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From Geek to Chic in Hewlett Packard's Advertising

by Gary Fleisner

For many years through the 1980s and 90s, television and movies have displayed geeks and nerds as people who spent all their time concerned with their work and technology. These undesirables, who were predominantly men, would spend their days doing calculations and researching on their computers. This gave the computer and one's interest in technology a negative connotation of being geeky and only useful for fields like mathematics, engineering, and science. However, in a few short years, technological understanding and usage have greatly increased. Now, almost everyone has a Blackberry, iPod, and/or cell phone within reach at all times. Gadgets have become the new accessories in our everyday lives and fashion designers are trying to accommodate this growing trend and develop clothes that appeal to the tech savvy consumer. Companies like Nike, Columbia, and Levi Strauss have all created clothing that hides the wires yet makes the controllers for the gadget easily accessible. Columbia has released an iPod-friendly jacket and Levi launched iPod jeans, complete with a joystick in the watch pocket (Geller). Hewlett-Packard is following suit by designing and advertising new laptops/notebooks to reach a broader market. Hewlett-Packard's advertisement for the Envy 13 promotes its new technology as chic and stylish in order to appeal to the modern woman.

The ad for the Hewlett-Packard Envy 13 notebook shows how women can be fashionable even while using technology. In the ad, the notebook itself is lying on its side, opened towards the reader with the key board on the left and the screen on the right. Surrounding the laptop is an array of metallic accessories: a high heel shoe sitting on top of the Envy 13, a necklace hanging on the corner of the screen, a silver clutch, and a crystal ring, all created by high end fashion designers. The slogan for the ad is: "Tech

Chic: SHINE ON.” In the ad, a side bar describes more about the product: “Metallic is the look of the moment. But the ultimate must have accessory is precious metal of a different kind: HP’s Envy 13...High style and high speed are a dazzling combination” (Hewlett-Packard 123). This displays how the computer is relying more on its appearance than its capabilities as a laptop. It is also interesting to note that the actual color and design of the outer casing of the laptop are not seen. This positioning adds a sense of mystery and makes readers want to see what the actual product looks like. The assumption is that it is the same silver metallic color as the other accessories around the notebook. In addition, except for the metallic accessories, most of the advertisement is black, including the background, screen, and keyboard of the product. This choice of color makes the Envy 13 seem clean, streamlined, and slim, which is also conveyed by the angle at which the product is laid. The advertisement displays the Envy 13 as an elegant and intriguing product.

Because of the growing number of computer producers, HP has to rely more on the design aspects of its notebooks to overshadow the lack of technological advancement. Over the last few years, technological innovation has greatly increased and advertisers have been coming up with new ways to appeal to their consumers, while trying to beat out their competitors. However, it is becoming harder and harder to compete in the PC market based on the technical aspects of notebooks and laptops alone. Nadine Kano, a market researcher for Microsoft, declares, ““People have always wanted power, speed and reliability, but these days they can get comparable disk space, processor speed, and RAM from many PC manufacturers. To get something unique, people are now looking for style”” (1). PCs are appearing in a variety of materials, shapes, styles, and colors (2). More and more computer companies are creating computers that appeal to a customer’s style rather than his/her technological needs.

The Hewlett Packard Company, the world’s largest technology company, has tried to keep up with this growing trend. In 2008, it launched its new campaign in combining fashion with technology. It partnered with world renowned fashion designer Vivienne Tam to create the notebook clutch, a first for the

computing world. Tam created the notebook “as a true reflection of the needs of a modern woman who cares about fashion but is also passionate about her technology” (“HP”). In addition, HP created the “tech chic” virtual experience where fashionistas could dress up their computers and notebooks with wall paper, screen savers and icons designed by Tam. Customers can also decide the design of their laptop cover to personalize it (“HP”). By having design aspects that customers, especially women, can change and fit to their own personal style, HP appeals to a customer’s interest in fashion.

Another reason why HP moved into creating more laptop designs geared towards women is the demographic trend of more and more working women purchasing their products. The demographic trend was first noticed when quilters in California were using HP’s ink-jet printers to transfer patterns onto cloth. So, the company developed a line of custom quilting software. Hewlett-Packard is catching onto these trends quickly because it has a higher percentage of women on its management team (40%) than the other high-tech companies (11%). Consequently HP has a better understanding of what women want and designs PCs geared toward their interests, such as the Envy 13 which promotes tech chic design (Speizer).

The HP Envy 13 advertisement is seen in the February issue of Vogue, a magazine developed to exude style and class. Vogue is a high end fashion magazine with a mission to “[put] fashion in the context of the larger world we live in.” The company argues that “For millions of women each month, Vogue is the eye of the culture, inspiring and challenging them to see things differently” (“Vogue”). Vogue has about 12 million readers with 88% of them being women. The median age of the reader is 34.5 with an average household income of \$68,667. Furthermore the Editor-in-Chief of Vogue, Anna Wintour, has tried to expand the idea of “fashion” to increase readership and help develop new trends that would be more affordable to the broader audience (“Vogue”). The HP advertisement fits well in this magazine because it is trying to show how a notebook computer is a new type of fashion statement, which is in the mission of Vogue. A computer is no longer considered only for nerds and people who

work in science based professions. Anyone can have a laptop and personalize it to fit his or her style and needs. Also, the Envy 13 is designed for wealthy women who want a stylish, high-end notebook to impress others. This is similar to how the high-end accessories designed by Oscar De La Renta and Alejandro Ingelmo surrounding the notebook create a chic and elegant style (Hewlett-Packard 123). HP's Envy 13 is meant to appeal to the high end consumer like the readers of Vogue since its starting price is \$1699 for the basic model (Gladstone 1). The Envy 13 is definitely focused on its outward appearance and name. Calling the product Envy conveys that people will become jealous of those who already own it which will just make people want it more. As a result, the people who can afford it and believe the ad and what the name offers will probably purchase it.

Hewlett-Packard's advertisement in Vogue for the Envy 13 convinces women to question the design of their current laptop in order to promote HP's new, chic notebook. Technology is an accessory in our lives and HP just wanted its new computer to look as stylish as an accessory should look. Less concern is placed on how well the computer performs and the logistics of it and more on how it looks. In general, women spend money on accessories, such as jewelry, that make them appear prettier and stylish, yet have no *real* function. Women are also more likely to purchase a more expensive product for its name and design rather than its function, and HP's advertisement markets towards this demographic. By HP making its new notebook tech-chic, women convince themselves that the name and design of the "accessory" is worth the price and replacing their current laptop. HP hopes the Envy 13 is the new must have accessory of the season and people will envy the Envy.

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