

Wrapping it up



The definition of packaging has evolved. Previously, this just used to just mean the label on a bottle; it now encompasses how one's brand is presented to the consumer. As such, packaging is involved in a far greater overall branding conversation - which designers and branding experts need to remember



By Danette Breitenbach

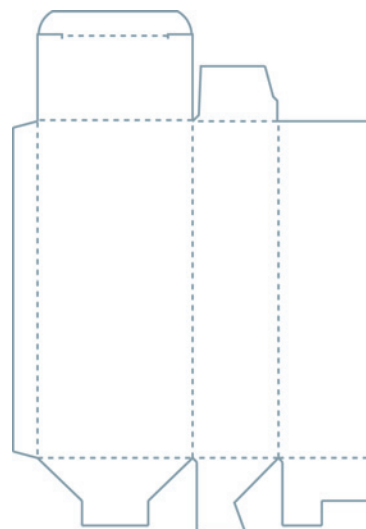
STEPHEN BEATTIE, Sales and Marketing manager, Pyrotec says that the fragmentation of media has made packaging much more important. "A brand owner's promotional message is often lost in the proliferation of advertising media, so attention is turning towards in-store and on-pack as consumers' purchase decisions are made in-store. Packaging and on-pack information is a key arrow in the marketers' quiver in effectively engaging with consumers at the 'in-store' and 'at-home' 'moments of truth' of a brand. It is the one piece of advertising 'real estate' that the brand owner is completely in control of."

one opportunity to influence what is happening with one's brand, certainly in terms of packaging," he says. A prime example of this can be seen in the blogging space where people discuss what packaging represents in open forums and comment on whether they approve of this or not. "This means that 'physical' space is not as important as it used to be in many instances - as the digital space is able to fundamentally influence what the object ends up looking like in reality."

Because the digital space additionally requires very clean, easy-to-recognise marks, he says we're increasingly seeing this trend being pulled through into packaging. "This takes into account how the latest generation of consumers reads and interacts with packaging. Because consumers are constantly bombarded by media and are very time-driven, packaging must convey its message concisely and effectively. As such, we're seeing packaging become simpler and bolder in many instances. It must communicate immediately - taking the user straight to the conversation with minimal effort."

He anticipates that we'll see this being taken a step further in the future, with all packaging ultimately including a QR (Quick Response) code.

While product packaging in its traditional format is benefiting from ongoing research into new and innovative areas in terms of physical packs, substrates, usage methods and mechanics, the interesting work is being done in the digital realm, says Jason Kempen, Fountainhead Design. "With the increased use of mobile internet and smart-phones, manufacturers are now able



THE INFLUENCE OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Adam Botha, creative director: Switch Branding and Design explains that the immediacy of media types currently means that by the time a product hits the shelf, consumers have not only already seen its packaging, but have also typically formed an opinion of it.

"As such, new media types and media fragmentation are giving consumers more than



Pic: Clive Glover

to create interactions that go beyond the physical pack and that can create a more immersive brand message for the consumer. From competitions to additional product info and more, consumers are easily able to make the jump online via mediums such as QR codes or AR."

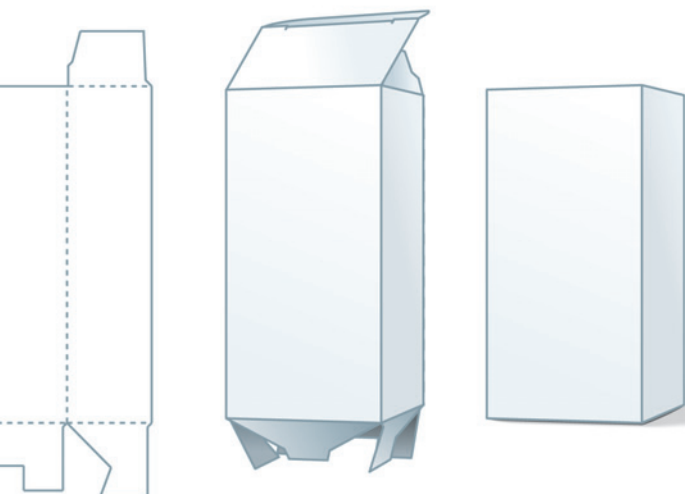
Packaging has become more interactive with QR codes and SMS shortcodes enabling packaging to be linked to mobi-sites and social media websites at a scan of a cell phone, agrees Beattie, who says: "This is resulting in exciting opportunities for brand owners to make their brand and packaging more value-added. For example, a reply SMS to an on-pack competition can have an imbedded link to a mobi-site where the consumer can receive more information about the product. Or, a QR code on a food product can allow the consumer to link to free recipes. Clever marketers can collect permission-based databases of their product users that they can use to provide value-added services and add-ons to their users."

