



BY AUBREY FERGUSON

Missed Opportunities in Package Design

A review of product packaging across the healthcare space in North America reveals several missed opportunities for innovation. Here's a look at three of these opportunities to bring innovation to packaging.

» Few would disagree that innovation is the Holy Grail of all marketers. But some marketers fail to unlock the mother lode of demand for their brands because they just don't get the continuous improvement innovation continuum. Three opportunities are derived from better understanding the consumer experience within this range.

To address innovation across all aspects of the consumer experience (the product features, package, price, point-of-sale presence, Web presence, advertising, call-center service and other factors) would entail chapters of a book. For the purpose of this article, our thoughts on innovation are confined to package design not because this is what we know best, but because the package is the core conveyance of every consumer brand's essence.

OPPORTUNITY #1

PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT OF INNOVATION

The biggest missed opportunity for marketers is neglecting to develop a broad portfolio of change, seeking not only the "home runs" but also the smaller, more numerous, continuous improvement changes; not nearly so glamorous, but a winning strategy for longer-term success. This has been touted as the hallmark of the successful Japanese manufacturing sector post-World War II.

Most of us are prone to seeking instant gratification. Returning to the popular baseball analogy, as marketers we all too frequently go up to bat focused on hitting a home run; we are focused on being the author of a dramatic event that can change the course of the game and bring the crowd to its feet. But home-run hitters invariably strike-out, also.

The innovation we should yearn for is nothing more (or less) than "change with added value." It can best be depicted as a continuum ranging from modest, continuous improvement all the way to "game changers." Within a brand's activity portfolio, a mix of methodical, ongoing change is ideally planned, pushed and cajoled. Again with the baseball analogy, these are a series of base hits and bunts needed to advance the runner until a run is scored. Constant improvement keeps the brand top of mind with consumers, the retail trade, opinion leaders/influencers and even staff.



In packaging innovation terms, this can be expressed in several ways; the most apparent is when a

manufacturer changes the package "skin." With the growing intrusion of private label brands in the grocery chain, consumer packaged goods brands have, in general, accelerated the rate of change of their packaging presentation from an estimated five- or six-year cycle to every two to three years. From our vantage point, this accelerated cycle is not as apparent in consumer health products across North America. Perhaps the growing consumer interest and retailer requirements for sustainable packaging will see the rate of change through continuous improvements come to market more readily.

Sustainable packaging may be an elusive goal but there are many beneficial steps along the way through which brand owners can maintain listings and consumer acceptance without driving up costs. These include use of unbleached, chlorine-free, FSC-certified paper, recycled content, and waterless printing with vegetable-based inks. Yet our scans of store shelves and media identify few consumer health care products that are demonstrating modest but meaningful advances in sustainability. Might greater concern for consumers' health be shown by addressing the environmental impact?

Innovation around sustainability could also focus on something as simple as material selection or the decision to forego layers of material altogether as we have witnessed by

OTC brands moving to easy-peel labels printed on both sides. These labels enable manufacturers to jettison outer cartons that have conveniently carried dosage and drug fact guidelines while orienting the package on shelf with the full front panel facing forward. Unfortunately, shelf stockers do not necessarily arrange cylindrical packages in a forward-facing position. Yet surprisingly, many of these brand owners have not moved

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beyond cylindrical packages to optimize the cube for better utilization of shipping, storage and retailers' shelf space. In the spirit of continuous improvement, it is not difficult to project such a conversion in the name of sustainability, cost-savings,



Foil and subtle color refinement were added to toothpaste overwraps to increase appeal.

and superior merchandising.

Other “base hits” in innovation may entail the simple addition of materials or printing effects to better convey a brand’s positioning or arrest a consumer’s eye. This was done in recent years with toothpaste overwraps where foil effects were added and enhanced with subtle refreshment in colors and design. The brand image is advanced without alienating established core consumers.

Footnote to missed opportunity: There must always be time and tolerance for the disruptive thinking that shuns complacency by accepting a prudent level of risk (a corollary topic for another time). In other words, there is a role for a home run hitter on every team or in every portfolio.

OPPORTUNITY #2 GRASPING TREND IMPLICATIONS

The second biggest missed opportunity is in giving lip service to ideas and trends but not being committed to realize meaningful change.

