

Packaging As An Aspect Of The Brand

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Companies have become very clever in how they spend their advertising budget and how they use new media such as viral campaigns.

However no fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) company can avoid the fact that the greatest advert for the product is the packaging that the consumer sees on the shelf when they make their purchase.

As such no matter how vast an advertising budget is available, those brands that succeed are those that recognise the importance of packaging for brand recognition and marketing, for that on-shelf consumer impact, and as the contact point for the brand relationship.

The contour bottle - Key to Coca-Cola branding

Coca-Cola is a good example of where a brand communication strategy utilises strong iconic packaging. With Coca-Cola, the brand recognition aspect of the packaging can be easily broken down into three parts, the silhouette of the original green glass contour bottle, the familiar typeface of the brand name and the particular shade of red.

With these three elements Coca-Cola manages to keep a very strong brand identity across a very wide packaging portfolio.

For example the contour bottle has been replicated in PET in both 500ml and 1 litre sizes, reproduced as an aluminium bottle both for limited edition use in classic cola and for the main pack type for Blak the coffee flavoured cola brand extension, and included as a silhouette on beverage cans (and even on paper cups for fountain sales).

This strategy enables Coca-Cola to maximise use of different channels (eg vending, foodservice) and to provide a solution for any number of drinking opportunities, whilst all the time reinforcing that basic brand identity.

Packaging flexibility also enables Coca Cola to respond quickly to trends, requirements and promotional opportunities. For example the glass contour bottle has been 'lightweighted' in the UK to reduce glass use by 20% and resulting in a shorter bottle, and in Spain in 2009 a 'slim' contour PET bottle was launched for easier grip for the on-the-go segment.

Both these innovations have played with the basic shape with the knowledge that the brand recognition is strong enough to take it.

Copycat Packaging

The power of packaging for brand recognition can also be seen in the readiness of private label products to emulate the leading brand packaging of the day.

Though in some categories consumers have become so familiar with private label products that retailers are now confident in actually leading packaging innovation, for those categories where the brands still hold sway, copycat packaging is still the order of the day.

In some respects this is because that packaging aspect has become shorthand for the product – such as the colour red used for cola-based carbonates. In others it is an attempt to suggest a comparison of product quality which may or may not actually be there.

Whilst print media, internet and TV advertising are all routes to build brand awareness, it is the packaging on the shelf that consumers have in their hand when they part with their money.

The importance of this fact was highlighted last year when PepsiCo Inc. revised the graphics for Tropicana in the US.

Despite strong existing customer loyalty, without the brand recognition in the pack consumers were no longer sure what they were being loyal to and used the opportunity to try out other brands.

The lesson here is that brand owners need to be very aware of what aspect of the packaging reinforces that recognition – often it isn't simply the colour and the logo.

For Tropicana it was the graphic of an orange with a straw.

Maintaining recognition across a portfolio

Whilst a single pack type might be iconic for your brand, consumers have different consumption needs and the

packaging portfolio need to deliver to these.

It is important for brand owners to know what consumers are recognising in their packaging and to ensure this is reinforced in all the packaging formats used for that brand.

by Dr. Benjamin Punchard. Please visit [Euromonitor International](#) for more information

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