



TRUTH BE TOLD:

Package Design Plays Larger Role in Shopper Marketing

By Dan Hilbert

The “packaging” in shopper marketing

I don't need to convince you. You already know how important package design is in the marketing mix. But do you really know if your packaging is working the hardest it can at retail, delivering its very best at the “first and second moment of truth”? Is it a key pillar in your shopper marketing strategy, contributing upstream in the planning process? How much improvement and advocacy have you realized from talking with shoppers about packaging?

This article is about the “packaging” in shopper marketing. It's about delivering success through one of the most powerful mediums I've grown to witness. It's about packaging as a strategy, not a tactic. Package design manifests ideas.

The relationship between packaging and shopper marketing

An admittedly rhetorical question: have you ever seen a retail aisle without packaging on products? No, because packaging is marketing for shoppers. And like any marketing vehicle, strategy and insights play a critical role.

List the objectives and core principles of shopper marketing, and you can use the same for package design. A few examples to illustrate my point:

- Accelerate trial and consumption
- Drive perceived value and higher retails
- Promote quick purchase decision

The design process is linked to the same objectives and research rigor as shopper need states. In fact, packaging and shopper marketing share similar behavioral models with regard to human communication -- from colors to shapes, numbers to words. So, it's reasonable to expect that package design is equally or even more important creatively than the images and call-to-action on POS materials.

Package design is the first moment of truth at retail

To this point, I have been faithful to the “first moment of truth (FMOT)” retail concept. Born several years ago by the team in Cincinnati, it has been an effective way to focus research and marketing resources on certain aspects of the shopping dynamic. But having seen how packaging positively moves the sales needle over and over again, the FMOT concept to me has become much more specific. My belief is that the “first moment of truth” is not at-shelf -- it resides at packaging, at-shelf.

This is not a play on words. It is fundamental to integrating the role of consumer and shopper, as they are not mutually exclusive targets at retail. Function, emotion and value are intersecting need states in-store. Packaging is one of very few tools to deliver a visual hierarchy that integrates all three (3) of these purchase drivers.

With all the new, flashy marketing technologies available today, it's sometimes easy to forget that the most powerful communication vehicle available to us is truly “analog”. Packaging is a critical element of retail engagement, because brands and their products ultimately end up in the eyes and hands of shoppers.

Packaging is scrutinized at the second moment of truth

Products, along with their packaging, are taken home. Intended benefits have been communicated, item purchased and the “second moment of truth” realized -- use or consumption of the product. As packaging is linked to the shelf at FMOT, so it is to product at this phase. Packaging signals expectations, while the product itself drives satisfaction -- they are forever attached. Describing this connection more viscerally, it is a measure of how well the brand is telling the truth. Done well, brand repeat and advocacy will grow, increasing direct conversations with consumers. These dialogues will inspire continuous improvement and provide zero-cost awareness through “earned” media.

Better link packaging with shopper marketing initiatives

As a community of brand leaders, let's make packaging a critical part of the shopper marketing discipline. This is an invitation to review how well you are doing and to consider package design a strategic imperative -- integrated early during marketing planning cycles, considered a key element to shopper initiatives and leveraged for consumer satisfaction.

As you can tell, I am passionate about packaging done well. I've seen it work again and again (and seen it's power destroy brands). So, here are a few things I've learned along the way to help make your design initiatives more effective and better win at retail:

- Move package design upstream in the research and planning process – make it a consideration within consumer and shopper strategies
- Utilize “visual” briefs when developing brand creative elements – advertising to promotions, POS to packaging
- Ensure packaging not only delivers brand positioning but makes a commercial difference on-shelf
- Scrutinize how well you are telling “the truth” – does the partnership between packaging and product ultimately deliver satisfaction
- Be hungry for consumer feedback – repurpose the positive and embrace every bit of the negatives

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