

What a Packaging Makeover Can Do For Your Company

Recently, some of the world's best-known companies have revamped their images through a radical redesign of their product packaging. Just how successful have these makeovers been?

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Branding consists of a range of different but strongly interconnected activities that are all geared towards creating a lasting, positive impression in the minds of consumers that will ultimately be good for business. Branding experts like Richard Bates, Senior Partner and Executive Creative Director of the Brand Integration Group (BIG) at Ogilvy & Mather, stress that the branding process is like telling a story, and absolutely everything contributes to the narrative.

Product packaging, though just one part of the process, is considered the most important by many. "Packaging is the number one medium to communicate the brand," states Laurent Hainaut, founder of design agency, Raison Pure. "You need to pay attention to this area in your branding strategy because it is the first thing someone sees, touches, and essentially buys. Packaging is often more than a medium -- it can be part of the product."

Many companies aim to rebrand themselves: revamping their image and attracting a new or wider audience, primarily by calling in design experts to modify their product packaging and their overall look.

Anaezi Modu, founder of Rebrand, strongly emphasizes the importance of packaging in the process of rebranding, however she cautions: "Rebranding a product isn't just about repackaging. Branding is a holistic experience and packaging is a key part of the overall branding process -- it has to be consistent with what the brand stands for."

She adds: "Packaging cannot be done in isolation. It's all about who a company is, what it is targeting, what its challenges are... Employees have to be incorporated into the repackaging process because quite often they are the first line of contact and the company has to be aware of the message that is being communicated at every single point of contact."

Case in point: the Brand Integration Group's work for Motorola. "Motorola came to us around the time that they realized that cell phones aren't just electronics -- they are symbols of fashion and lifestyles," recalls Bates. He explains that BIG's approach to the Motorola project was to treat a cell phone like "a precious object, a piece of jewelry," and package it accordingly.

Bates points out that with up-scale retailers like Tiffany, half of what the consumer pays for is a beautiful blue box with a white bow. "Packaging has the potential to make or break a product." He cites the iPhone and Chanel's packaging as examples, explaining that the high sheen lacquer finish of the latter's cosmetic product packaging "fingerprints like crazy: when I watch a woman hold a Chanel compact, she is constantly burnishing it and making it beautiful. The nature of the packaging engages the consumer with the product -- the interaction just adds to the story." He also surmises that the black polishing cloth included with the iPhone could elicit a similar consumer product relationship.

The branding experts who talked to Fast Company seem to unanimously agree that companies that want people to pay a premium for their products need to package them accordingly. But repackaging does not necessarily imply addition or enhancement: "Sometimes it's about stripping away the layers to discover why a product was successful in the first place, about finding the core element and unleashing it from the burdens of some of its marketing initiatives," explains Bates.

He cites Senior VP at Johnson & Johnson Chris Hacker's handling of a project to differentiate Rembrandt from other toothpastes as a prime example of rebranding through simplification. "The approach to Rembrandt consisted of pulling back -- communicating something simple and clean. The new strategy gave them a bold, fresh look and saved the company all the money it would otherwise have spent on glitter-ink."

A simple end result does not necessarily imply a simple process of creation and implementation, however -- even a basic branding strategy aimed at producing clear, bold messages and design needs to be a multi-faceted team effort in order to be effective. "Good packaging is the result of good collaboration between marketing, advertising, design, the supply chain and other teams. It is a very complex process that involves several teams and levels of people," states Hainaut.

"There are several questions that have to be asked," he adds. "Is the packaging telling the story we need it to tell? Is it telling the right story for the particular category it falls into? Are we using the right language for that category? How can we expect to differentiate our product but also stay true to our brand? How can we differentiate between different products within our own brand? There are various levels of communication, multiple analyses of the kind of messages we want to deliver and the point at which we want to deliver them. These are derived from research, ethnography, qualitative studies, and industry experts."

Recently, a slew of prominent brands have attempted a rebrand largely, though not always solely, through a focus on repackaging their products. A few names in particular were recognized by the ReBrand 100, which gives global awards in recognition of the world's most effective rebrands, or recommended by branding experts.

Millicare

Honored by the Rebrand 100 Global Awards in 2006, Millicare, a green friendly corporate carpet and textile maintenance franchise, was rebranded by design firm The Moderns.

The company's main challenge was apathy in the carpet cleaning market and a lack of brand recognition stemming from the fact that Millicare mostly operated in office facilities during off-hours. The Moderns' approach: "Because Millicare had a limited budget, we advised them to look at their vehicles and product packaging as billboard applications and marketing tools. If someone sees a Millicare van or comes across a product that has been left behind, we want them to clearly know that it belongs to Millicare," explains Kevin Szell, Design Director and Partner at The Moderns.

The aim was to develop a clear identity and visual presence for Millicare through a comprehensive rebranding, of which packaging was a prominent component. Szell explains that originally, the bottles were clear and revealed the liquids inside, some of which were not particularly attractive colors. The Moderns recommended that all packaging be made consistent and opaque. It also developed a labeling system of color-coded numbers that took into account the fact that many Millicare employees are not native English speakers.

