‘Packing’ a punch

Packaging needs to move beyond being an afterthought in the marketing mix. Some brands are finally waking up to the fact that packaging can have a very strong impact on sales at the last mile.

Meghna Sharma

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packaging that moves beyond being an afterthought in the marketing mix. Some brands are finally waking up to the fact that packaging can have a very strong impact on sales at the last mile.

Food products, for instance, get judged more on the base and ingredients mentioned on the pack, but in several categories, the look, design, color, and print get as much attention as the product itself. The need for brands to take cognizance of the science of good packaging has never been more crucial.

Packaging today has to do much more than just protect the product. It has to communicate, engage, and be part of the brand and the consumer.

Two years ago, there were very few brands in the country that were telling stories on the back, front, or the side of the packs. We took packaging as an opportunity to do so, by placing our products in ‘communication’. This led to a significant improvement in our sales.

Packaging is the silent salesperson. It is the silent ambassador of the brand. It is the silent warrior in the market. It is the silent salesman. It is the silent partner. It is the silent ... (text continues)

Packaging in recent years has come under the spotlight as consumers have started to realize its importance.

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in making it more human, more fun, and more friendly.

While bottles, jars, and cans were the norm, Paperboat's packaging is lighter, more compact, and more easily transportable, and had a 16% lesser carbon footprint than all other forms of drinks packaging in the market. "Two years ago, there were few brands in the country that were telling stories on the back, front, or the side of the packs. We took packaging as an opportunity to do so, by placing our products in "communication". This led to a significant improvement in our sales."

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Though different brand owners have different approaches to, and opinions about research—how much, what type, how extensive etc.—it would be unusual (and possibly even reckless) not to do research before committing to a pack redesign. United Spirits’ Royal Challenge refreshed its packaging and communication to cater to the newer breed of Indians who are hold, determined and spontaneous, says the company’s CMO Aamit Thomas. “Brands that invest in understanding consumer needs, evolve with speed, innovate through consumer-aligned products and positioning, are more likely to win the hearts and wallets of consumers.”

Innovative variants

The need to understand the impact of striking a balance between innovation design and functionality in order to deliver a package that can impact sales positively and help build the brand’s and in some instances even new categories, is very essential. Consumers are demanding more innovative packaging, that is, smaller sizes, or at price points that suit their pockets, or even packaging that allows them more convenience. Packaging can also help drive occasions of consumption—“vericello” varieties such as a queso pack for ketchup or ‘party’ packs (carbomated soft drinks branded ‘hang out’ packs (chips brands); ‘family’ packs (Cadbury’s, or ice creams); packs for ‘famous’ (Cadbury’s Shoor or even Domin- o’s Pizza’s ‘gift’ packs, and much more. Furthermore, there are innovations in the size, shape, opening and closure, in secondary packaging.

Mondelēz constantly tries to refurbish its packaging. Last year’s packing revamp was the 21st redesign in the brand’s 108-year history. “Packaging plays an important role in creating brand identity & recall and shall impact across product groups,” asserts Sameer Mohendrodeo, senior manager, R&D & Material Equipment Interaction—Asia Pacific, Mondelēz International, while stating the example of Cadbury Glow, which is crafted exclusively in Bratislava (Slovakia). The gold and purple packaging is reminiscent of a treasure chest that glows from the inside out, filled with chocolates. Varitika Hail, head, qualitative research at Mindshare Brown, believes that packaging that lends to an overall consumer experience of the brand is great packaging and states the example of Apple. “From the time you hold the pack and discover the brand inside...all of it is a heightened experience and it comes at a cost,” she says, adding, “Maybe that’s why some Indian brands are unable to utilise heighten the experience, since you add in my element of the experience, the prod- uct cost will only go up.” And the dichotomy is, most FMCG categories are seeking to deliver more affordable products to the end consumer. Huge constraints in buying power, logistics and retail formats have so far limited many innovations. The economies of things has been a clear driver for certain types of packaging. Hence, it im- pacts the percentage of a product cost that is allotted towards packaging by certain brands. While for some, the pack- aging component of a product could be 15-30% of the product’s MRP; others allot as low as 2%.

This in re- turn also brings in to ex- amine how some Indian manu- facturers don’t pay the same at- tention to the quality of the pack, as they do to the product. Design, colours and the logo are usually taken care of and here evolved, but mono and bottle caps break or come loose or don’t last as long as the container. Quality, therefore, is key and good really is in the details, for an overall brand experience.

Role of technology

A growing market need for food packaging is to give foods the highest level of protection. To allow for flexibility in another reason brands are innovating. The after- math caused by the Needle’s Maggi fiasco brought to notice that consumers are also increasingly concerned about what is in- side the package—whether the featured ingredients, or whether it contains preservatives and chemicals, for instance. “Brand owners are looking for attractive, distribution-friendly, retaile- friendly packaging options that protect food best while retaining taste and nutrition and giv- ing a great product experience—which is why aesthetically processed and packaged foods in tetra pak cartons for example are a fast-growing segment,” says Kandarp Singh, MD, Tetra Pak South Asia Markets. There have been many technological in- novations in the field of packaging. One of the most important innovations has been the development of aseptic technology which has been hailed as the most impor- tant food science advancement of the 20th century by the highly renowned Institute of Food Technologists. However, since no legal enforcement in India is weak, the same global players who comply with stringent laws on packaging materials including food grade and low mi- gration inks in the rest of the world, sometimes use cheaper substrates and inks in India.

Points out Naresh Khanna, editor of Packaging South Asia and chief consultant of IGPstar, that the govern- ment needs to close the gap in the poor understanding of the issues of safety, health and environment in relation to both consumer products and the packaging industry. “For instance, the Indian govern- ment sometimes passes regula- tional orders without showing any sensi- ble plan or workable initiative for the col- lection, sorting and recycling of refuse and garbage of which packaging can be both a dangerous as well as a recover- able and recyclable component of val- ue,” Khanna says.

Most experts agree that technology for packag- ing should also consider the impact of packaging on the environment. To sum up, it may be relatively under- leveraged, unmined ‘P’ of Philip Kotler’s marketing mix, but the Indian marketing “juggler” habit has created enough space to learn from. Starting with paper based packaging for beverages, to aseptic packaging of milk, to a diverse packaging portfolio that caters to a variety of foods and consumer categories, the variety of packaging innovations have been a wel- come change for consumers,