

Sudden Impact

Design Research Strategies to Help You Win at the Shelf

By Valla Roth



Packaging is a key driver at that first moment of truth. When the consumer is standing at the shelf deciding which brand to buy amidst a vast array of alternatives, it's important to have a package that breaks through the clutter, creates purchasing, and supports your brand image.

And unlike a traditional marketing media plan, it is on the shelf for consumers to see, 24/7. Packaging changes can be tricky, especially for well-known brands with loyal users. While it's important to keep your packaging fresh and up to date, you need to make sure the changes are the right ones for your brand.

At my firm, MarketTools, we use and suggest a three-step process to optimize your package graphics. We believe the package is an important—and sometimes undervalued—component of marketing communications. Kevin Keller of the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College has stated: “The package is often the buyer’s first encounter with a product and is capable of turning the buyer on or off.” This is especially true in light of declining media budgets and media fragmentation.

A.G. Lafley, CEO of Procter & Gamble, has also emphasized: “Thirty million times a day, in more than 160 countries, P&G brands face their first moment of truth, when consumers stand in front of a store shelf...and decide whether to buy a P&G brand, or a competing product.”

Effective packaging is very important for new products since the first moment of truth is truly the very first decision made about the brand. But a product is only new

once, and hopefully it will live a long life, likely with many package enhancements as consumer needs and the market evolve.

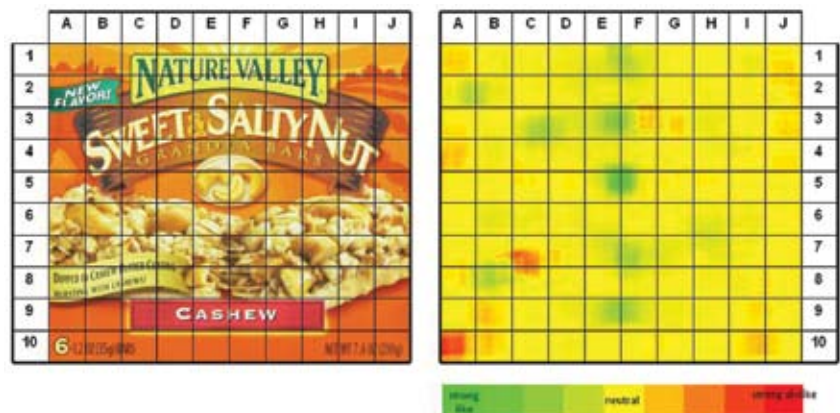
Experience at our firm tells us that redesigns of an established brand need to be handled carefully. While minor tweaks are likely not worth the investment, too major a change can alienate current users to the point of making the brand unrecognizable at the shelf, not stimulating purchase, and inconsistent with the brand's image. Thus, many times a great package redesign is evolutionary, not revolutionary.

We believe there is a formula for effective packaging:

- Breaks Through on Shelf
- + Easy to Find
- + Creates Purchasing
- + Supports Brand Image
- = Effective Packaging

While the formula makes perfect sense, it is often not easy to achieve, especially for established products where there is equity in the current design. Therefore, we believe a systematic three-step approach improves the value of your packaging, resulting in a win at the shelf.

1. Assess current package: Jump start



Using a tool such as this Package Highlighter example helps researchers focus in on what design elements are working—or not working—on a package.

the design process by understanding your package's strengths and weaknesses

2. Narrow down early options: Efficiently screen early design concepts so the most promising ones are carried forward

3. Optimize lead candidates: Thoroughly profile and rigorously evaluate a handful of the strongest options

1. Assess current package

You believe your package is tired and needs a makeover. But where do you start?



ing of the package's intensity areas, and is a useful precursor to more expensive eye tracking approaches. Along with your brand strategy statement, Package Assessment provides the insights needed for designers to begin their exploration of new alternatives.

2. Narrow down early options

In a typical design process, designers will produce 30 options. The team then narrows it down to 15-20 ideas, but it is still



A virtual shopping exercise helps determine if the new package motivates purchasing.

Using our Package Assessment solution, you enter the design process with a full understanding of your current package. Central to this are our Highlighter Tools: Shelf Highlighter and Package Highlighter. With Shelf Highlighter, the consumer sees your package in a realistic shelf setting surrounded by competition. He or she clicks directly on the packages that are attention-getting, liked, disliked, and found confusing. This provides you some valuable feedback in a competitive context. With Package Highlighter, the focus is solely on your package. Again, the consumer clicks directly on parts of the package that are attention-getting, liked, disliked and found confusing—and Package Highlighter reveals why. Image maps are provided, visually depicting the feedback. Finally, brand image ratings are collected.

We have found that Package Highlighter provides very precise understand-

information overload. Where do you go from here? A Package Screen can efficiently provide consumer input to find the ones with potential. Research respondents simply use our drag and drop exercise to sort packages based on intent to buy, liking, value for the money, uniqueness, and fit with the brand. This provides you a handful of designs to move to the next stage.

3. Optimize Lead Candidates

Let's say you now have two, three, four, or five solid designs. Which have the most potential? How can they be optimized? To help answer these questions, we thoroughly profile each design on several important dimensions:

BREAKS THROUGH – Getting noticed among the clutter at the shelf. We measure breakthrough by showing consumers a realistic shelf setting for a few seconds and then asking brand recall.

FINDABILITY – Individual SKUs are easily found on the shelf. While a line of packages may create strong breakthrough, the strong architecture of the line may overwhelm identification of the individual items. We ask the shopper to click on a certain SKU. We measure whether the correct one was chosen, and the time to find it.

CREATES PURCHASE – Stimulates the shopper to buy. Of course, a package must generate sales. We create a virtual shopping exercise of the store shelf where the respondent can zoom (step in closer), scroll (walk up and down the aisle), click on a package for a better view (pick it up off the shelf), and decide whether to put it in his or her shopping basket (purchase it).

SUPPORTS BRAND IMAGE – Conveys the brand message. The package's communication must be consistent with the entire brand experience, including advertising, promotions, and the product. We utilize our Highlighter tools to better understand the package's strengths and weaknesses both on the shelf and focusing on the package itself. We also ask a variety of diagnostic questions such as main point conveyed, image/attribute ratings, usage occasions, etc. to better understand the communication.

In summary, an impactful package must do so many things simultaneously. The right research tools can help you create and optimize an impactful package to help you win at the shelf—all day every day. ■

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