

renegade

game changers | thought leaders | rule breakers | style makers

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ISSUE 7

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FROM GOOGLE

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work for you*

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LIFE IS TOO SHORT TO REMOVE THE USB SAFELY.

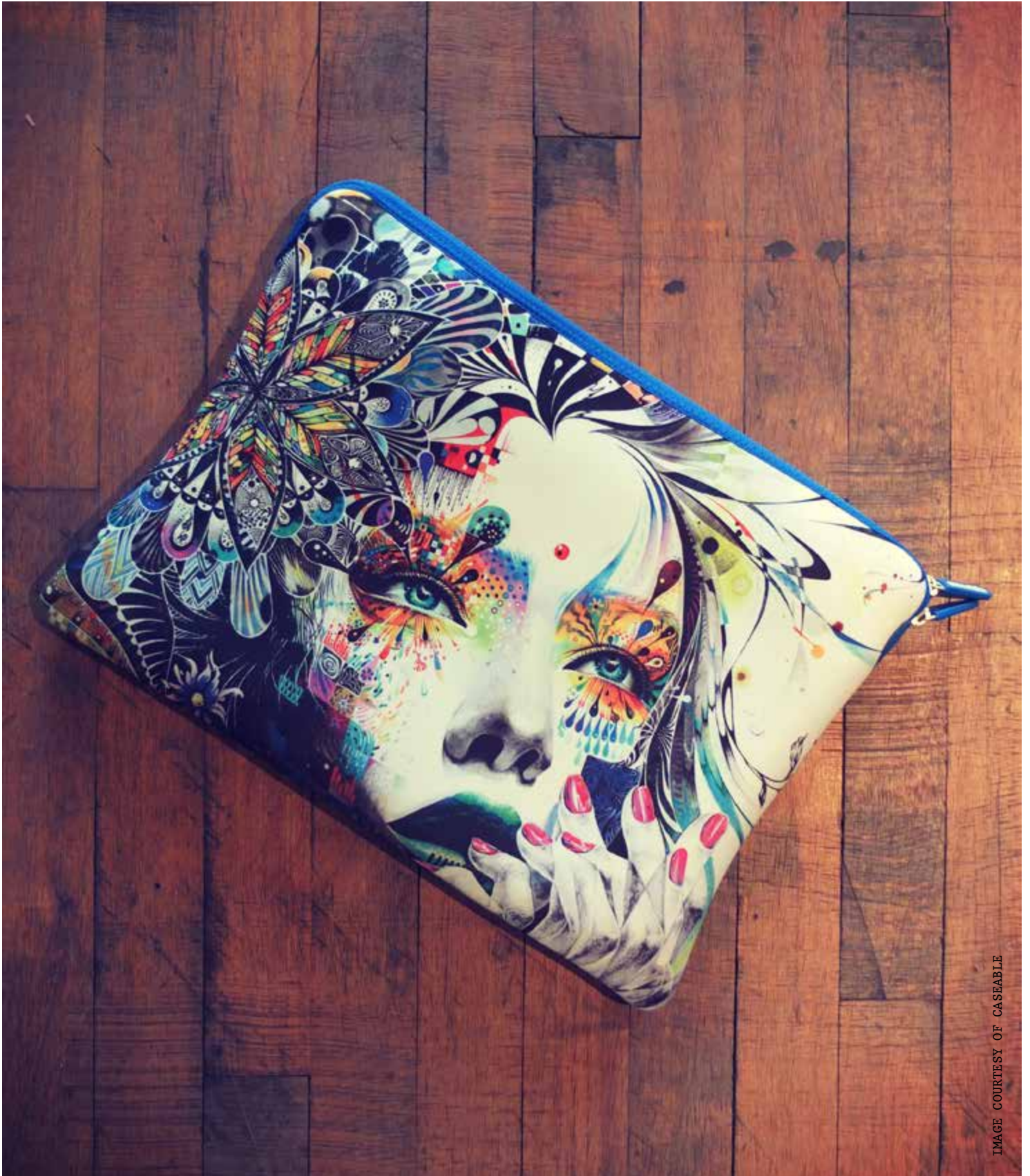


IMAGE COURTESY OF CASEABLE



ON THE CASE

FROM BROOKLYN and BERLIN hail two German entrepreneurs who spotted the world's INFATUATION with customised goods long before it became a GLOBAL trend. This year, they'll make tens of thousands of products for people all over the PLANET.

