

Toyfriend: Sex Sells When Designed Right

How one Swedish industrial designer created a new product via the thought and power of good design



STOCKHOLM, Sweden—A report by respected analyst Hewson expects sales of sex toys to grow from \$8.3 billion a year to \$65 billion by 2020. Researchers quoted in the article said: “We think that by 2020-2025 sex toy purchasing will run at over 400 million units per annum. In context, that’s about the same as smartphone units shipped per year.” The report said that sales of sex toys has been held back in the past due to an association with the sleazy, male-dominated pornography industry.

One of the main reasons that the previously shady sex-toy business is now emerging out of the basements up onto the main streets is one visionary, a Swede that the French edition of *ELLE Magazine* described as “the Philippe Starck of vibrators,” industrial designer Eric Kalén.

In the beginning of his career as an industrial designer, Kalén designed for leading a Swedish mobile company, as well as home appliance and furniture companies. But with the dream of building his own business, as a design student he constantly asked himself the same question over and over again: in what area is design not used to compete and create better products? The answer was sex-toys. Kalén founded the company LELO, a name and a brand that soon found its way into the bedside tables and handbags of women all over the world as well as in the mainstream media.

In its way it was a revolution, a whole new product segment and lifestyle accessory had been created in just a few years. Kalén had simply designed sex-toys that were beautiful. He had created a clear concept and a brand, the first luxury brand for vibrators. These were products that people were proud and ready to pay a lot of money for and that were mentioned in the same sentence as Prada or Gucci. Some consumers and designers even referenced them to be as appealing as Apple products. Kalén had succeeded in moving sex toys from the back street to the main street.

When a visionary opens up a road into new territories a lot of people will follow. It didn’t take long before other brands with a similar concept started crowding the premium sex toy segment. Kalén again started thinking about what new things could be done.

“Using a high price and exclusive designs as an alibi to make people comfortable with buying a vibrator worked really well, but after a while it didn’t feel as interesting and exciting anymore. I realized that the products did not fit when they were placed in pharmacies, accessory shops or convenience stores; the price level was unrealistically high for most people. Then I had the idea, or call it a mission: a high price shouldn’t be necessary as an alibi to buy a vibrator, design and attitude should be enough,” Kalén said.

The answer was Toyfriend.

To put it simply you can say that Toyfriend is to sex toys what H&M is to clothes. Toyfriend offers the consumer a unique concept with a thought through product range, great design and function at a price that is affordable for most people. All this with an attitude that is completely free from the normal stereotypes of the sex toy business.

“Today the market space is with filled with expensive vibrators that they want to be perceived as exclusive, or cheap products where design and quality is of no importance. Instead, I want to put design and concept in focus, and I want to do it with products that don’t consume a big part of a consumers monthly salary,” Kalén said.

Kalén has done it again and the consumers love it. With Toyfriend everybody can feel the pleasure of good quality and design, not only a few. The idea of creating a strong brand that can attract and satisfy in a market segment where a majority of the consumers are really purchasing has demanded new and innovative strategies.

To learn more about Eric Kalen and his work visit Toyfriend.us/creator.

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