

Patterns

about design in consumer packaging

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Patterns

about design in consumer packaging

First edition

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Foreword

If you are a manager, marketing professional, package designer or student about to begin a brand or package design initiative, it's essential to be aware of context.

R.BIRD Patterns™ reports draw from professional experience and observations, providing insight into design and communication practices within given product categories.

Armed with digital cameras and note pads, our designers visit retail environments to photograph, “live and on-shelf,” product presentation in natural habitats. We bring the evidence back for closer study in search of common design trends to find new areas of opportunity.

These reports have become more interesting and curious over time. Some of the brands no longer exist. Much of the packaging has been redesigned once, twice or more... and sometimes changed back.

It's educational and entertaining to compare where product images have come from with where they are, today.

R.BIRD Patterns™ was born at the intersection of opportunity and curiosity.

We were proposing a redesign for a line of organizers and calculators. The best way to convince our client of the need for change was to show why and how.

The “Organizers & Calculators” report was the result. We had established a valuable methodology that day, which has been applied to many R.BIRD projects.

R.BIRD Patterns reports are referenced in colleges and universities around the world as a model for exploration and critique. Each page is a demonstration of critical thinking, drawing conclusions and creating hypotheses from easily recorded evidence.

This book is a collection of R.BIRD Patterns reports made public from 2002 to 2007. Especially for this printing, these reports have been refreshed with additional observations and new galleries of product images from which the reader can make new observations and recommendations.

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Overview



Overview

Our observations included consideration of the brands and packaging shown above - and more. These products were found on-shelf in mass-market retail, specialty shops, big box superstores or online retailers.

Storytelling



Storytelling

Tea and its origins, varieties and cultures is rich in heritage. Nonetheless, there seems to be a dearth of storytelling that plays a prominent role in packaging of tea.

We attribute this to a fundamental difference between Eastern and Western cultures. Let's face it. Western cultures have far to go and much to learn, while Eastern cultures span thousands of years. In that context, history is treasured and trumpeted.

Response

Western culture, too often, favors quick commercialization above honored heritage in its product marketing and packaging. There's a huge opportunity for brand-building in the tea category, particularly, as the west becomes more knowledgeable about the beverage.

Storytelling is a way to build understanding and demand for authenticity and quality of experience.

Asian Influences



Asian Influences

Many of us associate the Eastern hemisphere with the origin of tea, including: China, India, Ceylon and Japan. The use of background patterns, graphic shapes, typographic styles and iconic figures of these regions creates an association with time and place that enhances perceived authenticity.

Response

The use of authentic images and symbology in packaging for tea also creates a promise that the product will live up to the expectations created through visual cues.

Overview



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Product Illustration



Product Illustration

One of the most effective ways to communicate crunch is through close-up photography or detailed illustration. Carefully placed illustrations along with “missing bite”, cereal-on-a-spoon and torn package pours are a few tricks that continue to work.

Response

While designers often cringe at the thought of using these cliché product presentations, marketers hate to mess with success. When illustrated or photographed in a unique style, consumers respond positively to mouth-watering product images.

White Space



White Space

Several brands use a clean white field to provide contrast and let the product image communicate crunch more effectively. This unadorned presentation keeps the focus on the grain, texture and nuances of the product.

Response

While presentation on white is an effective way to put focus on texture and grain, it also is a common technique among organic, or natural foods. Words like “clean”, “crisp” and “snappy” come to mind for packages using this technique.

Overview



Overview

Our observations included consideration of the brands and packaging shown above - and more. These products were found on-shelf in mass-market retail, specialty shops, big box superstores or online retailers.

Blue & Pink



Blue & Pink

The image on top is a lineup of major brands organized by color (ROYGBIV). The dominant color range is from blue-green to blue-violet, with a significant amount of presence in the pink range.

The two bottom images illustrate typical color distribution. The image on the right is a blurred version of the one on the left, demonstrating the overall effect color has on the shopping experience.

Response

Opportunity for differentiation exists in yellow, orange, and green. We'd focus on the brighter, cleaner, more energetic side of those colors to help lift the product away from the pegboard system and to further separate the product from the somewhat predictable blues and pinks that currently dominate the category.

