

CLOSE/CLOSER



Close to the product – pack requires interesting content

Purposeful gradients: The packaging concept “Ikigai”, designed by the French-Australian design studio Blackthorns, includes design variants for different types of beer. The colorful and lively design with its purposeful gradients refers to the Japanese term “Ikigai” (reason for being).

aging design

Packaging design is continuously pushing the boundaries. This applies particularly to consumer goods brands where we see multiple trends, all designed to differentiate but also express brands more strongly. Where does the courage to do something different come from? Why is the design of packaging becoming more and more diverse? And how does all of this fit with consumers who live and shop increasingly in a digital world?

A beer can in the shape of a champagne flute? Made of brushed aluminum and refined with delicate engraving, the look of the limited edition “Le Beck’s” is more than unusual. The campaign aimed to make canned beer a desirable choice at formal events, such as classical concerts or exhibition openings for example, Beck’s tastes divine, so the message. The concept, which the beer brand owes to the advertising agency group Serviceplan, demonstrates a new trend in packaging design – the courage to break the mold.

The fact that design diversity is increasing on the supermarket shelves can be attributed to consumers: well informed, aesthetically educated and media savvy, they expect an attractive appearance, entertainment, and variety as well as credible, transparent information about the product and brand from product packaging. The constant availability of all kinds of products via online shops means that the demands of consumers – and thus the competitive pressure of consumer goods brands – continue to rise.

Packaging design benefits from this: not only young start-ups, but also the large corporations have understood that the design of packaging can break the mold and stretch standards in order to differentiate brands and attract the attention of their target audience.



Natural pastel colors: Noble & Lore is a Swiss brand for naturally and ethically produced CBD wellness products. This is exactly what the elegant, pastel, natural-looking packaging design by A Project By, a design duo based in Athens and Berlin, represents.

Packaging design focuses on codes

A language of visual codes, designed to influence the customer's response to a product positively, is integral to packaging design. These codes appeal to the deepest human psyche in an attempt to make one product more appealing over another. Designers consider every aspect from size and shape to materials, color, fonts, illustrations and photo styles and, of course, the actual product and brand messaging.

Simply put, geometrical shapes are perceived as masculine and round shapes as feminine. A slim bottle shape tends to be perceived as a higher quality product compared to a round bottle.

Therefore, the job of a packaging designer is not only to protect the product but more importantly, to communicate. Similar to verbal communication, the interpretation of these codes largely depends on the context, the cultural background and social trends. Transparent packaging, for example, allows the consumer to see the product and is therefore popular for brands who want to gain consumer's trust. But these transparent foils come at a cost to the environment, which is why Barilla – the Italian pasta brand – aims to eliminate their foil window in favor of more sustainable paper packaging by the end of 2020. This clearly signals the priorities of a brand and, in itself, carries an important message.



Myths & legends: Design studio Moruba from Logroño, Spain, designed the label for a wine from Somontano. The horse represents the untamed, rich nature of the wine region.

The meaning of color can also change. For a long time, the color black stood for exclusivity and luxury – that is, until tech companies like Apple embraced the color white and elevated it to premium status. Similarly, brands that want to convey sustainability no longer rely solely on green, but increasingly also on shades of blue – a development that originates from the field of sustainable electric mobility. Trends from fashion and art also influence packaging design: muted pastel colors are currently big on the catwalks as well as on supermarket shelves. But what does that mean for confectionery brands since science suggests that strong primary colors are associated with a sweet taste?

Codes in packaging design can be used to specifically appeal to the target groups' expectations. Deliberately breaking out of familiar standards is another tried and tested method at a designer's disposal. It's attracting attention through targeted irritation. Something Beck's cleverly explored when they introduced the flute-shaped beer can. The shape of the can implies that the content is of the highest quality, simply because of the association of the flute with champagne.

Design meets science

The demands on packaging design are high because consumers make a product choice in a matter of seconds. 70% of purchasing decisions are made in-store in front of the shelf



Irritation, friction, breaking the mold: The “Le Beck’s” beer can, in the shape of a champagne flute, challenges perception. The special edition can was designed by Serviceplan from Munich.



Christine Lischka, Managing Partner of Serviceplan Design in Hamburg, has years of experience as a packaging designer.

and decisions are primarily driven by emotions. This is why neuromarketing plays an important role in packaging design: It uses brain research and psychology findings to advertise more efficiently.

Studies show that emotional triggers and needs of consumers differ greatly according to gender, age and personality. Therefore, this deep customer insight can be used in packaging design to connect with the target audience on a deep emotional level – and encourage them to buy.

Christine Lischka, packaging designer and managing partner at Serviceplan Design in Hamburg, has developed packaging for incontinence pads – a taboo subject. Studies show that incontinence in France is perceived almost as embarrassing a topic as adultery; in Germany, the topic is even more shameful than unemployment.

“Our aim was to use our design to give affected women the feeling that incontinence does not question their femininity and dignity,” explains Christine Lischka. Empathy is an essential pre-requisite for good packaging design, but it’s no substitute for creativity.

Once the requirements of the target groups have been identified, the designers begin to translate the product messages into suitable codes. Christine Lischka works with semiotics, the study of signs: “The ability to understand,

use and design signs is one of the core competencies of a designer.” The trick is to use visual codes that are easy to understand, relevant and attractive for the target group.

