

True Packaging Innovation – Reality or Just a Dream?

by Stephen Birtsas

For any consumer packaged goods (CPG) company, innovative packaging can set a product apart from the competition and help ensure the success of a new product launch. But the challenge of coordinating packaging development with product launch schedules, strict retailer requirements and consumer research often stands in the way of true packaging innovation.

Retailers have strict packaging requirements for sustainability, design, size and configuration. Fail to meet these requirements, or fail to differentiate your package from the competition, and a product is less likely to get a preferred shelf location, end cap or promotion. Worse yet, a new product with a poorly designed package may not even be carried by the retailer.

To consistently and effectively deliver strong packaging innovation, CPG companies must define a comprehensive packaging strategy that includes:

- Integration and alignment of product development activities with packaging development activities
- True integration of packaging design with packaging development - so packaging is first designed for function, aesthetics and shopability and then developed to meet design objectives
- Compliance with retailer requirements and corporate sustainability goals
- Alignment to the organization's supply chain strategies
- Product data management that improves claims management, translations and labeling
- Voice of the customer input from consumer research and other sources

Most companies only dream of a strategy like this, but it can be a reality. Companies that deliver on true packaging innovation have made some basic changes to their principles, processes and technology. Here are just a few.

Packaging is not an afterthought

Change the old school mentality that a package is an afterthought of the product. Packaging can't be an afterthought; it must be designed and developed in conjunction with the product. The mentality of "just put it in a box, slap a label on it and sell it" simply doesn't cut it.

Packaging design is more than artwork

Companies need to eliminate the "throw it over the wall" mentality when working with a creative group and realize that packaging design is more than just designing packaging artwork. Packaging design should be viewed as a comprehensive approach that integrates structural packaging design, artwork development, color and material selection, printing and filling process, and sourcing decisions.

Companies must establish true cross functional collaboration between designers, engineers, marketers, buyers and suppliers throughout the design and development process. The best performers go one step further by establishing packaging business processes that support cross functional collaboration. They enable these processes with specialty software applications and design tools that support automated workflow and virtualization of packaging designs.

Product data must be the foundation for confident labeling and claims management

A simple labeling error can create a major product recall or cause thousands of dollars to be lost on obsolete inventory or rework. When companies successfully implement product data management capabilities and integrate packaging data with product data, they are able to improve the time required to generate labeling and reduce compliance and legal risks associated with labeling errors.

To be successful, CPG companies need to be ready for changes to their organizational design and be willing to invest in the appropriate resources including people, business processes and software tools.

What's Your View?

Is true packaging innovation achievable? Where did you start – people, process, tools, or all at the same time? We'd like to know how you're executing your packaging design and development, and making the changes you need to support these efforts.

Originally published on July 24th, 2012

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