

The LBD of branding

PACKAGING THAT WALKS YOUR TALK

A little black dress is an essential in every wardrobe – you can't be without one. Your product packaging is equally important. It can make your brand stand out, blend in or become a timeless must-have. In the second of this series of branding articles, **Neil Osborne** explains how the right (or wrong) packaging can make or break your brand's success.

Building a brilliant brand comes from building a mixture of unique characteristics — performance, benefits, positioning, environment, packaging or distribution — that form its base. The combination of those characteristics should clearly separate your brand from its competitors. Otherwise it will be lost in a sea of grey sameness.

In our industry, where appearance is important, grey is not the place to be. Instead, your brand needs to take a stand with its look and feel. But in a world where customers now drive much of your marketing, there's little left where you have control — packaging and its performance are the exception to the rule.

Part Two: Packaging & Performance

As the second of the 7 Ps of salon industry brand building, (refer to my first article in the March 2014 issue) packaging is the most under-appreciated and under-utilised element in branding.

In the salon market, packaging contributes in a variety of ways to your overall product development. Therefore it's vital to deal with this 'P' early, rather than further down the branding path as some non-industry models suggest.

Ideally your pack-design and its functionality should be a direct extension of the inner product — delivering an attractive image and trustworthy application time after time. It should offer a connecting emotional bridge between the product and your user. It can even take them on a sensory experience that involves touch, sight, sound, smell or taste.

What is packaging?

Packaging is the physical representation of a product or brand. Encompassing both the outer 'wrapping' and inner 'containers,' packaging plays a decisive role in influencing purchase decisions.

Said to account for as much as 75 per cent of a purchase (especially in a retail environment), packaging therefore warrants attention — to the finer details — when creating a brand experience. In fact, it could be said that designing your brand identity and packaging is a science in itself.

In the beauty area, smell, touch and the personification of the brand's image are all vitally important. If you think of your formula as the soul of your product, your packaging is its spirit that connects to your customers.

Dressed for success

For many on the brand — building path, packaging design is the fun part. The challenge is to ensure you reinforce the integrity and uniqueness of your formulation with containers and outer wrapping that reflect those qualities. Consider how it will feel in your users' hands and look on-shelf.

Standout packaging is also a brilliant way to stretch a meagre marketing budget. It can figuratively help the product jump off the shelves or call out to your customers.

The on-shelf presence should connect with your overall brand image, style and suitability for your target market. If your customers are teenagers, your pack could be bright, fun and funky while anti-ageing products could look very different. Alternatively, some products may need unique packaging or boxing to help protect them from UV degradation and maintain their efficacy.

Dressing your product formula in its packaging has an enduring effect; no different to the clothes you wear each day. One of the first things you need to consider is the personality of your product and how you want it to be seen.

By extending my little black dress (LBD) metaphor, let me explain some options to consider when dressing your salon brand:

i. The light summer dress

This style of packaging could be used to communicate that your product is natural, light and affordable, yet effective.

ii. The cocktail dress

This could suggest glamour, high impact, quality and a higher price point for your product.

iii. The business suit

This could be a serious, well-packaged, specialised performance product range that is priced to deliver on its claims.

iv. The little black dress

And the timeless classic — a short black dress that's eye catching, subtly sensual and priceless.

Do my shoes match?

Selecting containers is like shopping for shoes. They need to work with and complete the ensemble, not scream "Wrong, wrong, wrong!" when your customer opens the wrapping. They also have to last the long haul usage and not break after one outing.

The first decision is stock bottle and packaging or do you splurge and create a custom mould for a unique shape or design? In this area there is much to consider (more than this article permits) but the golden rule is cheap is definitely not always the best.

The quickest way to destroy the likelihood of rebuy is a pump that either doesn't work or won't dispense all the product in the bottle. Another challenge to consider is the quantity required for an ideal application and a pump that delivers product consistently and reliably.

Formulas with limited shelf life also affect pack design. The container size and its dispensing mechanism must directly relate to the average usage rate, so that the product content is exhausted before its expiry date.

Modern product formulas sometimes require 'airless' packaging. This packaging dispenses product without allowing air to penetrate the product cavity, and needs a speciality hunt for the correct components.

Speciality containers can become a strong differentiator for your product in the marketplace, but they come at a premium cost. Make sure you include those extra costs in your cost-of-goods calculations (more on this in my third article) and the ensuing retail price for the entire brand.

This look is outdated

Not all packaging succeeds. If it's poorly conceived, it can kill a brand as easily as launch one. Alternatively, as your brand evolves and grows, you may find that your much-loved brand look — that dress and shoes — no longer work, together or apart.

Mismatches can occur at any time. It's a little more tricky (and costly) with custom packs, but if you've started out using stock containers you may decide on a redesign once your volume (and profit) permits. Well-orchestrated, this can be an opportunity to relaunch your brand as well as introduce a new aspect, feature or differentiator that builds on the established strengths of your range.

Well established brands generally consider a repack, redesign or range extension every three to five years to revitalise the brand look and feel. Generally speaking, these are fairly major and time-consuming undertakings, especially with larger product ranges.

Regardless of what stage you're at in your brand journey, it's important to understand that a redesign is as important as the initial launch. A great redesign can add a whole new notoriety and sales volume to a brand; however many brands have lost customers by being too clever with a re-launch, so be thoughtful and realistic in your decisions.

Regardless of your design and component desires, there are many restrictions, laws and requirements in place that must be respected. Each country can have different legislative needs and the appropriate requirements need to be researched properly. In Australia I recommend www.productsafety.gov.au or a downloadable guide is available at www.accc.gov.au

Your brand wardrobe

The dress and shoes your product wears shouldn't be the only thing that reflects the design basics of your brand. Your entire wardrobe should reflect that ethos.

Your design ethos should be carried across the brand advertising, website, product brochures and point-of-sale, uniforms, offices, presentations, sales material and even through to the style of your communication in-field, to name just a few essentials.

While packaging won't make up for inherent product (positioning or formula) weaknesses, it can make your customers notice the product in the first place. It will also go a long way to supporting the overall brand promise.

Great branding permeates every aspect of what makes up your promise, how you deliver it and why you continue doing it, again and again. When everything works together your brand will undoubtedly stand out in the sea of grey, clearly distinguishing it from all others. ■

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PACK DESIGN LESSONS FROM APPLE

Apple, the world's most valuable brand, designs every product as if it's a work of art.

Every product has great packaging design. On opening, you're taken on a journey — an experience — that directly reflects how they want you to feel about their brand.

Five lessons that can be learnt from Apple design:

1. Champion simplicity
2. Turn the ordinary into the beautiful
3. Design a total user experience
4. Your pack validates your price
5. Become your brand

By spending as much time on the pack design as they do the product itself, they've made the purchase decision a snap and ensured that the box matches what's inside.

Numerous Apple fans not only keep their packaging post-sale, there are also legions of them that record the actual unwrapping process of their newly purchased Apple products.

It's called 'unboxing' and their avid fanaticism can be seen by searching it on YouTube.