

# Packages as People

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In a matter of seconds, shoppers are making the same judgments about your brand from its packaging—be it a bag, bottle, box, piece of plastic or a crafty carrier—that they would make when meeting a new person.

Is it noticeable? How bold or reserved does it look? Is it complex or simple? Do I like it? These considerations are what we must now focus on if we want to use the package as a portal to a lasting relationship with shoppers.

Successful modern package design is as much emotional as it is functional. It invites shoppers to create a relationship with it. It becomes an invaluable part of the brand by focusing on what matters to the shopper. And it holds the memory of experiences in which it played a part in the past. Ultimately, it tells your shopper the story of your brand.

The interrelationship between a package's functional and emotional benefits can represent opportunity or danger. An active lifestyle brand that presents itself in a bottle a shopper can't hold while riding a bike undermines its brand message and will be perceived the way any of us would experience an inauthentic person.

The same would be said for a socially-conscious brand with excessive packaging or an innovative, forward-thinking brand that comes wrapped exclusively in traditional packaging elements. The functionality can enhance the emotional, and the emotional can bring with it expectations of the functional. When they work together, consistently and iconically, the results can be immensely powerful.

Consider how many memories link to the Coca-Cola contour bottle. While shoppers may not articulate why they treasure drinking from the contour bottle, we know that the brand, product and package together create an indelible experience and preference for the brand. We call this the *full embrace*.

Our interactions with packaging, like our interactions with people, are made up of numerous sensory cues that impact our reaction and potential emotional connection with it. How a package feels in your hand, how it looks on your shelf, how it sounds when you open it all create different experiences and trigger different associations.

It is similar to when you embrace an old friend, smell the friend's cologne and recall many other happy, or not-so-happy, occasions you shared together.

To better understand what makes a package invaluable to the brand experience, we need to view its development through several different lenses.

## KNOW YOUR SHOPPER

Take the time to learn about your targeted shopper and design to her needs. Understand how the product fits within her life. Is she finicky about quality or more focused on price? Is she filling a need or a void?

## Creating a full embrace with shoppers starts with packaging.

Some shoppers simply are more passionate and engaged in the shopping experience. The shopping experience is the introduction to the relationship and many times it is the package that is the sole communicator of the brand. By understanding her need and what motivates it, your visual and verbal messaging can reflect both the brand's personality and the shopper's aspirations and create a memorable experience.

Function Drinks, a marketer of performance beverages, has made significant headway not by following the traditional route of naming its product line based on flavor, but by understanding its shopper and creating relevance by naming its products for the benefit to the drinker.

With flavor names like *Urban Detox* and *Alternative*

*Energy* so prominent on the packaging, Function focuses on the aspirations of the shopper (to cure a hangover, or to boost energy with more than sugar) while being true to its brand personality (being a functional drink).

In doing so, the company offers its shoppers something that Gatorade or the other sports drinks don't — a specific answer to their problems.

Likewise, Similac Advance recently redesigned its powder formula package with an innovative grip-flip-scoop design that simplifies feeding time. Its package designers empathetically recognize that parents, when holding their babies, often misplace the lid and get upset about digging for the scoop.

Similac Advance designed a package that addresses all of these concerns, exemplifying how a brand understands the way a package is used in the home.

The packaging makes a statement about the brand loudly and clearly — namely that its purpose is to help parents care for their children. Thanks to its functionality, the package creates problem-free feeding occasions.

The more of these occasions the packaging creates and for which it is present, the stronger it is associated with those occasions. Eventually, the package itself can summon the feeling and reward of nurturing one's children — exactly where the brand wants to be.

#### **GRASP THE RETAIL CONTEXT**

Recognize that shoppers bring different levels of involvement to different categories. Take orange juice, a product which people shop for habitually and automatically.

When Tropicana re-designed its package, it created confusion by removing key visual icons and long-recognized color-coding. It didn't matter that the new design was beautiful, clearly stated benefits and enjoyed notable shelf presence; shoppers couldn't find their favorite flavors or varieties.