Structure & Quality



Structure & Quality

High end refillable razors (top) are typically sold individually in unique blister packs or elaborate clam shells, calling attention to the longer lasting, higher quality nature of the product. Mid level disposables (middle) are sold in smaller quantities either in cardboard wraps or simpler blister card packages which borrow design cues from their more expensive siblings. Price conscious and bulk disposables are typically sold in bags thrown into bins at the bottom of the shelf. A lucky few are promoted to hangers where they can be seen.

Response

Packaging materials can say a lot about the expected quality of a product. Put it in a cheap bag and the expectation may likely be that the product inside is cheap, too. Borrow structural cues from higher price points to lift the perceived quality of the entire line. And question how the customer will store the package before the products inside are used. Is there a way to make a handsome package and a storage container in one?

Overview



Overview

Our observations included consideration of the brands and packaging shown above - and more. These products were found on-shelf in mass-market retail, specialty shops, big box superstores or online retailers.

Real Juice?



Real Juice?

Juice is sold under many names: Juice Drink, Juice Drink Blend, 100% Juice, etc. Combine that with the many ways in which juice is produced: Fresh Squeezed, From Concentrate, Not From Concentrate, Pasteurized, etc., and suddenly the consumer may be wondering, “what, exactly, is juice?”

Response

Terms like “100% Juice” or “not from concentrate” are signs of quality and health. Those who can make such claims, will do well to make them clearly visible. Those who can’t, would do better by focusing on the flavor components of their product.

Healthy



Healthy

Juice marketers try hard to promote their products as healthy. Specialty organics such as bionaturae (2) use a more natural color palette and classic, simple typefaces to project a natural, organic identity. Others use radiant sunbursts, fresh green leaves, heart motifs, and banners indicating the nutritional benefits to underscore the healthy aspect of their products.

Response

It's not just bullet points and facts that convince a health-conscious buyer. Intangible and emotional cues can project a "healthy" or "natural" message on multiple levels.

Overview



Overview

Our observations included consideration of the brands and packaging shown above - and more. These products were found on-shelf in convenience stores, mass-market retail, specialty shops, big box superstores or online retailers.

Color



Color

Red Bull owns red/blue/silver, while others rely on a combination of acidic greens and yellows, black, and the aluminum finish of the can to convey a sense of energy and high performance.

Response

The green/black areas of the category are pretty well spoken for. There appears to be more opportunity for differentiation on the red side of the spectrum, a curiously obvious choice for “active” or “dangerous” metaphors.

Hyperculture



Hyperculture

Energy drinks are not for your grandparents. Rather, they're often geared towards a thrill-craved, hyperactive youth culture whose primary mission is to "get their rocks" off legally (see Monster Energy target consumer, left).

Response

While the majority of energy drinks sport youthful (teenage) graphics and visual themes, an opportunity exists to reach a wider group of consumers wanting an alternative to coffee. Red Bull is one such brand that we feel does a good job of visually appealing to a more broad demographic.

Overview



Overview

Our observations include some of the brands and categories shown above.

Structure



Structure

Coffee is sold in a variety of structures depending on the type of coffee, volume, and use. Value-priced and bulk coffees are typically sold in cans, tubs, or bricks while bags are reserved for whole beans or specialty coffees seeking that “corner roaster” image.

Response

Structure, just like every aspect of design, should constantly evolve to meet new usage patterns, shipping and selling concerns, brand strategy, even changes in consumer lifestyle.

Innovation



Innovation

Nescafé, Harmony Bay, and Folgers have introduced plastic containers which allows them to create comfortable handles, pop-up lids and unique shapes. International Coffees has added a line of instant cappuccino blends sold in individual pouches, but they continue to hold on to their signature rectangular metal tin, still a unique stand-out in the category.

Response

Notably absent from the stores we visited were the increasingly popular coffee “pods” (lower right). These little one-hit-wonders are by far the most dramatic innovation in coffee-making. Rather than making an entire pot of coffee at once, each pod makes a single, balanced cup of coffee. Perfect for the one-coffee-drinker family or the coffee fanatic rushing out the door in the morning.

Overview



Overview

Our observations include the brands and categories shown above. These products can be found in most retail supermarkets, nutritional and specialty stores nationally.

