

Is Packaging Innovation The Chicken Or The Egg?

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva



It's a long-standing quandary, which came first the chicken or the egg? It's sort of like that with consumer product packaging innovation. Let's face it. We are all in advertising overload.

We see nearly 3,000 marketing messages a day. So what's a poor packaging professional supposed to do? Develop the product then the package or vice versa. No matter the answer, it's evident that conventional packaging doesn't sell products or at the very least it produces flat sales. According to some of my latest research, the packaging may not sell the product at all in the future.

In preparation for a presentation on packaging innovation, I decided to poll my network about what they believe to be new in packaging innovation for consumer products. I posed these questions to my audience:

What is your definition of packaging innovation for consumer products? Have you seen any recent packaging examples that you consider truly different and why are they unique? If you could invent it what new types of new product packaging would you like develop?

Big mistake! Maybe I should say it was a true learning experience. You think I could have anticipated some of the responses. Remember, I have been researching packaging as a marketing tool for years. Most of the responses I received were not favorable to the packaging community.

One thing is clear. Our beloved 'packaging' is under attack by the consumer. They just don't understand it.

A couple of surprising points came from this exercise.

1) The packaging professionals didn't seem at all concerned about this topic or for the most part wouldn't share their insights (non confidential of course) about the topic. I wonder if they are just too busy or they simply didn't care about packaging innovation.

2) The consumer (those people not in the packaging industry) registered loud and clear. They gave me the skinny on their dissatisfaction on everything from less packaging to 'wrap rage' induced by product packaging. They took the time to express their opinions.

So to what do we attribute this dichotomy of opinions? Package professionals are involved in the third largest industry in the US. It is 'packaging' and we are confident that we know what the consumer needs (or so we think).

Uninformed consumers are unhappy, outraged, dissatisfied and just plain angry with the packaging industry and it's our fault. Our industry has done very little to educate the consumer about why they need packaging and what role it has to play in modern society. What about the consumer perceptions? These are sadly going downhill. With the holidays, we get a flurry of editors writing about 'wrap rage.' In addition with the 'green movement' we are getting protest of environmentally unfriendly, excess packaging and so on.

But the truth is consumers need packaging innovation. They need all of the benefits it has to offer with threats such as product integrity and security, country of origin issues and so on.

So who is going to answer these dilemmas? Smart packaging professionals who will use packaging innovation to the consumers' benefit. They will educate and inform consumers that the package is a whole lot more than what it seems to be on the surface.

To answer the age old chicken or egg quandary. Packaging has a perception problem which has to be resolved now. It is imperative that we 'connect' with the consumer before the egg or the chicken are either conceived or hatched. Otherwise, packaging will continue to face detractors and complainers and reinforce the negative consumer perceptions.

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