

What Really Is Ownable?

The word “ownable” has crept into the package design community like many conveniently coined words or phrases before it. Designers are not shy about using jargon, and some firms even trademark their jargon.

“Ownable” is probably not trademarkable, and it is a bit clunky as far as common English usage is concerned, so I don’t think Merriam-Webster’s will add it soon. The common meanings, however, are not so far from “able to be owned,” often applied to a design element, logo, color, or package shape. In its most literal sense, a design element can be ownable if intellectual property law prevents a close copy. At the present time, Hershey is trying to protect, in court, the Reese’s brand from copycat packaging of a competitor. The lawsuit claims trademark dilution and infringement from a competitor’s use of a similar orange, brown, and tan color scheme.

The other common usage of the word in design has more to do with consumers’ perception of a brand. For this context, the meaning of ownable is: A design element, logo, color, or shape that most consumers familiar with a brand associate immediately with that brand, so much so that if that element were by itself, one would expect consumers to both recognize it, associate it with the brand, and have a positive reaction to it. The other side of the coin is that a design element is most ownable when there is no similar expression of it in the marketplace.

Two very different case studies of package redesigns in this issue illustrate this meaning. The formidable Beringer wine brand, along with the YARD design agency, recently replaced an un-ownable “script B” with an ownable, “intertwined double B” that the winery hopes will convey a modern classic. At the other end of the spectrum, a big valentine-style heart would not be many designers’ first choice of an ownable icon, but the new Corazonas snack foods package design surprises with its appeal and accessibility.

Ironically, both the resveratrol in Beringer’s red wine and the phytosterols in Corazonas snacks have been proven to lower “bad” cholesterol and be good for the heart. So let’s raise a glass to healthy, ownable design.

Best,



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FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome Changes

The primary goal of a package design “refresh” of an established brand is to lure new customers while making the change seem natural to existing customers. The most loyal fans of any brand can be easily put off by a design change, but how much and for how long is debatable. Or, one can ask, is that small percentage even worth worrying about?

More likely, though, there’s a part of that loyal fan inside all of that brand’s customers, both current and former. Rekindling interest in the brand then comes down to artfully executed package design that connects with consumers as a blend of the past, present, and future. Two features in this issue examine the delicate balance of modernizing “heritage” brands—Perdue and Luden’s.

The risk involved in making a significant break from the past may be lessening each year. Because of the frequency of package design changes that occur these days in the supermarket, consumers are less thrown off by any redesign—as long as it’s an evolution and not a revolution. If the parent brand is strong and the package change retains the core elements, consumers accept these changes as just business as usual. If this is true, then choosing core elements during a product launch—like a catchy, appropriate, and memorable product name—is even more important for the long-term success of a brand.

Consumer behavior in the modern era is certainly a moving target. Predicting shoppers’ expectations of a brand or package may be a futile attempt in the end, but most redesign initiatives still try to identify a brand’s prototypical consumer and address that person’s needs. It may be more advisable, though more complex, to segment target consumers into categories such as loyalists, occasional users, brand-neutral shoppers, etc.

In segmenting potential users of a product, one strategy of getting a brand or product off and running is targeting “early adopters” both on the retail shelf and through the Internet. Among the advantages of engaging early adopters is that they’re often more social than the rest of the population, what Malcolm Gladwell called “Connectors” in his book *The Tipping Point*. A more important advantage for designers is that early adopters are also usually active consumers who are eager to provide feedback to make the product, package design, or brand better.

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Where Fresh Ideas Come From

It's amazing how breakthrough structural innovation often provokes the reaction: Why didn't anyone think of that before? The truth is that there are very few actual "Eureka!" moments. Most inspiration comes, as they say, from perspiration.

It's paradoxical that asking consumers directly what they like—or don't like—about a package will usually yield few actionable insights. When placed in this context, consumers take on a designer's point of view, and that's precisely what researchers don't want. Getting at consumers' real behaviors and motivations is often an exercise in sheer perseverance.

Sometimes it takes a deep dive into observing repetitive consumer behaviors to discover an unmet need. Other times, it takes staring endlessly at an existing product or package until the unexpected becomes obvious. Sometimes it's finding the exact, specific question to get at consumer motivations. Other times, it's asking the broadest questions. Why are things the way they are? Is it just convention? Is there a better way?

This issue of *Package Design* finds many questions that, when asked in the right context, were the spark for innovative and refreshing design solutions, such as: Why are almost all boxes for round frozen pizzas square? (See page 18.) Can a curvy personal care bottle shape be unisex? (See page 22.) What balance is right when cobranding with a cause? (See Natural Inspirations on page 10.)

Of course, there are also long distances between answering these questions and creating package designs that work both on shelf and in consumers' homes. That's where perspiration and perseverance come into play.

This issue also kicks off the 2011 Makeover Challenge, sponsored by Brushfoil, which invites four design firms to reimagine an existing brand. This blue-sky exercise encourages experimentation and innovative concepts that might be ahead of their time. We wish the best of luck to the teams, profiled on pages 28 through 30, as the prize for the most popular brand redesign is a full feature in our November issue.

Best,



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Authentic Origins

By all accounts, consumers' B.S. meters are getting more sensitive every day. They can quickly tell when a claim on a package or the brand's positioning is stretching beyond the absolute truth. Some skeptical consumers have developed an instant, knee-jerk, negative reaction to even the slightest hint of impropriety.

Of course, some brands have a history of consistent quality that they can rely on to back up their position. However, a new brand or package that offers no explicit back-story, does not detail ingredient origins, or seems misleading often won't pass the smell test. Even when a brand is a quality, authentic product, a package can fall short in conveying that point of difference on shelf.

For a compare and contrast exercise on this point, visit the Snapshots section of this issue, on pages 10 and 12. On one hand, a true heritage brand from Bulgaria, Kamenitza, gets an artful update with many traditional authentic cues. On the other, the new Kitchens of Africa brand presents its authenticity with a modern flair, using repeated, suggestive motifs while mixing in colors and patterns that U.S. consumers would recognize as African in origin.

One way brand owners and package designers have responded to this need for authentic brand stories is by telling those stories, in text, on the package or having the company owner sign a short "letter" to the consumer. However, this type of information is often on the back panel. What's more of an art is to convey authenticity instantly—at the shopper's first glance—with front panel graphics, text, and hierarchy that are direct, informative, and accessible.

This was the task before the design teams in the 2011 Makeover Challenge, sponsored by Brushfoil, which invites four design firms to reimagine an existing brand. The Brazil Gourmet brand produces high-quality juices sourced and packaged in South America. The design teams rose to the Challenge by creating brand positions and package designs that translated Brazilian sensibilities for more palatable consumption by U.S. consumers.

We wish the best of luck to the teams as you, the readers, vote for your favorite redesign of Brazil Gourmet (www.packagedesignmag.com/MakeoverChallenge). The prize for the most popular brand redesign is a full feature in our November issue. May the most authentic team win!

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