Low-Carb Brands



Low-Carb Brands

Atkins is the most recognized brand of low-carb products. Other recognizable brands include Keto, Carb Fit and Carb Options. A host of sub-branded products from mainstream brands are gaining in popularity. Carb Options from Unilever Bestfoods taps into the popularity of existing brands, like, Skippy, Hellmann's, and Ragú.

Response

Some of the more authentic, health food brands need to pick up the slack in appetite appeal and brand presence now that they are faced with mainstream brands as competition. Carb Options has come out swinging with a bright color palette and more unified, consumer friendly look.

The long-term battle for the hearts and minds of consumers between pure low-carb brands and sub-branded products from existing brands will bear watching.

Sub-Brands



Sub-Brands

Some existing brands have extended their line of products with low-carb sub-brands. Relevant new names for products, such as, “Carb Well,” “Carb Countdown,” “Carb Control,” and “Carb Counting” are among the pack.

Response

Creating sub-brands can be a safety feature that will allow products to be phased out if the low-carb craze loses popularity, leaving the master brand intact.

It also takes advantage of brand loyalty with existing consumers, while attracting new consumers looking for low-carb products.

Overview



Overview

Our observations on these brands revealed a high level of noise in the category. Attention is under competition from brand marks, flavors, colors, healthy claims and benefit violators.

Response

Simplification of branding would serve consumers well in this hard to navigate category.

Structure



Structure

The majority of breads are sealed in clear plastic wrap to keep their shape and maintain freshness. Non-resealable outer bags are decorated and fastened with a plastic tag or twist tie. End panels are the primary communicators at point of sale. Face panels (top left) offer the expanded brand essence by using illustration or photography to reinforce a unique position. The back panel (bottom right) is commonly used for storytelling and nutritional information. Rye breads are the only ones that are stacked vertically and use the face panel at point of sale.

Response

Opportunities for unique structures or packaging configurations could create a stir in this category. It's important to note that any new structures must provide equal or better freshness and product visibility.

Bread Varieties



Bread Varieties

We found there is a wide variety of offerings among sliced breads. White and Wheat are the most common kinds of breads. Light, Country Style, Multi-grain, Nuts/Oats, Potato, Rye, and specialty breads make up the balance of the category.

Response

We expect to see more Low-carb bread offerings to coincide with current health perceptions and the impact of carbohydrates on diets. Why not consider more eclectic flavorings: Why not “olive and rosemary,” for an example. Following with seasonal micro-brew concept?

Overview



Overview

Our observations include the brands shown above. These products can be found in most retail supermarkets, drug stores and pharmacies nationally.

Structure



Structure

The dominant physical structure within this category is a vertical oblong box. Most children's medicines are presented in a syrup form in a 4-8 fluid ounce bottle, with a measuring cup for accurate dosage. Additionally, all medicines are secured with a mandatory tamper resistant feature to ensure safety of the consumer.

Response

Opportunities for unique structures or alternative methods of delivery could create a point of difference that sets one brand apart from the competition.

