

The Blue Standard

by Jason Press

One would think that in the heady world of private jet travel, a concept like *luxury* would be integral to the communications process. But it was precisely the absence of a strong, compelling luxury message in the category and the opportunity to capitalize on its own distinct strengths that have enabled Bluestar Jets to clearly define a powerful presence in private jet travel.

In the late 1990s, two former Wall Street financial brokers, Todd Rome and Ricky Sitomer, saw an opportunity to take the brokerage model and adopt it for the private jet industry. After extensive research and analysis of the category, the duo founded Bluestar Jets, having gained a deep understanding about the market challenges and opportunities—as well as the future—of private jet aviation.

Keying off their brokerage back-grounds, they created a network of private aviation companies that secures time and availability of various aircraft. The operators that partner with Bluestar range from pure providers of luxury jets to operators of corporate jet fleets used by major companies such as Verizon, Sony, major financial institutions and others.

Among business executives, there was a certain level of frustration with the lack of service and cost of flying privately. Bluestar's founders realized that most private jet travelers didn't need fractional ownership of a jet and would, in fact, welcome a more cost-effective and flexible alternative.

A FRESH MODEL

"The Bluestar offering represented an entirely new business model, giving fliers greater flexibility to secure jet travel either on a one-off basis or more frequently, as part of a loyalty program," explains Michael Miller, senior partner with G2. "The company utilizes more of an on-demand approach, creating a market to broker time and available jet capacity to executives and others with private jet travel needs."

The events of 9/11 helped spur greater demand for

private jet travel among those who could afford it, as executives shied away from commercial flights. As a result, lots of competitors have jumped into this business, with some even seeking to replicate Bluestar's model. With competition growing and Bluestar seeking to differentiate itself from NetJets and Flexjet, the company saw a chance to carve out a distinctive niche in the category.

"The problem was that Bluestar's communications lagged far behind their business model in terms of the desired sophistication, luxury and service messages that they wished to convey," explains

**Bluestar Jets
marries luxury,
safety and service
to stand out in
private jet travel.**



BLUESTAR
JETS



Deirdre McMennamin, a partner with G2 and senior strategist on the campaign.

Bluestar was also facing off against what co-founder Sitomer calls the “Coke and Pepsi of the industry,” NetJets and Flexjet, both well-funded carriers that had spent heavily to brand themselves. Berkshire Hathaway owns NetJets, while Bombardier owns Flexjet. There was also a perception out there, among their audience targets, that because Bluestar didn’t own or manage its own fleet that there were possible safety concerns.

In addition, we learned in our briefing that there is not a lot of loyalty in this business. It seems a bit counter-intuitive, but even those who can afford to fly private jets still shop around for the best price and are not necessarily wedded to a certain brand. It’s a very price-driven segment.

In October 2005, as a first step in learning more about Bluestar’s business, we interviewed some of the company’s 150-plus brokers as part of an audit process. We asked them how they conduct their business, what type of customers they have, what they feel their point-of-difference is and who their competitors are. The key takeaway from the audit was that

these brokers are extremely passionate about their clients and provide them with completely personalized attention.

“It was truly eye opening,” recalls McMennamin. “Bluestar’s brokers are not just some guys in a room with headsets on. They actually know what their clients like on their bagels. They know that this guy’s son likes xBox, not Nintendo. They know what cars their customers like to drive.

“In many cases,” he adds, “they personally follow up with their clients once

they land to see how their flight was and if they have other travel needs. This high-touch approach struck us as a huge point-of-difference in helping to map out key elements of a positioning.”

THE NEW LUXURY

At G2, we track a wide assortment of trends, both micro and macro, to help guide clients. Deirdre and her team, in tracking luxury trends, have been following the identification of a new level of luxury. It goes well beyond the traditional diamonds, furs and luxury cars, delving more into life’s little pleasures — whatever pleases you. Luxury for one person might mean lavender soap, while for another it’s a cashmere blanket. So, it was really coming to a new definition of *luxury* and just as importantly, what it means to private jet travelers.

Because of Bluestar’s personalized service, they would be able to deliver on this new level of luxury.

But, while luxury clearly emerged as a key part of Bluestar’s positioning, even customized luxury would not be enough to help the brand stand apart — especially when so many were touting luxury. The other key attribute that we felt the company needed to communicate was *safety*. This would not only help address any concerns among Bluestar’s audiences about the use of →



← other providers' planes but would also leverage a recent initiative that the company had embarked upon.

"Just prior to our working together, Bluestar Jets had forged a partnership with Wyvern, the premier safety inspection service for the private jet industry," Miller says. "We felt it was important to play up this partnership to underscore Bluestar's commitment to upholding the industry's strictest safety standards."

Thus the positioning was cemented: a dominant message built around luxury—backed by personalized service and safety as key supporting elements.

G2 adopted a modified version of its customary approach to design language for Bluestar, given its immediate needs and fast turnaround demands. It began with redesigning the company's logo.

"The logo design was very simplistic and did not deliver the message of luxury or premium service," notes Miller. "We explored literally thousands of icons associated with luxury across a wide assortment of categories. In doing so, we came up with the current shield that surrounds the Bluestar "B" to connote safety as well as a crest, which harkens back to classic luxury brands such as Hermes, Louis Vuitton and Cerrutti."

The use of the "B" surrounding a star emerged as the brand's graphic language. By creating an icon with the "B," we established a branding scheme that could allow the logo to live without the Bluestar name at some point in time, along the lines of BMW and many other iconic brands. We also utilized a rich, dark blue to connote luxury and, over time, turn it into an "ownable" shade.

To help address Bluestar's desire to



revamp and emphasize its loyalty program and drive repeat business, we developed a high-end membership kit. We also created a high-end brochure for qualified leads, and a more succinct, cost-effective piece for mass mailings.

BLUE IS NEW BLACK

We launched the new identity for Bluestar Jets in January of this year, using a teaser ad with the tagline "Blue is the New Black." We used an all-type ad, very simple, white type on a blue background, featuring a call-to-action on the bottom, with the URL and a phone number. The idea was to capture people's attention, create interest and start the education process. The ad appeared in niche maga-

zines such as *Robb Report*, *Gotham*, *Aspen Peak* and others that skew to Bluestar's target audiences.

We created and ran subsequent print ads that built off this launch, mentioning that Bluestar's luxury jet service is all part of a "blue standard," a fresh take on the classic "gold standard." The latest series of ads promote the company's SkyCard incentive or loyalty program, enumerating the many flexibility and cost benefits

over fractional ownership and other rental providers. The ads feature the logos of American Express as the preferred card, and Wyvern, lending additional credibility and shared equity to Bluestar Jets.

"The rebranding effort has been very successful in helping us maintain our aggressive growth results, which have averaged 50 to 100 percent per year in each of the last six years," says Ricky Sitomer, CEO of Bluestar Jets. "We see the future in this business and understand the critical role that marketing plays in helping us maintain strong momentum. The rebranding campaign has not only helped us carve out a unique niche in terms of our luxury and value messages, but it is also generating a lot of buzz within the industry and among consumers about what we're doing and where we're going." ■



As president of **G2 Branding & Design** and **G2 Promotional Marketing** (www.g2.com), **Jason Press** has supervised the development of G2's branding initiatives and marketing plans for a diverse range of clients, creating holistic marketing programs that ensure the consistent delivery of a singular brand promise. Prior to his nearly two decades with the Grey family of companies, he worked at Rosenberg & Company, a full-service advertising agency in Dallas, TX, developing integrated marketing and branding programs for a range of global clients. He can be reached at jpress@g2.com and (212) 616-9000.