

# Ahead of the curve

Piquadro tackles duty free with new store openings and high-value collaborations by MELISSA SILVA

For new brands entering travel retail from the domestic market, the transition can be challenging. Although the luggage category may not pose the same challenges as a highly competitive category like confectionery, newcomers still have to be on their toes. For Italian business bag and accessory brand Piquadro, however, the transition has been relatively seamless, eased perhaps by winning the Best Bag category for its latest range of laptop backpacks, “Coleos,” in *Wallpaper\**’s Design Awards 2013.

Founded in Italy in 1987 by Marco Palmieri, an engineering student, Piquadro originally produced leather goods for small third parties like Prada and Dolce & Gabbana before launching its own brand 10 years later. Today, Piquadro operates according to three core values: design, functionality and technology.

“The good thing about Piquadro is that we’re not just a luggage company,” says Florence Nguyen, Travel Retail & Wholesale Director Asia Pacific. “We do have luggage, but

if you look at our total sales, we have a good balance—briefcases, day bags and accessories represent approximately 30%, while luggage is about 7%, which is good because we have a diverse product offering.”

Having only just entered travel retail, Piquadro is doing well for itself, already opening a POS in a corner with King Power International in Pattaya Downtown Duty Free, Thailand; a corner in Shanghai Hongqiao Airport Terminal 2 with Dufry; and a corner in Macau Airport with King Power Duty Free. This month Piquadro is set to open its first duty free shop in Daegu, Korea. “We are in the midst of really expanding the brand internationally, not only in Asia but in Europe as well,” says Nguyen.

## Setting itself apart

Technology is big for Piquadro, which could help to set the brand apart from other accessory and luggage brands. “This is how we define ourselves—tech inside,” says Nguyen. “Functionality is also big for us.” In addition to technology and functionality, Nguyen also cites innovation and Italian design as other characteristics that distinguish Piquadro from others in the two categories. “One of our core values is innovative design, and we design for people who travel and want something convenient, but also fashionable,” she says.

Piquadro also offers its products in a range of colors, as opposed to the more common monochromatic shades, to further differentiate itself. “Compared to other brands that usually only offer products in black or brown, we came up with colors,” says Nguyen. Furthermore, offering exclusive services in addition to a diverse color range provides consumers with greater choice and the opportunity to personalize their purchase. “We have a line called Sartoria where customers can create their own bag,” says Nguyen. “They can choose their own thread, the color of the inside of the bag, the color of the outside of the bag—everything. It’s custom made.”

Piquadro’s Sartoria line allows customers to custom design their own bag, including the color of the thread, lining and leather



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Earlier this year Piquadro launched a collection called Signo, which like the Sartoria collection, provides customers with the opportunity to personalize the design and construction of a small leather tag, which is attached to the bag they wish to purchase. Customers can go online to enter their design and color choices of the tag and the finished product is shipped to them.

Piquadro’s product offering is geared mostly towards young professionals, both men and women, at a ratio of 80% and 20% respectively. Nguyen feels the brand appeals most to customers that have a design mindset and are looking for competitive pricing. “I think what’s important is the value for money,” she says. “Nowadays people are more conscious about the money they spend, so they look for something that is good quality and will last for a long period of time at an affordable price. This is where we enter.”

Opportunities have continued to arise for Piquadro as 2013 progresses. Just this month the brand launched its first collaborative capsule collection titled, “Antonio Marras + Piquadro” in Asia, the product of a partnership with Antonio Marras, who has been the creative director for Kenzo for the past eight years. “It’s the first time that we’ve done a color version with a creative designer,” says Nguyen. This kind of collaborative effort could provide a good pattern for Piquadro’s future. □



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