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Quality Review

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Animal Rubber Bands

Photography/Satoru Naito, Text/ Kyoko Ohtsu

World goes wild for colorful bands you'll want to use again and again!

Just imagine one or two of these undeniably cute animal-shaped rubber bands left casually on your desk. There is no doubt that anyone passing by would do a double take. I actually carry a few around in my pencil case, and there's no shortage of interested glances whenever I take one out.

These popular animal rubber bands can be found in stockists of stylish stationery all over Japan. They have also been a huge hit among Americans and Europeans, to the point where an elementary school in one US state actually banned them after it became popular among pupils to wear lots of the bands around their wrists and trade them.

Animal rubber bands are the brainchild of the firm h concept, which is based in Asakusabashi, Tokyo. Animal rubber bands were the first product developed by h concept under its " + d (plus d)" brand, and are also now its flagship offering.

The first place to stock the bands was the shop at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which was quite a coup, to say the least. h concept Managing Director Hideyoshi Nagoya reflects on how it happened.

"We were finally ready to launch the bands, and wondering who we should try to sell them to, when the designer

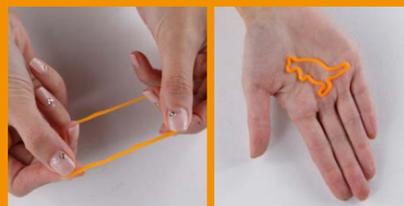
expressed a desire to place them in the shop at the MoMA. Obviously, for a designer, having something at the New York Museum of Modern Art is the stuff of dreams."

So the company's sales rep set out for a New York trade show, bearing hand packaged product samples. The agent was apparently amazed to learn he'd flown all that way for a few lowly rubber bands. But a MoMA buyer took one look at the back of the package, laughed, and the deal was done.

You see, in addition to the product itself being universally understood, the bands have a less obvious feature that helps to make them so endearing.

Usually the back of a product package has a list of warnings not to do such-and such, or telling you that so-and-so is dangerous. But in an alternative, more friendly approach to these common warnings, Nagoya penned them from the animals' point of view, using phrases such as "Don't eat us! We are your friends." Ten items of cautionary advice are accompanied by illustrations and simple English to make them readily understandable to children, adults, and non-Japanese speakers.

The company's plan proved astoundingly successful, with the bands becoming a global phenomenon to the extent that copies even appeared on the market in America. However the difference in quality when compared to the "Made in Japan" products is obvious. The h concept bands are made from silicon rubber; top-quality 100% Japanese-made silicon that is robust, durable, and highly elastic. Moreover, they do not deteriorate the way competing products



Because animal rubber bands are made from strong, high-quality materials, no matter how much you stretch them, they always return to their original shape. The sight of these cheerful creatures is guaranteed to make the most monotonous office chore just that little bit more enjoyable.

do, and are safe even if swallowed.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm an unashamed fan of animal rubber bands. As I learned more about them I realized that I'd been using these little bands from day to day for a very long time, totally unaware of their story. Then something else suddenly occurred to me: these may be mere rubber bands, but I can't remember ever throwing one away. Apart from those given to others, whenever a member of my rubber band menagerie has gone missing I've immediately dived under my desk in a frantic search for it. Has a so-called consumable ever been reused this much? These cute little rubber bands have in fact turned out to be one of those all-conquering eco-products, the power of their design working magic on the subconscious.

The first set of animal rubber bands, "Zoo", was launched in 2002. This was followed in 2004 by "Pet", in 2007 by "Dino" (see photo below), and most recently, in 2010, "Farm". So now we are truly spoiled for choice. Animal rubber bands also make the perfect souvenir. And so these delightful, expandable creatures now stretch right around the world.

Even one is sure to make your study a more enjoyable place to be.



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Animal Rubberband