WORDS: SHEREE MUTTON

French poet Charles Péguy once said, "It is the essence of genius to make use of the simplest ideas." On the surface, New York-based friends Marvin Amberg and Klaus Wegener did just that when they launched their custom gadget case business, caseable, in 2010.

"Klaus wanted to brand the logo of our initial start-up company on a laptop sleeve," says Marvin, who met Klaus in business school and after graduating, decided a career in finance was not for him. "To our surprise, we couldn't find any company at the time that offered this feature. That is when the idea of caseable was born."

The driven duo took advantage of a niche market, researching how to manufacture high-quality customisable technology cases for laptops, Kindles, iPads, e-readers, tablets and smartphones.

"The biggest challenge was learning everything we needed to know about producing cases, so we started visiting different manufacturers to get information about possible procedures and production methods," Marvin says.

"It took us a long time to finally find a way of producing our cases. As a start-up, you always face challenges and learn from your own mistakes. But you also quickly adapt to challenges and grow as an entrepreneur."

And while it sounds very simple – they make cases for people's stuff – the customisation options available for a single laptop cover number 20,000 and each is made-to-order, printed in one location (San Jose, California for iPad covers) and hand-sewn in Brooklyn. In sum, their business is about customising the widest range of devices on the planet.

Eager to launch, the duo turned traditional business models on their heads, tackling two countries (and two markets) from the outset. "We started caseable with production in the United States, while shipping to Europe from day one as well. It made sense to start off in the US because it's a major market and it didn't hurt that we already had great contacts to set up our production in Brooklyn," Marvin explains.

IMAGE COURTESY OF CASEABLE

"Soon though, we realised that there was quite some demand for customised cases in Europe, especially in Germany. So we opened an office in Berlin soon after."

Marvin admits the decision was a bold move for a start-up, but says it worked for caseable. "One main reason to start internationally was that we wanted to prevent copycats early on," he says.

"Being in Brooklyn and Berlin has become a very important part of who we are as a brand today. It inspires us in our daily lives, in and out of the office. It's like a creative melting pot with an abundance of designers and artists, but also other companies that focus on local craftsmanship. We see these two exciting cities as a nexus of art, street style and culture. This gives us a unique opportunity and it all translates directly into what we do at caseable."

"There are disadvantages as well, of course. Coordination is sometimes bothersome when you can rarely sit on one table and have six hours time difference between you."

By the second year in business, the gadget case company had grown more than 600 per cent. "We ship up to a few hundred pieces per day," Marvin says.

Fast-forward another two years and caseable has successfully launched in Canada, across Europe, in Australia and recently Russia. "We now have dedicated country managers who oversee the growth of each of these markets. We currently employ a team of around 40 across locations," Marvin reveals.

"We are constantly expanding our offices and production facilities. It looks different here every month."

Despite the company's rapid growth, caseable doesn't appear to be slowing. Having partnered with companies like Amazon and Zazzle and even corporations including IBM and Nike, the brand's co-founders are striving for sustainability.

"There is no other company in the market that offers the greatest breadth of custom electronic cases," Marvin explains. "We want to become the brand for creative and personal technology accessories. This means growing deeper in our category and slowly expanding further."



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Marvin says a key to their success has been a focus on quality. "We needed almost one year to launch with the first products, just so that we were satisfied. Without good products that our customers appreciate, we wouldn't be here," he says, adding that "thinking big" would have to be the second reason for their success.

"It might sound cliché, but if we hadn't done exactly that and hadn't taken the risk, we would not have today's international footprint and many exciting partnerships would never have happened."

The brand has also collaborated with artists and photographers, producing unique designs for their range of cases.

"Our artist partners are the extension of our brand and provide influences from all over the world. Although we offer a wide array of case designs through artist collaborations, custom is still the key design," says Marvin.

Caseable's success is a testament to the two risk-taking powerhouses steering it and they know their markets. "In the United States, the bestsellers are the laptop cases, whereas in Germany, consumers are more interested in our smartphone cases," Marvin says. "We take great pride in being able to pay close attention to each case this way, so every one of our customers can feel confident in receiving a quality, custom case."

And from the current statistics (they are projecting growth this financial year to be between 200 and 300 per cent, have just doubled the size of their space in Brooklyn and opened a facility in central Germany), the customisation trend isn't slowing down. "The electronic device and accessories markets only continue to grow and the level of innovation that spurs in these markets excites us. We're happy to be part of it," Marvin says. "In the very beginning, caseable was just an idea." ■