Dove

Laurent Hainaut, the founder of Raison Pure, identifies two primary areas that Dove needed to address through a repackaging: image and inconsistency. "Dove was a soap/cleansing brand rather than a beauty brand. The packaging reflected this -- it was more convenient than cosmetic and sleek," states Hainaut. Raison Pure worked to evolve the company's packaging to follow the evolution of its brand message from cleansing to beauty.

The brand was also disorganized internationally: "Products in different countries showed the Dove logo flying in different directions. A major reason to redesign was to achieve consistency," he explains. The challenge was to create an image that was relevant across geographic and cultural boundaries to appeal to all women.

Additionally, a further challenge was ensuring consistency across Dove's different product categories in a manner that would still allow for consumer differentiation. Raison Pure's intent was to achieve this consistency and also find a brand identity for Dove that respected the languages and codes of every category.

Rembrandt

After Johnson & Johnson bought the Rembrandt brand about 18 months ago, its aim was to radically rebrand the oral healthcare line. Spearheaded by Chris Hacker, J&J developed a repackaging plan reflecting its belief that the category was ready for a more sophisticated approach -- one that went beyond hygiene and transitioned Rembrandt into the beauty arena in a manner that was similar to the space occupied by skincare products.

"Repackaging was really at the heart of the relaunch," emphasizes Carmen Nestares, Product Director for the Rembrandt. "The feeling was that there was a good opportunity in the oral healthcare category to have a brand that was a mix of emotion/aesthetics and functionality. Women tend to have a special connection with their cosmetics and we wanted them to feel that with their toothpaste too. The aim is to make people feel pampered and special, like they just bought a product that is found at a boutique instead of a department store."

With that in mind, the packaging was revamped: while the old box was silver, shiny and overrun by copy and pictures of people's smiling faces, the new boxes are simple, uncluttered and white in color, with more contemporary font and a big logo. In stark contrast to the white exterior, the new boxes are vibrantly colored inside. They also open at the top instead of on the side like other toothpaste boxes: "We want people to feel like they are opening a gift, like they are treating themselves to something when they open the box," explains Nestares.

Wellington Cordage

Wellington Cordage brought on design firm Proteus to differentiate the company from its competitors, whose ropes and cordage were all packaged similarly.

Charlie Conn, VP of Branding, and Tom Feehley, VP of Marketing Strategy at Proteus, told Fast Company that the design firm's role went well beyond repackaging to an entire revamping of Wellington's messages, tag lines, logo and overall identity. Recalls Charlie: "Wellington had been in existence for about 150 years. At one point the leadership of the company decided to go global, so they used a globe with the name of the company as a logo. It kind of looked like a financial services company. We told Wellington that they had a far bigger issue than packaging and merchandising. There was a brand problem -- they weren't expressing who they were and what they stood for. They weren't differentiating themselves from the crowd. We recommended a whole new positioning for the brand."

He adds: "Their packaging was very focused on the technical side of things and most consumers are pretty untechnical. Most of the industry was stuck

in the very low-end rope and cordage because there was no difference in the packaging -- people would just go and grab the first thing off the shelf."

Feehley explained that Proteus's repackaging suggestions were based on its discovery that while conventionally, rope had been packaged to communicate either the material it was made from or the application for which it would be used, in fact consumers were most interested in how strong the product was -- this was found to be a far greater consideration than price. Additionally, consumers wanted to feel the product they were buying.

Based on these insights, Feehley and Conn explain: "We created a whole merchandising system and packaging based on light, medium, heavy. We also decided to do away with the plastic bag and go with a branded storage strap to hold the rope together instead. This had long-lasting implications because when the rest of the packaging was thrown away, this continued to identify the rope as a Wellington product."

Kleenex

The Kleenex repackaging story is somewhat different from the others, because the original signature rectangular Kleenex box continues to exist. Kimberly Clark did, however, decide to also package its tissues in an oval box, the aim being to "bring the tissue box out of the bedroom and bathroom, and into the living room," according to Joey Mooring, Manager of Corporate Communications for Kimberly Clark.

"The oval packaging was based on the realization that consumers have begun paying far more attention to design and style. It has become almost a minimum expectation that elements of style and design are incorporated into everyday products," explains Steve Erb, Senior Brand Manager for Kleenex. "The aim was also to attract younger consumers by offering different designs. Historically Kimberly Clark has chosen designs that are well-established, but in this case we consciously went a bit more trend forward--selecting designs that were more on the cutting edge of design and fashion," he adds.

The company reports that the new design did so well that the boxes, which were first released as holiday editions, were the top sellers of all facial tissues in the weeks prior to the holidays.

Additionally, recognizing an increasing consumer trend towards customization, Kleenex has taken things a step further, with a service that allows customers to design their own tissue boxes. States Erb, "We recognize that the package is almost as important as the tissue inside because essentially, it's the package that's displayed around the home."

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