New technologies also mean that historical approach to package design where production facilities ultimately dictated the packaging's form, especially in terms of size, material used and so forth, is being challenged. Whereas designers would previously design a bottle to fit a machine for example, the rise of new technology now means that marketers and designers determine design parameters upfront and, if the factory is unable to produce the packaging, they simply find a smaller specialist who can.

As a result, packaging is no longer necessarily something that simply gets thrown away once the product that it contained has been consumed, explains Botha.

"Technology is enabling the 're'-factor: how packaging can be reformatted, repurposed, reused and recycled. Designers are embracing this trend and creating new forms of packaging that incorporate clever shapes, clever materials - and clever thinking. We aren't simply pursuing whatever makes for a unique form, but rather starting off by deciding what the packaging will be used for once the product has been consumed; whether the packaging will be completely recyclable; reusable or so beautiful that it will be displayed as an ornament."

Social media has given the consumer more access to information and so consumers are becoming more and more educated in terms of what they are buying and therefore demand more information. "I see this as an opportunity for marketers to engage/interact more with consumers. Some companies are using social media e.g. Facebook as informal research to obtain feedback on the type of products they should be stocking, colour preferences etc. An



THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

What is the most important advice you would give marketers who would like to utilise packaging as a marketing medium?

➤ **Adam Botha, creative director:**

Switch Branding and Design: "Definitely the age-old advice that you need to treat the front of your pack as you would a logo. Your packaging must support your brand's message. It must be single-minded and simplistic, providing your consumer with the required 'moment of truth'"

➤ **Gareth Pearson, CEO of BMI Research:**

"Marketers should be considering the impact that the social media revolution could have on their products and how packaging can be used to embrace this trend. Some brands are using social media such as Facebook effectively for competitions, but packaging is only including website details - marketers are missing the opportunity on pack to interact with consumers creatively. Is your pack reflecting the media that your consumer is using to obtain information e.g. iPads?"

➤ **Jason Kempen, Fountainhead Design:**

"Keep it simple. Shelf space is busy and confusing at the best of times - consumers are looking for quick and easy interactions that make their lives easier, not more complicated. Ensure your product is easy to find, delivers what it promises, and has good distribution. A single-minded, honest design always stands the test of time."

➤ **Stephen Beattie, sales and marketing manager, Pyrotec:**

"Use three important factors that make on-pack advertising effective: the message should be relevant, the message should be bold and stand out on the packaging, and yet, paradoxically, complement the packaging design. The message should be interactive and involve the consumer so that they become more emotionally attached to the brand through the experience."

example of this is the Woolworths *Taste Magazine* where they designed two different covers for the magazine and consumers were asked to vote for their favourite. In the future, more interaction with consumers, may also impact on packaging," says Pearson.

Technology will ultimately continue to drive packaging says Botha, and not only will the use of QR codes increase, but also online purchasing can be expected to increase. "As more and more consumers buy products off the internet, multimedia interactivity with brands will require packaging to evolve accordingly - functioning in both the 3D and 2D space (being able to spin and click apart to show the contents of the pack for example). Social media like Twitter and Facebook will also allow packaging to access the personal world of the consumer as never before. As a result, packaging will no longer simply be a physical box on a shelf, but will come to represent the brand in every sense."

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CONSUMER

The principle of packaging design has always relied on the consumer as the key influencer - with mere moments available in-store, packaging needs to work hard to attract attention in a cluttered environment.

"From easy navigation through the use of colour, to consumer focused taglines and copy, packaging has been, and always will, rely on consumer engagement in order for it to be successful. The old adage of consumers voting with their wallets still rings true!" says Kempen.

Packaging is becoming more user friendly, interactive, value-adding and eco-friendly according to Beattie, and "often packaging is as much of the product as the product itself." The dramatic increase in shopping centres in suburbs and townships, as well as extended trading hours, has meant that monthly shopping has become a thing of the past. "Consumers now often shop on a daily or weekly basis. As such, product unit sizes are much smaller, often being a single serving portion size - and packaging needs to accommodate this trend. This presents a greater challenge for designers, as we're still required to put the same amount of information on the smaller pack while maximising the overall impact of the design," says Botha. He also says there is a growth in the number of brands in various categories. "Designers need to become increasingly conscious of how packaging occupies and 'owns' space - both by itself and as a collective on a shelf. While this isn't necessarily a new trend, I do believe that it's something we're being forced to become more aware of as the consumer space becomes more cluttered and expensive to physically occupy in-store."

