10 Easy Packaging Improvements For More Sales In 08

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva

Well, we are into the New Year and everyone is making resolutions on how to improve in 08. In fact I just provided some easy packaging resolutions that you CAN keep. It's time to seriously think about your product and it's packaging too. Just like we do with our mental, emotional and physical aspects of our lives at this time of year, think about improving, updating or changing your product packaging. You want it to mesh with your consumer wants and needs. Consumers are a moving target and what worked last year may not work in the years to come or something may have changed externally that might influence the consumer such as the move to green and environmentally friendly product packaging.

Here are 10 simple things you can do to ensure your product packaging is on target and delivers the right message to the right audience.

1) Take an honest look at your product packaging. Is it working to your product's best advantage? Are there changes that you have put off making due to lack of time or money? Implement a plan to review one product at a time or a family of products if they are interrelated. An important factor to consider when making any changes is the continuity of the brand. Don't change for change's sake. That only serves to alienate the customer. Keep in mind that old established brands need refreshing too.

2) Give your product packaging to an outsider to review. Ask someone who knows nothing about your product and your packaging to evaluate it. Ask for an honest opinion of what they like or don't like and ask what they think might be missing. Ask them to be objective and honest. Many times product developers get caught up in their own opinions and it's good to get grounded with an outside consumer perspective. NOTE: Be objective about negative opinions. Delve in to the actual reason someone may not like your packaging. Best case scenario hire an expert one who understands packaging and branding intimately.

3) Go to at least five different retail outlets and look for comparable or competitive products and assess their shelf appeal. Is there a particular characteristic that appeals to you? It could be color shape, innovative design. Determine if you think their packaging is better than yours. What stood out in your mind about that particular package? NOTE: You don't want your product packaging to mimic the competition. INSIDERS TIP: Play dumb and ask another shopper to make a decision about which product they like best. Then ask them why they chose that package. Keep in mind you won't satisfy everyone no matter what you do.

4) Step back from your product on the shelf at least five feet. Does your product stand out among the competition or is it awash in a sea of sameness? Is it difficult to distinguish one product from another? Is there a USP (unique selling proposition) that makes your product more interesting or more consumer friendly? Note: Many private label brands trade on brand recognition from the branded product. If your packaging goes that route, make sure you are not copying or infringing on someone else's design or trademarked product packaging. You can't be too careful in this arena as the CPG companies are loosing share to private label products they will be watching for look alikes or copycat packaging.

5) Walk the isles out side your product category. Look for crossover innovations that can be utilised in your existing product. Look for new ways of dispensing

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a product such as the stick gum that moved into a larger number of pieces and a convenient carry cup holder. An innovative packaging concept that changes what people buy is what you are trying to capture. Think of past innovations that have revolutionised the industry such as reclosable zippers or pre-washed ready to eat produce. Entire markets have been built around these innovations

6) Review trends and predictions for your industry. Is your product packaging in line with where the industry is going? Is your market moving in a new direction or are outside influences driving what is happening to product packaging? A good example is the current movement toward 'green' product packaging. Will this fit your product and where your business is moving? Are you so specialised or in such a small niche that you may be alienating many potential market opportunities?

7) Read from cover to cover at least two industry publications. Pay special attention to marketing case studies or product makeovers. Look for new innovations or ideas that you can incorporate into your existing product packaging. Read the ads too. They always showcase the latest industry innovation. Several publications specialise in telling the story of how companies improved their product packaging. Take their lessons to heart.

8) Subscribe to the industry blogs, e-zines and newsletters relevant to your product. Don't subscribe . . . read them. Pick one or two that you like or that provide pertinent information and discard the rest. There is such a thing as too much information that can either confuse you or make it impossible to make a decision because there is always a new and a better package out on the market. I'm always on the lookout for good packaging blogs so if you uncover one be sure and drop me a line.

9) Plan to attend at least one industry trade show or conference. There are lots to choose from. If you are looking for packaging insights and innovation sustainability, please be sure to attend Best Practices in Sustainability - Top Trends, Tips and Takeaways from Thought leaders in green retailing Tuesday, February 26, 2008, 6:30-9:30 am – Embassy Suites, Rogers, AR I will be presenting Sustainable Packaging - From 'Green' to 'Great'.

10) Last but not least think about ways to improve your product packaging. Make it easier for the consumer to use, find, carry, store, open, consume or find important information about your product. Some of the simplest innovations can revolutionise an industry though innovative product packaging. Innovation drives the industry with new product offerings and a better way to package existing products.

Whether you can accomplish all ten tasks or just a few, the most important issue is that you decide to move forward one packaging step at a time. Let's face it. Consumers are a fickle bunch. It doesn't take much to turn them off. In fact, you only have 2.6 seconds to turn them on. That is how long you have to persuade them to buy your product and the only way to do that is through compelling packaging. Make some easy improvements this year to increase your sales. Remember, your package is your number one salesperson and once you have lost the opportunity you may never get it back.

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