

B.G. FRANCK BICHON

Building a recession-proof business around high-fashion accessories



Franck Bichon



WITH ITS FLAIR FOR ELEVATING mundane musical accessories to a fashion statement, BG Franck Bichon occupies prime territory in one of the industry's most recession-proof segments. In the weeks leading up to Musikmesse 2009, the Lyon, France-based company was looking to maintain its advantage with a number of new products and an aggressive game plan. "Our answer to the global recession is to stay on the attack: more shows, more advertisement, action on FaceBook, new packaging, and new products for now and 2010," says founder and President Franck Bichon.

Nearly 25 years since launching its stylish small goods line, BG is carrying over its artistic concept into new packaging to be showcased in Frankfurt. "You buy with your eyes," says Franck. "Just as you can be attracted to a person before knowing him or her, the same is true of packaging. You aim to be the most eye-catching and the best-looking." With a space-saving design, BG's new packaging allows dealers to stock, for instance, twice as many of its instrument swabs in a given footprint. All packaging can be opened and reclosed without damaging it, allowing customers to examine the product for quality before they buy. Supplementary dealer materials have also been updated and distilled, with product information expressed in easy-to-understand charts and bullet points. "Simplicity is actually the hardest thing to do in design and marketing," says Franck. "There is always so much to show, to say! But with this 'less is more' approach, dealers don't need to waste time sifting through longwinded explanations to find the model they want to stock."

Among the BG products slated to appear at Musikmesse are new microfibre "cozies" used to protect instruments from dust—either for musicians who leave their instruments on a stand between sets or practice sessions, or for dealers who want to ward off dust collection on the merchandise when they close their stores at night or over weekends. New instrument warmers in silk and polar fleece insulate instruments from extreme temperatures and shocks.

Also new this year are BG Propacks, kits containing a bundle of related BG accessories. Fifteen different Propack concepts have been introduced—including a "Best Of" collection for each version—each of which represents a 15% discount on the individual purchase of the products it contains. "BG is always full of new projects, but we must also focus on existing lines," says Franck. "In these economic times, accessories are what dealers turn to."

Plans for a wave of products to be released for BG's 25th anniversary in 2010 have been kept close to the vest, although the company has preannounced a new classical sax mouthpiece design—to be pre-introduced at the World Saxophone Congress in Bangkok this July—and new "DIVA" hybrid reeds. Both products were developed by Franck's father, woodwind expert Serge Bichon. "DIVA is a unique concept, mixing natural fiber (no cane) and synthetic material," says Franck. "We are offering an alternative between natural cane and synthetic reeds."

This year marks the start of a merchandising campaign highlighting the company's distinctive interlocking "BG" logo. Where other companies propagate their names and logos with complimentary pens and keychains, BG features musically relevant giveaways including sample pad driers and glass cleaners made from the microfibre used in BG's instrument swabs and care cloths. In a particularly luxurious offering, the company will hand out branded scarves in the designer-quality silk used in its swabs, key covers, and instrument cushions.

"Why should we offer pens when we don't sell pens?" says Franck. "The only things we offer as giveaways are products that musicians can buy later in shops. When musicians carry our products with them in their daily lives, word of mouth becomes our best advertising campaign. What I expect in return from this merchandising is to develop our 'image de marque' [trademark]—our brand must be everywhere."

As of February, BG also has a FaceBook page, which is managed by 20-year-old Jessica Watts, a clarinet student at the University of North Texas. "This is her thing, her generation, and I knew right away she had what I'd been looking for in someone to assist me with this project," says Franck. "Working on packaging and advertising is one thing, but not everything—the internet has changed how the world communicates."

BG's FaceBook page contains company information, pictures of products and recent happenings, and an "events" section that's kept current with upcoming promotions and convention appearances. The company's FaceBook friends were also used as an exclusive "pre-test" group for its hybrid DIVA reeds. "In terms of communication, it's as important to have a FaceBook page as it is to have a cell phone," says Watts. "BG established its FaceBook page to integrate with new culture and reach people in a new way. Having a FaceBook page shows the newer generation that BG is here and now, not stuck in old ways."

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