LEGISLATION

As consumers become more demanding about their rights, there is an expectation that there will be stricter controls as to how products are marketed at consumers through traditional advertising as well as packaging. Pearson says the impact of the Consumer Protection Act (CPA) has not influenced the packaging industry as much as the brand owner. "The onus is on the marketer to ensure that the labels and visuals contain the correct information about the contents of the pack. The brand owner has and designers need to be more aware of the Act and incorporate as much information as possible onto packaging mediums. I feel the CPA is a good initiative as it supports transparency."



"TECHNOLOGY IS ENABLING THE 'RE'-FACTOR: HOW PACKAGING CAN BE REFORMATTED, REPURPOSED, REUSED AND RECYCLED"

Botha agrees: "To my mind, the CPA is simplifying packaging in many ways. Its forcing designers and brand specialists to literally tell the product's story 'like it is' while still being creative within those constraints. This is because the CPA prevents any ambiguity in brand messaging. As such, it's challenging us to design within specific parameters."

Kempen believes the CPA has had a huge impact. "Aside from the obvious issues like ingredient declaration, product claims and accurate nutritionals, the design of the actual pack has in most cases been affected; from typeface size to use of product photography (especially in food and beverage packaging). As a result designers are being challenged to come up with new ways to attract consumers with attractive packaging that is compliant."

Because the new requirements are so rigorous, designers have to remain cognisant of complying with everything from including a detailed description of the product to eliminating adjectives like 'pure' or 'natural'. "With the increase in information required to appear on pack, we're also being forced to push the way available space is - and can be - used," says Botha. He uses the example of some deodorants that now print product details on the underside of the pack label as an example. "Consumers seeking additional information can thus access this by unfolding this label. More tags are being found on the necks of bottles as well. However, these have to comply with various structural requirements. They cannot detach easily for example. Visual depictions such as serving suggestions have also been affected, with many products having to reprint their packaging as a result. Because non-compliance is punishable by a fine, brands are being forced to comply - and will be held accountable for any 'misleading' product packaging."

Next year in March, the Labelling Act will become law. But, Pearson says this is not news for marketers - everyone is aware of it and gearing up for the March 2012 deadline. It has had implications for some brands where it has impact on the actual brand name e.g. Willard's Cheese Curls - who have had to change the name, as the product did not contain cheese.

Given that manufacturers have to update their packaging for the CPA, many are utilising the opportunity to do a brand refresh at the same time, says Kempen. "This is keeping packaging agencies very busy - particularly given the relatively short period of time left (all retailers and products need to be compliant by March 2012).

STILL BEING CREATIVE

The strict regulations have not stopped clients from demanding unique packaging design. Says Botha: "This demand has been matched with a growing awareness among clients that packaging doesn't - and shouldn't - end with the box." He says creativity of one's packaging helps to position the brand and that this is even more important now that the CPA is challenging designers to differentiate brands while complying with certain rules. "Advertisers must also remember that the perception they wish to create for their brands is echoed in the product's packaging. Brand messaging thus remains imperative." This has to guide packaging.

"From a 'good' packaging perspective, this should tell the consumer exactly what they are going to get; protect the product contents; and be able to be used in some form (recyclable or reusable) after the contents have been consumed."

Kempen says good packaging is packaging that allows the customer to easily find the product, understand it, and hopefully, buy it. "It is important not be influenced by trends, but to rather remain true to what your product stands for. An understanding of your competitor environment is also extremely important, as nowhere else will you face as stiff a competition than at the moment of interaction. Above all, make sure that you deliver as promised - consumers that can relate to the synergy between packaging and product will always come back for more."

Great creative is a critical element of packaging. "It is important to consider that a packaged product is vying for attention among many other products. So, the secret in creative packaging is simplicity in design. Less is more," says Beattie.

I believe that South Africa is an innovative packaging environment and we can hold our heads high in the packaging arena in terms of creativity and sustainability. What we always forget that in this country we do not have the economies of scale in terms of consumers, compared to other countries. South Africa has a biennial premier packaging design competition called, Gold Pack Awards, which is a celebration of different packs created in South Africa and winners of these packs are invited to submit their entry into the WorldStar packaging awards. South Africa has previously won awards for best packaging globally. In short, our packaging industry is competitive both in innovation and design.