Because orange juice is a product that moms buy for their families, they're driven by a desire to get it right — in this case, bringing home something their kids will drink. It's not a category that sparks excitement and innovation. It's a category complex with a wide range of variables. The package change was just too much for the shopper.

In contrast, other categories, such as candy, are experienced very differently by shoppers. The purchase tends to be impulsive. The risk is low, but the reward is high. The shopper enters the category with an open mind and an explorer's sense of adventure.

Regardless of the category, brands have the

opportunity to challenge the *status quo*. Shoppers too often face a sea of sameness in a category. Great functional and innovative packaging can shock the shopper into rethinking their relationship with the category.

General Electric improved performance when it reinvented the caulking experience with GE Caulk Singles disposable packs. GE understood that squeeze tubes are difficult to use, leave hands aching and work areas a mess.

The Singles packs dispense effortlessly with one hand, require no tools and minimize product waste. The innovative packaging empowers the shopper to feel that she can complete the project herself.

Brands that live outside the traditional retail environment and the home must understand their shoppers' needs in those contexts too. Heinz ketchup has done just that with its recent packaging innovation for its single serve ketchup. As anyone who has used the traditional ketchup packet can attest, it can be a messy, unsatisfying experience — hardly the experience Heinz wants its users to associate with the brand.

Heinz's new Dip & Squeeze packet allows shoppers to choose how they prefer to use the product: dip or squeeze. It also opens easily and provides the right amount of ketchup each time — thereby assuring the same great out-of-home experience that their users associate with the Heinz brand at home.

This positive experience with the package not only builds the Heinz users' loyalty, but also gives new and lapsed users a compelling reason to try Heinz at home.

#### **REINFORCE THE BRAND EXPERIENCE**

Does your package design directly reflect your brand positioning, attitude, and ethos? Can shoppers see that from their perspective?

"Green" household cleaners are a strong example. They force shoppers to reconsider how they use cleaning products by replacing harsh chemicals with milder ones and employing more environmentally sound methods. So, their packaging can't be wasteful or inconsiderate of the environment; that would do nothing to further their brand positioning.

Method laundry detergent has done a great job practicing what it preaches. The product itself limits unnecessary water in its formula, so the consumer uses one-fourth the dose of the leading detergent.

How does the packaging add to this? It's about a third of the size of a normal 50-load bottle of detergent (which means less plastic and less to carry home), and it uses a simple pump top that requires just one hand for dispensing.



A few squirts into a washer, and a consumer not only is washing clothes but also actively helping to protect the environment. For Method, packaging is as much a manifestation of its brand positioning as the product itself.

Getting to the heart of the brand experience through packaging also can evoke an emotional interaction. Help Remedies uses words and visual cues to remove the clinical, impersonal approach used by other healthcare products (not to mention the chore of sorting through a complex aisle when you're not feeling well).

Picking the right product is now easy. Help Remedies makes solving simple health issues simple with language like, "help, I have a headache" or "help, I can't sleep." By stripping away some of the complexity of medicines, their products are "friendlier" and more accessible than other brands.

Help Remedies does a great job of inviting you into a relationship. Thankfully, as shoppers look to expand this relationship with a visit to their website, they won't be disappointed. Everything the brand does is focused on helping people.

Their packaging is made of compostable materials; they source and manufacture locally; they speak with honesty; and they are giving back some five-percent of their profits to charities that help to provide healthcare to those in need. This brand provides a *full embrace*.

Creating a *full embrace* through packaging goes beyond the traditional process of package design. It delivers more than functional and rational benefits and reaches an emotional pinnacle embedded into shoppers' hearts and minds.

Ultimately, by better understanding your shopper, your category and winning design insights, your packaging becomes an integral part of the brand experience. The brand, product and package can become linked inextricably in a shopper's heart and mind to deliver a holistic and satisfying experience.

Shoppers very much need that because the brand experience starts with that first impression at the shelf. The shopper must find value in your brand and choose to engage with it. Effective packaging offers one of the best ways to deliver value without discounting your brand.

Take advantage of the opportunity to jolt shoppers out of a pattern of rote behavior and jump-start their lasting friendship with your brand. ■



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