Lischka replaced the unpleasant light yellow of the old incontinence pad packaging with a confident pink. In addition, she introduced photos of women wearing attractive underwear reminiscent of lingerie adverts. Featuring people was a novelty in this product category, which immediately boosted sales of sanitary towels.

Stories and attitudes

People love stories – that’s why storytelling in packaging design is ideal for differentiating brands. The function of the marketing tool here is to coherently interlink product features with the brand image. Compelling stories can be about ecological production processes, regional ingredients, interesting company history, or a comment on current events – like the Wolfskraft campaign, for example.

In the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Bavarian craft beer brand, together with the design and branding agency Peter Schmidt Group, created a small run of special edition labels on which their logo, a wolf’s face, was wearing a face mask. Employees of the Bavarian craft beer brand distributed this ‘after-work beer’ free of charge to doctors, supermarket employees, postmen and women



“All packaging should be smart and sustainable”

Olaf Barski, founder of Barski Design, Frankfurt/Main

Mr Barski, you are not a brand strategist or advertiser, but a product designer. What makes your packaging design approach different from that of other agencies?

We offer structural packaging design. This means that we take a holistic look at the requirements of packaging design: concept, construction and sustainable production, as well as transport, storage and presentation of packaging, plus naturally the question how the user experiences packaging. For example: What should a smart box for insulin pens look like, while making sure it can be comfortably stowed away in a fridge, pulled out and closed again without damaging it? We focus on communication and branding at a later point in time. That's why our contacts on customer side are usually not marketing managers, but packaging engineers and, of course, the users.

What makes for good packaging design?

The choice of ecological materials, the manufacturing processes and disposal are more important than ever today. All packaging should be smart and sustainable. As a general rule: less is more.

An example?

We worked on a project for WMF, the famous kitchen- and table-ware brand. We were tasked to develop a cutlery set for young adults on the move. The result: a compact set, perfect for a picnic in the park, lunch in the office or for traveling. We developed a 'case', made from Ocean Plastic, which feels similar to felt and protects the rolled-up cutlery perfectly. Our concept envisaged that the case is not only part of the product, but also serves as packaging on the department store shelves.

The call for ecological, sustainable packaging is increasingly being heard in politics and business. Is this reflected in the nature of your projects, too?

Definitely. Avoiding waste has always been important in packaging design; driven by the ecological crisis, packaging design gains even more importance. It's therefore not surprising that we see an increase in research projects to identify sustainable materials and production processes and matching these with consumers' demands and trends of the future.



Less is more – sustainability: the Frankfurt design studio Barski Design has created to-go cutlery for WMF that doesn't require any packaging. The roll-up case, made from Ocean Plastics, looks high-quality, embodies the brand values, and protects the product.

and other key workers. The campaign was so well received that Wolfscraft made the label available on Instagram and Facebook for customers to print out and stick on beer bottles themselves.

Storytelling creates moments of identification

“Vegan, exotic or organically grown: Today, people define themselves by what they eat,” explains Ulrich Aldinger, Creative Director at the Peter Schmidt Group in Munich. Good storytelling makes it easy for consumers to identify with a brand and its products. If it is easy for people to understand what a brand is really about, like-minded people are much more likely to engage across the wide range of channels available these days. In particular, younger generations are sensitive to the fact that the brands they surround themselves with, not only share their environmental concerns, but also act responsibly too and aspire to create a world and society to be proud of for generations to come.

Simpler, clearer, louder: packaging becomes instagrammable

Our everyday life is increasingly taking place virtually – on social media, when shopping online or in video conferences. This also affects packaging design. “We have to take the digital representation of packaging design into account,” says Ulrich Aldinger. The design must be scalable to work on mobile devices, in different digital channels and at



Clear and simple: The Peter Schmidt Group from Munich has designed a clean packaging design for Eilles' tea range, that convinces with its clear and simple design, making it also easy to read in an online shop.



Characterful hand lettering: Designed by the Peter Schmidt Group, the packaging from el origen's organic crisps is based on artisanal design, suggesting a careful, natural production methods.

different sizes. The message on the packaging must be recognizable even in the smallest Instagram pictures. This requires clear and simple packaging design: simplistic designs, clearly structured layouts, concise messaging and strong ideas. It's becoming more and more important to stand out on crowded shelves and noisy social media and shopping platforms.

As a result, packaging design relies on ever stronger visual stimuli.

Common sense(s)

The digital world primarily stimulates our sense of vision. As a result, our appreciation for the physical, multisensory experience seems to have increased. This is also noticeable in packaging design, reports Christine Lischka: Recent market research for baby care products showed that the importance of the physical experience of unpacking has increased. The test audience perceived ornate embossing, textures and fine smells of packaging much more consciously than before. And, what does that mean? Brands are increasingly open to engaging all senses of the audience to gain an advantage.



Colorfully elegant: Designed by Zoo Studio in Barcelona, this chocolate packaging by Melissa Coppel looks elegant despite its bright color palette – helped by the use of gradients and delicate gold dots.

GMG's innovative color management solutions help ensure that the leading packaging designers' creative concepts can be reliably produced across all processes – with the exact color result customers have approved.