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- Features
- Brand (re)New
- Following Up
- Just Out
- Next + Now
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**Question: Is the use of white in packaging overused? Is it still possible to use white as an equity color?**

February 18, 2010

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**Philip VanDusen, Anthem Worldwide:**



White is a double edged sword. Overall, white communicates purity and simplicity. It catches the eye and shines a light on whatever color or image is in proximity. On one hand, it can communicate luxury and a premium value proposition when paired with an aspirational product (think: Apple iMac boxes). On the other hand, it can also communicate "generic" or "cheap" (think: Target's Up & Up brand, though I would argue that was not Target's intention). It all comes down to context. To brands like Campbell's or Coke, it can be argued that white is an integral part of their brand and the brand's packaging equity.

It is possible to use white as an equity color in packaging on its own. Apple did it, though they have since moved to black. Target is doing it, among others. But I would posit that it is very hard to really "own" white. White is just too necessary for design to function overall – it's just too ubiquitous. It can, of course be an indispensable part of a brand's identity, like the white around the NBC peacock's rainbow feathers or the white dot and ring in Target's brandmark. It can give an emotional lift to darker brand colors, take GAP's navy blue square, or Hershey's deep brown, for example.

Is white "overused?" I don't think so. It's about how it is used. It is a tool in the design toolkit. O.K., a big, really important tool. Let's call it the hammer in the big design toolbox. If you don't use it right, you can smash your thumb. But then, if you do use it right, the success of its use can be measured by the success of the product at retail and the alignment with the brand's overall strategic positioning.

**Perry Seelert, united\* dsn:**



There is nothing inherently wrong with the use of white, but unfortunately of late we have seen an increase of it being utilized in poorly executed design programs, especially in retail/own brand packaging. In retail, it is loaded with value symbolism, and we are reawakening consumers' impressions of the "old, value brand" private label in some executions we have seen. However, when white is done with the right attention to detail and consideration, like it is with A&P's Via Roma, then the effect can be quite beautiful.

In the end, it doesn't matter whether it is white or any other color, but it does need to have a high level of strategic design thought and investment.

**Russ Napolitano, Wallace Church:**



The current trend is to create packaging that is simple, straightforward and instantly engages consumers with the facts and an overall brand promise. In other words, what this product is (facts) and what it will do for you (promise) must be immediately apparent to consumers. As a result, we have seen an inordinate use of white as a primary packaging color. White was once relegated for use on private label/generic brands (value priced) or pharmaceuticals (efficacy). White had traditionally been a way for store brands to break through the "color clutter" of those colors 'owned' by national brands. Now white is commonly used across many products, all product categories and all price points from value-based, to mid-level and to premium tiers. After all, white:



- Is clean
- Is straightforward
- Keeps it simple
- Is friendly and approachable
- Is neutral; a neutral background color that reduces the amount of competing elements and background "noise"
- Allows foreground colors and imagery to "pop" off of neutral background
- Enhances imagery such as product presentation, ingredients, usage, etc.
- Best supports a product's reason for being – (e.g. efficacy, all natural and/or organic)

Within the past five years, we have seen many brands rely on white as a primary brand color – all for the reasons listed above. In addition, we have seen a tremendous amount of growth in the all natural and organic categories and many of these brand's within this growing category rely on white to reinforce their reason for being – Cascadian Farms, Kashi, Nature's Promise...to name just a few.

Does this mean that white is overused? I am not so sure that "is white overused" is the question to be answered. What we must take in to consideration is:

- Does white best support my brand's essence and reason for being?
- Is the use of white unique in my product category?
- Does white provide me with the ability to make a connection with my consumer at shelf, in other words, does it make my product stand out from the crowd?

As brand marketers and package designers, we should not settle for a simple yes or no answer to any of the questions above. It is our joint responsibility to ensure that packaging is on target, relevant to the brand, presents the brand in the best possible way and gives the brand the leading edge at shelf.

If white is overused in your product category, it does not mean that you should automatically abandon its use and look to replace it with another color. You must take in to account your brand equity, brand essence and ability to stand out. Perhaps white can still work, but you need to enhance your overall design architecture to maintain uniqueness and impact at shelf.

There is one big risk with white and its common use – boredom. For the same reasons why white has become so popular and accepted by consumers – simplicity, elegance, etc., consumers can get bored and even confused when looking at a sea of white. I do predict that at some point very soon, the pendulum will swing back to color saturation, but used in a way that still supports consumers' need for simplicity and a break from their every day hectic lifestyle.



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**Title:** *Via Roma excels in its packaging.*

By: *andy*

Posted: *April 27, 2010 11:52 AM*

The white background sets off the rest of the Via Roma packaging, the authentic Italian images and lettering.

That way, each Via Roma package hangs like a fine piece of art, but instead of hanging at the Vatican, it adorns the shelf space at your local Great A&P family of banner supermarkets.

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