

OXO Good Grips

What was the problem?

OXO was founded in 1990 on the philosophy of Inclusive Design. The British Standards Institute (2005) defines inclusive design as “The design of mainstream products and/or services that are accessible to, and usable by, as many people as reasonably possible...without the need for special adaptation or specialized design.” This means that by designing for the needs of those excluded from product use, product experience is improved across a wide range of users.

OXO designer Sam Farber spotted a market opportunity when he saw that his wife, Betsey, an arthritis sufferer, struggled using a standard metal vegetable peeler.

What did they do?

Although this was the genesis of the Oxo concept, Farber embraced the entire ethos of inclusive design which includes population awareness (able bodied, disabled, young, old, male, female, right-handed or left), user centeredness (people within these populations have a range of capabilities and skills), and business focus. This ethos results in products that are functional, usable, desirable and viable



What was the result?

Inclusive design is now the philosophy embedded within the design and development process of products in the OXO range of kitchen tools. The ergonomic design has set a new standard for the industry and raised the level of customer expectation for comfort and performance.

The annual growth in sales was over 35% per year from 1991 to 2002, and the line has grown to more than 500 innovative products covering many areas of the home. The OXO Good Grips line has been recognized by several national and international organizations for superior design. The company’s strategy is based on the primary goals of making products that are usable and desirable.

“The goal of making products more usable forces us to first identify problems and inefficiencies of existing products, not only in terms of comfort, but performance as well. This gives us the foundation to meet our commitment of making products that make a tangible improvement in peoples' daily lives.”

In 1992, the Farber's sold Oxo International to General Housewares Corporation and retired again in the fall of 1995. Sam handpicked

Alex Lee to join the company as Director of Product Development and later, its president. At 39, Lee brought with him a drive "to design easy to use products for the largest spectrum of the population, from healthy 20yearolds on up."



Still popular: Oxo's Vegetable Peeler

Both Sam and Betsey Farber continued to travel and promote the concept of Universal Design. They appeared as keynote speakers at "Design for the 21st Century", a global conference on Universal Design on June 16, 2000 in Providence, RI, and discussed the background and development of Oxo International and its "Good Grips" line of products.

Oxo's Ongoing Challenge

In 1999, World Kitchen (formerly Corning Consumer Products, makers of Corelle, Corningware, and Pyrex) purchased General Housewares, along with EKCO Group, and adopted the World Kitchen name early in 2000. By 2000, Oxo International enjoyed an annual growth rate of 37%, with about \$60 million in annual sales. With little spent on advertising, the inviting design and high quality of Oxo's products made them the subjects of numerous print features and TV news shows.

Despite its status as a major (if not the foremost) standard bearer for Universal Design, Oxo must constantly reiterate its mission. President Alex Lee notes, "The idea was always, from the start, to make useful products for people of all ages and levels of dexterity." Still, Lee says, people sometimes think of Oxo as making, geriatric products for people with limitations." By continuing to rethink and redesign everyday tools, Oxo is a constant reminder of the common needs faced by people of all ages and abilities and the importance of Universal Design in meeting those needs.

Household Products - OXO

This case study describes how OXO innovated in the kitchen utensil market by focusing on people with arthritis. Their range of Good Grips products have become international bestsellers that make life easier for everyone.

PROBLEM

Why can't kitchen utensils be easier for people with arthritis to use?

Sam Farber, the founder of OXO, saw his wife having difficulties holding kitchen tools due to her mild arthritis. He saw an opportunity here - to help people with reduced dexterity as well as create kitchen tools that were more comfortable for everyone.

APPROACH

OXO worked with 'real people' to understand issues with current utensils.

They held workshops and focus groups to see the difficulties faced by older people and people with arthritis. They studied the effects of reduced strength, grip and coordination when handling kitchenware. This allowed them to identify key issues and write a more broad-minded, well-informed design brief. Expert users, such as chefs, were consulted for their experience and input. Able-bodied people also participated to ensure that ideas were relevant to the mainstream market.

Further research into functionality and ergonomics was combined with user insights. This influenced the style, weight, look and feel of every product.

RESULT

Iconic designs and an annual growth rate of over 30%.

Over 500 products exist in the Good Grips range. Many of them have become international bestsellers. OXO's Salad Spinner is its most popular product. The salad can be spun by pressing down on the large, black button, removing the need to grip and turn handles as on existing salad spinners. The design is simpler to use and can be operated by wet or arthritic hands. It takes little strength to make it work. Oxo has won over 100 design awards and sees Inclusive Design as a philosophy as well as a profitable business practice. It continues to set the standard for user-friendly kitchen utensils.

"We wanted to appeal to the broadest possible market, not just a very specific market of arthritics and the infirm" Sam Farber, Founder, OXO



IDEA: OXO's innovation was a jug that could be read from above instead of the side. The scale also uses red text on a white background giving good colour contrast for most liquids.



INSIGHT: People were constantly bending over or lifting up the jug to read the scale. They had to do this several times to get the level right.