neapolitan tailoring tradition has become renowned all over the world, as demonstrated by a recent article published by the Financial Times (January 27, 2015): “If Italy is a study in contrasts, Naples and its tailors provide one of the most striking. While the southern city is racked by decline and urban decay, some of its streets in the grip of organised crime, the fortunes of its tailors—whose hand-cut, hand sewn suits fit with the city’s languor and regal beauty — are rising” (Sanderson, 2015).

2. The D & B rating expresses a synthetic and predictive ranking of reliability on the overall situation of the company, with a 1 to 4 scale (1 = the highest rating of reliability of the company).

3. Since 2005, AGB Company produces for Harmont & Blaine’s junior line through an exclusive subcontractor’s agreement.

4. In 2016, two new subsidiaries will be established, one in the United States and the other in Spain, responsible for the activities of four boutiques (Madrid, Barcelona, Puerto Banus, and Malaga), 15 corners in El Corte Ingles, and 3/4 outlets (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

5. In Campania, the three main Italian textile districts are located in:
   1) San Giuseppe Vesuviano (the largest textile district of South Italy, with more than 4,000 companies specializing in the production of clothing for men, women, and children, as well as fabrics, curtains, etc.),
   2) Sant’Agata dei Goti-Casapulla (focused on the production of jackets, slacks, knitwear, shirts, and leather clothing), and
   3) San Marco di Cavoti (specializing in some phases of production, such as the cutting of fabrics and packaging of the garments).

6. Marinella is a Naples-based third-generation company with over 100 years of history producing tailored, high-quality, and handmade ties that are sold through six exclusive boutiques (located in Naples, Milan, London, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Lugano) and several corner shops located in Europe, Asia (Isetan-Japan) and America (New York and Washington, United States). Among the most famous customers of the company are all the United States Presidents from Kennedy to Bill Clinton, as well as Re Juan Carlos and Prince Alberto II of Monaco.

7. Kiton produces mainly high-quality, custom-tailored, and handmade dresses, which require 25 to 50 hours of work. All products are sold through
boutiques in Europe (Paris, London, Barcelona, Vienna), Asia (Moscow, Singapore, Tokyo), the United States (Miami, New York, San Francisco, Houston), and the Middle East (Dubai, Abu Dhabi).

8. The Harmont & Blaine café revenue in 2013 amounted to €555,000 (up 121% compared to €250,703 for 2012) (Harmont & Blaine, 2013). However, at present the firm has decided to concentrate its efforts exclusively on its core business.

9. For the project “Global Cities” by the end of 2016, the company has planned openings in cities like London, New York, Tokyo, and Singapore (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

10. For example, during the Moscow store inauguration, all the shop windows emphasized the cultural link between Italy and Russia through the representation of three classic dancers in the colors of the Russian flag, a sport in which both countries have always excelled.

11. In this way the company controls the flow of unsold stock, monitors the brand appeal, and increases short-term liquidity (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2015).

12. The industry’s profitability declined. In 2013, the average ROI fell by 1.5%, compared to the previous year (Fashion and Luxury Insight Report—SDA Bocconi, 2015).

13. The four founders are brothers by their mother, who was married to Sir Montefusco as her second husband.

14. Founded in Nice, France in 1950, Façonnable is an international company that distributes its products in Europe, North and South America, Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Façonnable is a high-end brand renowned worldwide for its timeless collections for men and women.

15. The usurpation of the brand is widespread in China. When Italian companies enter the Chinese market, they often find that some Chinese company has already filed the same brand. China applies the principle of “first to file,” for which the trade mark right is given to the subject who submitted the request first. There are cases in which Chinese entrepreneurs have acquired the ownership of Italian trademarks, taking advantage of the reputation or trying to sell them to the Italian owner. These “shadow companies” are mainly located in Hong Kong, where the constitution paperwork and company registration are particularly rapid and where the local trademark office does not perform background searches or checks on lists of filed trademarks. Italian companies generally have no alternative but to pay. Harmont & Blaine instead has chosen the path of litigation, by resorting to the Chinese Department of Appeal of the Patent Office, which upheld the claim and assigned the exclusive right to the brand Harmont & Blaine. The decision is now final (Interview with Domenico Menniti, 2016).
16. Informal agreements concern all moments in which well-known national and international brand lovers contribute to enhance brand image as they participate in important moments of the firm’s life, such as the opening of a new store, the promotion of a new collection, the organization of a fashion event, or simply the purchase of Harmont & Blaine products. Among these international celebrities are actors such as Sylvester Stallone, Antony Delon, Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt, Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and Massimiliano Rosolino (swimmer and Italian Olympic champion).

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