We all acknowledge our aging population and the attendant inherent failing eyesight, loss of strength and balance and limits to dexterity. Yet across all consumer categories, we observe few examples of brand owners consciously seeking to increase type size, for example, or to provide greater legibility through contrasting colors. Not surprisingly, in the analgesic section there have been efforts to make twist tops easier to remove and reinstall. It does



An illustration on the package cover helps clearly communicate the method of product delivery.

seem that other categories are still not paying attention.

Another concern not seemingly addressed is North America’s high level of illiteracy. Accepting the definition of functional illiteracy as an inability to read at a grade 9 level, it has been estimated that as many as one-third of consumers are not able to confidently or competently absorb important information presented at store level. The writer has witnessed the marketing advantage of simply adding photos of application-based wound care bandages on front panels of packaging. A greater use of photos, icons, illustrations and multiple languages, as is the norm in Europe, would go a long way to breaking down these word-based barriers.

OPPORTUNITY #3 INTERSECTING WITH ‘MOMENTS OF TRUTH’

While marketers speak in terms of finding the “moment of truth” for their brands, many fail to appreciate that there are multiple “moments of truth” through which to address innovation and the consumer experience at the:

- Point of Awareness
- Point of Purchase
- Points of Usage

Procter & Gamble chief executive A.G. Lafley is credited with popularizing the concept, the “moment of truth,” the few seconds when the consumer first views a package in store and which becomes pivotal to their impulse purchase decision. Over time, this has given rise to a “second moment of truth,” the point at which the consumer interacts with the product and has his/her expectations satisfied or diminished. Lafley marries the point of awareness with the point of purchase to emphasize how important the in-store environment is, but marketers often neglect to think through the consumer experience and not appreciate how the consumer interacts with the product in transportation, storage, usage, re-usage and ultimately disposal. We’ll call this experience the “third moment of truth,” or the points of usage.

The point of awareness occurs when the consumer is first exposed to the package, be it through advertising, in-store observation or through referral (seeing someone else interact with the brand). First impressions are instantly and subconsciously formulated ... and cannot necessarily be articulated by a consumer (hence the maligned focus groups). Importantly, we all know first impressions are lasting. As far back as the 1930s, researcher Louis Cheskin documented the extent to which consumers made product preferences based on pack-

“Packaging innovation should be active at all points of consumer and user engagement to ensure sustained success.”

aging graphics despite having extended in-home use of the test samples. From this he developed the premise of image transference in which the package becomes the primary conveyance of the brand’s essence.

Marketers often feel overwhelmed trying to enhance consumers’ points of usage experience when regulatory requirements burden marketing communication and first impressions matter so much. But if it was easy, everyone would be doing it routinely. Relentless pursuit of improvement can be as simple as strategically inverting the graphics on a ketchup container so the product is more readily available to dispense when taken out of storage. More often it entails adding meaningful features (such as easy twist-off caps) and convey the news in a meaningful manner that does not overwhelm the brand’s core communication hierarchy.

These “moments of truth” should be charted against the range of innovation available to a brand in

the short and longer term to help map out innovation opportunities in all areas to bring meaningful value to the consumer and avoid being pre-empted by competitors, existing or new.

Accordingly, packaging innovation should be active at all points of consumer and user engagement to ensure sustained success.

OPPORTUNITIES ARE NOT LIMITED TO THESE THREE

In considering the three greatest opportunities for design innovation in consumer healthcare packaging, it would have been obvious to turn to the excessive use of me-too thinking (A.K.A. competitive benchmarking) and to marketers’ excessive reliance on focus groups for research. When looking for real innovation, successful marketers don’t just try to one-up competitors or ask consumers (they can’t tell you ... not sure? Think about the conceptualization of Apple’s ubiquitous iPod). They seek and engage the design thinkers wherever they can be found ... in engineering, product development, sales, finance, customer service, suppliers and yes, consumers. No one group has a monopoly on ideas.

Finally, if you think the opportunities are limited to these mentioned above, then you too might be missing out on a chance to successfully innovate. <<

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Moments of Truth

	← Range of innovation →	
	Modest, continuous improvement	Dramatic home runs
1. Point of Awareness		
2. Point of Purchase		
3. Points of Usage		