Packaging a product the right way

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva

Just because you have a great product doesn't mean its going to sell. Or even if you have it in the right retail environment that it's going to fly off the shelf. Your consumer is a moving target.

Packaging a product the right way entails much more than just creating a box to put your product in. Sure, you are going to get it there in one piece, we hope but gone are the days of the box acting as only a protective shipping container. The box today is the 'retail' salesperson. The box or package is expected to provide the necessary information to make an informed shoppers' decision. You have to get your customer to pick up your product first before they will buy it.

Here are 5 questions you must answer that will help you determine whether your product packaging will sell.

1. Who is your core consumer?

You have market trends, demographics and market niches that are continually evolving at any point in time. If you are not staying on top of these trends, then your product isn't 'connecting' to them with the right message. That core 'message' or the mechanism to speak human is one of the most important attributes of your product packaging.

Your product packaging must connect with your core consumer on multiple levels. Before you can sell anything you need to understand who they are.

2. What is the competitive environment for your product packaging?

So start your analysis by viewing your package from the eyes of the consumer. If you are buying it, what's going to compel you to pick it up off the shelf? Or is it just sitting there lost amongst rows of competitive products?

Think in terms your package calling out to you I'm here 'buy me, buy me.' Does your product do this? If not, your package isn't doing its job by persuading a consumer to purchase your product.

3. How does your consumer shop?

Do you know your customers current buying trends? Several years ago, we went through the supersized phase. There are still a lot of supersized packages; however, buying trends are changing to smaller sizes in general. To package smaller does not mean less profit, in many cases it means more. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for convenience, ease of use and a smaller quantity. Remember the three premium baking potatoes in a package cost almost the price of a 5 lb bag. If you live with just one other person, do you really need 5 lbs of potatoes?

Your package has to marry with your consumers lifestyles. If you don't know what that is then you can never develop the right product packaging that will appeal to them.

4. What is your packaging's USP- Unique Selling Proposition

70% of purchasing decisions are made in the store. And the decision whether to pick up your package or not is made in 2.6 seconds. That's a few seconds of retail sensory overload that is going to determine whether or not your product will sell. So, your package better have the RIGHT message geared towards the RIGHT audience.

Convey the information about what is inside and how it's going to help the consumer solve a problem. That's an important factor to remember. When someone looks at your product they are thinking, "What is this product going to do for me?" You know, WFFIM. That is the What's in it for Me consumer?

If you don't know the answer then your product will never connect with your core consumer.

5. What are the consumer hot buttons that your packaging must reflect?

In addition to environmental concerns consumers are concerned about labelling and product security. People are reading labels AND scrutinising them.

What it says on that label will influence whether they buy your product or not. The point being is that any high profile package or product will be looked at thoroughly by consumers. What you tell them better be the right message and true.

Watchdog groups abound and they are on the lookout for your product to make a mistake. Whether they deem you are marketing to an inappropriate market (EX: Spykes marketing liquor to children) or that your packaging isn't telling the whole truth (Ex: McDonald's and all the other fast food companies and fat content), it's sure to become newsworthy and in the worst case scenario could seriously impact your business.

What about product security and integrity? Given the rash of recent product recalls (for a variety of reasons) product security has become paramount. States could enact legislation or at the very least mandate that your product packaging has a tracking device. Now this is not the same as RFID; similar but not the same. The latest devices allow you to track products all the way back to the field it was grown in and it provides a track back for every step along the way.

Could a product recall put your business in jeopardy?

All these questions need to be answered and not just with the initial package design, its an ongoing process. As I mentioned at the beginning the consumer is a moving target and your package has to move along with them in the right direction. Be sure the consumer you are trying to capture continually receives the right message.

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