Product Form



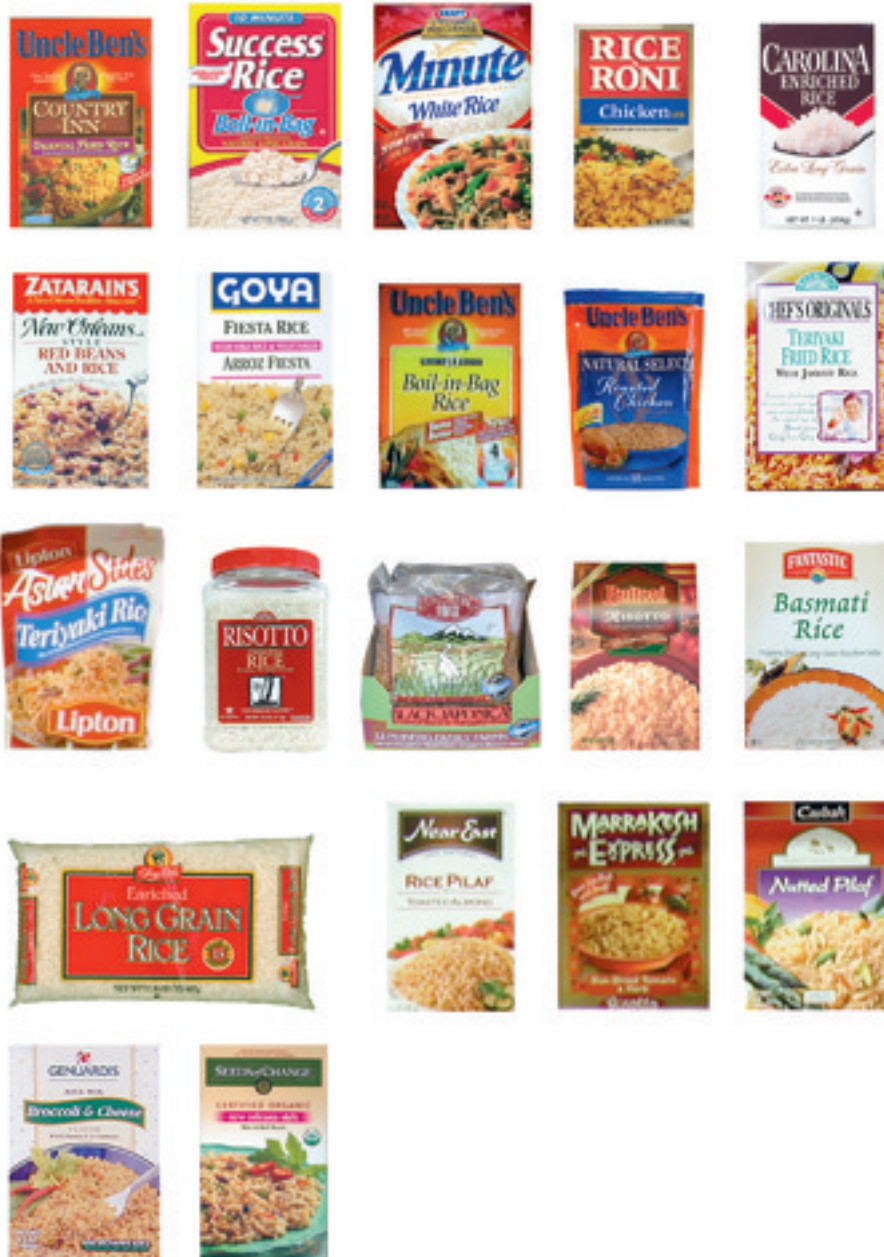
Children's Cold Medicine Product Forms

Typical forms in the children's cold medicine category include: chewable tablets, syrup, dissolving tablets, throat drops and nasal sprays. Syrup formulas in both droppers and measuring bottles seem to prevail as the most sought after form of relieving cold and flu symptoms for infants and young children.

Response

Paramount to successfully distinguishing a different form of product from its counterparts are the visual cues that represent the form of the product. Products such as Dimetapp successfully use a spoon to communicate liquid formulation, while Triaminic illustrates a picture of the actual bottle in the background.

Overview



Overview

Our observations include the brands shown above. These products can be found in most retail supermarkets nationally with the exception of the private label Shop Rite brand.

Structure



Structure

Most of the rice products we found come in small rectangular cartons or simple plastic bags. Traditional cartons offer the most options for billboard and shelf impact. Resealable bags and unique structures appear more often in specialty variants or exotic flavors sold in smaller quantities for higher prices.

Response

Structure and functionality are important dimensions. The addition of a resealable closure on a plastic bag, for example, can add functional value and a feeling of higher quality to the offerings within the category.

Color



Color

The majority of competing packages are red, orange and other earthy, warm tones. Splashes of deep blue and gold add richness to the packs. Some of the more ethnic offerings use splashes of contrasting color or larger white areas to help their offerings stand apart.

Response

The field is wide open to explore new colors that break tradition and differentiate from the established brands.

Brand Personality



Brand Personality

Many of the products inherit brand equity from their consumer electronics products, such as TVs, stereos and cameras while others are recognized for their calculators and organizer products.

Response

Products and package graphics should communicate brand messages that support quality, dependability, and functionality.

Shelf Presence



Shelf Presence

Major outlets including: Staples, Target, and OfficeMax, use red backgrounds on pegboards.

Response

Examine the environment carefully before implementing a branding system. Explore alternative colorings to improve contrast to the environment and reduce “camouflage.”

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