



A Brand New World

BUILDING YOUR FOOD OR BEVERAGE BRAND BY WAY OF ITS PACKAGING HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT AS IT IS TODAY

BY LOUIS GIGUÈRE

In a product development process, packaging-related issues very often arise in the early stages of a project. And yet it can sometimes be quite difficult to predict the exact point at which we will come up with the final answers. I don't know how many times clients have come to see me at the beginning of a food innovation project and brief me using bottles, boxes or bags that they have brought back from food exhibitions or innovative grocery stores they visited in an American or European city. Why does this happen? Because packaging has the key quality of helping you to structure a multi-dimensional concept.

By itself, food and beverage packaging points to the production process, a conservation technique, a method of preparation, consumption occasion, a sustainable development statement and a brand identity component, even before the designer dresses it. After its studio visit, it becomes the most important brand vehicle for consumers — it carries the promise and the guarantee of a fully satisfying experience.

To successfully play its role to the fullest, packaging must be the outcome of an overall marketing thought process and rigorous brand strategy. This exercise also involves certain required steps: its initial function is that of product conservation; its environmental footprint must be, more than ever, under control; its operational efficiency must satisfy the most demanding operators; and it must be seamlessly compatible with in-store marketing techniques. Basically, it requires the work of a multidisciplinary team.

Two important determining aspects of the current production of packaging are environmental concerns and design.

A brand component consistent with sustainable development

People are more than ready to blame packaging when the environmental impact of the food production system is being scrutinized, even though it constitutes only one aspect. In addition to the pressures exerted by different regulatory levels to lower the food industry's global carbon footprint, to which packaging contributes, the public is becoming increasingly concerned about the issue. A study conducted by Mintel in spring 2010 entitled *Offering Ethicality and Sustainability in Food and Drinks* showed that packaging that is in compliance with certain principles associated with sustainable development can help convince the most cynical consumer of the validity of ethical claims made by a brand.

The reason for the relevance attached to packaging? It's close to home, it fills our garbage cans (or recycling bins), it's visible, palpable, easy to decipher, the consumer has the feeling of contributing to "the cause," and his appreciation is directly instrumental in increasing the processor's credibility. What's more, packaging obscures other sustainable development aspects that affect production. Here is something that can encourage often-opportunistic initiatives. Accordingly, environmental options and associated claims are as numerous as they are unclear: recycled, compostable, renewable, re-useable, energy-efficient, recyclable, biodegradable, environmentally responsible, lighter, and more.

In order to gain clarity, the issue of packaging's impact on the environment must be studied from a comprehensive perspective. The study should include all the flows and processes involved in the production, distribution

PACKAGING REPORT

and end-of-life stages of the material used in the packaging, including the production and transportation of the resources consumed and the management of the waste generated at each stage.

The results of studies conducted using this complete methodology, known as Life Cycle Analysis, have led to astonishing conclusions. For example, Kingsey Falls, Que.-based Cascades, in partnership with Montreal's Interuniversity Research Centre for the Lifecycle of Products, Processes and Services (CIRAIG), had trays made of different materials analyzed based on the Life Cycle approach. Among the solutions such as moulded pulp, recycled PET and corn-based material, the famous Polystyrene Foam had the lowest potential impact on the environment (when produced with Cascades' specific processes and facilities). Not bad for a material that, not so long ago, was regarded as a commercial evil!

Another way of assessing the environmental impact of packaging is to measure its carbon footprint. This calculation also takes into account the five key life cycles — extraction of raw materials, transportation, manufacturing, packaging and distribution — but this time, the result is expressed as a CO₂ gram equivalent for 100 g of finished product.

Design, design, design!

Design is involved at all stages of packaging development.



