Not Ready for Prime Time Packaging

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva

It's 08 - Are your packaged products ready for prime time? Here are a few insightful tips to help you out.

There are many packaging issues afloat in the minds of the consumer. We just came off the traditional 'wrap rage' cycle that stirs everyone into a frenzy around the holidays. Be aware that it's still an issue to contend with in the minds of the consumer. Clamshells, twist ties and difficult to open packages still get mileage in the media.

Packaging has many detractors. We are getting serious scrutiny from everyone in the realm of environmental sustainability, less packaging, more environmentally friendly packaging, save the earth packaging and so on. Every week I read about a new packaging crusade that is supposed to solve our environmental woes. But I have been researching for an upcoming presentation Sustainable Packaging – From Green To Great. The lack of new packaging innovation to solve the problem is quite distressing.

Most of what I am seeing revolves around the same supplier using the same packaging materials. Unfortunately, a lot of it is smoke and mirrors that touts 'green' but does not back it up with true sustainable documentation. There are a few good examples of innovation. In researching environmentally friendly lipstick tube examples, the results were woefully inadequate. 'Cargo Plant Love Biodegradable Lipstick' was the only company I discover (with a great marketing story I might add).

So, I pose these questions to all product packaging developers. How green are you? Do you want to be? Do your consumers and your target demographic even care whether you are green or not? This is going to be one of the prime time packaging issues in 08 so you better make some serious strides in deciding what you want your product packaging to reflect.

Another key matter will be product security, integrity and product origination. (AKA - The Made in China Syndrome) Currently the Made in China tag is becoming a political hot button. One of the trends I am starting to see is a China backlash. Products made and packaged in China are coming back to the US. Some companies are using China Free on their product packaging as a marketing tool.

People are reading labels AND scrutinising them. What it says on that label will influence whether they buy your product or not. I just read that cloned meat will be coming on the market in a few years. At present, the FDA won't require food makers to label that their products came from cloned animals. ICK!! I'd want to know from the product packaging and, I believe, so would most consumers. 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 about 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.

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Consumers are fickle. What is a hot issue today may be gone tomorrow. However, in the interim if you are not on target with the right packaging message you may alienate them or force them to buy a competitor's product because your packaging is not sending the right packaging message.

So, before you embark on any new packaging campaign in 08 understand and incorporate into your product packaging what the consumer wants to know about the product. Be sure your packaging is ready for prime time to the right consumer with the right marketing message.

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