"While some see packaging as a necessary evil, there are very few people who do not see its awesome value not just to convey and protect the products we buy, but to communicate brand identity and ultimately enhance product sales," concludes Pearson.



Thinking outside the box

The fragmentation of media, the rise of new technologies and emergence of the consumer as the product driver, as well as legislation protecting the rights of the consumer, have combined to emphasise packaging of brands. A medium of advertising not always clearly understood or utilised to its fullest, packaging can make or break a sale. *Advantage* asked experts what they see as the trends in packaging



Gareth Pearson, CEO, BMI Research

Jason Kempen, Fountainhead Design

- **Simplicity:** more than ever, and partly influenced by the CPA, clean and simple packaging is coming through strongly. Bold crisp typefaces, strong colours and concise layouts - this is a trend that is very visible in British and European markets as well
- **'Real photography':** especially in the realm of food, consumers no longer relate to over-styled, laboured product shots - wholesome, natural, friendly and accessible is the way to go - think Justin Bonello and Neil Roake
- **Illustration:** given the strict guidelines around how photography can be used, many designers are reverting to the time-honoured traditions of illustration, pattern and iconography
- **Everyday luxury:** overall consumers are becoming more sophisticated with their buying patterns and product choices, hence the need for packaging to reiterate their position on quality and value money through good, more premium design
- **Sustainability:** particularly with smaller producers that are able to move more quickly on this, there is a new generation of environmentally concerned, organic-focused products in market, and packaging is the perfect place to reflect these values

Adam Botha, creative director, Switch Branding and Design

- **Recyclable packaging:** this trend is being pushed by a combination of consumer and client demand. With both groups becoming more environmentally responsible, packaging has to adapt as a result. It has to be able to move through the complete reuse, reduce, recycle cycle.
- **Ergonomic packaging:** as a result of greater demand for ease of use. Clients are spending more money on form design than ever before. Clients want their packaging to 'fit' and 'feel right' in the consumer's hand when carried and consumed. Form design is becoming synonymous with brand messaging. It must reiterate the key messages of both the product and brand
- **Simple bold packaging:** becoming a prerequisite for most brands. As mentioned previously, this allows the product to live in both the physical and digital space
- **An almost cult approach to packaging:** Linked to the above, we're also seeing this approach to packaging developing based on the emergence of niche sub-cultures of consumers. Because consumers want to be seen as 'different' and 'unique individuals', we're seeing cult characters being included in packaging. A prime example of this is the vinyl toy that comes with Gwen Stefani's new perfume bottle.

Stephen Beattie, sales and marketing manager, Pyrotec

- More information required on packaging
- On-line efficiencies i.e. packaging of products needs to be produced more efficiently
- Lower cost

- **Sustainability/Recycling:** a recent move from glass to PET is currently taking place as well as moving away from metal to glass and PET and using more substrates that can be reused or recycled. Companies are trying to reduce substrate and fibre content in their packaging and the consumer wants to know what he/she can do with the packaging post use
- **Down-gauging or light weighting:** packs are becoming smaller and packaging is becoming thinner and lighter whilst still retaining its performance
- **Downsizing:** as a result of the recession, manufacturers are making smaller pack sizes. An example of this is All Gold tomato sauce, changing bottles from 750ml to 700ml to help consumers financially. Locally and internationally, the rise in ingredient costs has seen some chocolate giants change their pack offerings in order to remain profitable. An example of this is in the confectionary market where Toblerone is expected to shed off one triangle to help keep costs down. The reduction in size is not only price driven but could also be linked to health trends, with smaller portion sizes expected to help tackle the obesity epidemic
- **Material changes:** this established trend will be a continually changing one. Primary packaging choices vacillate between paper, glass, metal and plastic, dependent largely upon prevailing material costs. Companies also focus innovatively on their packaging using their secondary packaging i.e. the carton that contains the product as a form of advertising or for promotional packaging. Another factor playing a role in material changes is the increasing fuel prices as this puts extra pressure on margins that affect which material is cheapest to transport
- **Convenience:** single sachets, dispensing taps, no touch hand wash system - packaging is constantly evolving in the area of convenience where consumers seek product convenience, which is usually best represented in the product packaging. Child-friendly closures, carry packs, re-sealable closures and dispensing features are some of the obvious areas of focus where consumer convenience is offered