Courtesy of Cascade Specialty Products Group, Plastic and Moulded Pulp Products

Designers are directly involved in the creation of containers, a task that involves producing technical sketches of bottles, bowls, caps and pumps, even before engineers get involved. Further on in the product development process, designers will dress these containers and will design the final product that will land in the hands of the consumer. We're talking about a complex exercise that will bring together marketing strategies, brand positioning, its brand identity and final consumption experience during which the product will be imbued. Anything is possible in this world — the only imposed limitation stems from the commercial conformism visible in several sectors of the industry.

The reality of consumer and business demands today has meant the emergence of new forms of packaging. The consumer is demonstrating an open-minded attitude when it comes to design and seeks products that will deliver that "ultra" experience. Additionally, environmental considerations are leading to the use of new materials that have the potential to surprise through their application. What's more, we are faced today with the even greater need to market differentiated products and brands in order to answer the famous question: "Why does my brand matter?"

Following are products from around the world whose packaging helps answer that question, while meeting consumer interest in environmental considerations.




The essence of the craft

The use of Kraft fibreboard lends a natural, authentic, even rugged feature to packaging. Black-and-white printed images of artisans truly working with food evoke nostalgia and family, emotional associations that are transferred to the product itself, which is perfectly displayed from its most spectacular angle.

Producer: Dyrøy Food

Country: Norway



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When fruit is no longer simply a commodity

This packaging successfully differentiates a product that is a commodity in itself. The use of a sleeve offers a generous showcase in which to present a brand promise that marries the product's unsurpassable quality, naturalness and taste experience.

Producer: Jan Robben

Country: The Netherlands



A master sausage-maker who stands proud

Humour, surprise and confidence are the ideas conveyed by this packaging, which integrates an icon that gives the sausage world a totally eclectic twist: the bow tie! The main feature of this brand is communicated in the blink of an eye: distinction.

Producer: Kerry Foods Limited

Country: U.K.

A cocktail with nothing to hide

Although the shape of this bottle offers nothing new by way of differentiation, its transparency packs an explosive punch! In fact, it challenges our expectations and in so doing, attracts our attention. Once this impact is created, the product still needs to tempt us.

Producer: Cervecera Mexicana

Country: Mexico



Cook without getting your hands dirty

The packaging is a conservation method, preparation technique, communication and total brand experience tool. All the ingredients are contained in the box (including the king prawns), so product handling is reduced and food odours are controlled. Everything is contained in a package that conveys a bold statement and that connotes expertise, simplicity and joie de vivre.

Producer: The Saucy Fish Co.

Country: U.K.



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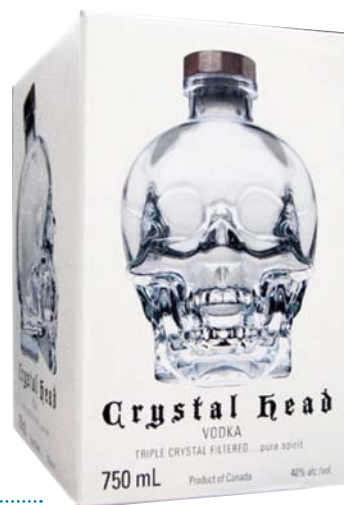
PACKAGING REPORT

Quadruple-proof packaging

Vodka that is distilled four times, run through a coal filter, followed by three crystal filters. You have to be a bit of a nutcase to go to such extremes! And this bottle accurately translates this state of mind. Furthermore, it's marketed by none other than Dan Aykroyd Wines and the brand experience packs the strength of a vodka martini straight up! You laugh. However, the Liquor Control Board of Ontario didn't find it so funny. It prohibited this product based on the pretext that it was death-like, a gesture interpreted by *The Globe and Mail* as: "Because remains do not convey the most tactful marketing message when your goal is to be a virtuous vendor of beverage alcohol." Don't let these guys rule the skateboard industry!

Producer: Dan Aykroyd Wines

Country: Canada



Get carried away!

Although this packaging is admittedly eccentric, it plays the literal interpretation card, drawing olive oil straight from the producer's vat! That's what we call child's play.

Producer: Clemente

Country: Italy



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