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A 2013 Macrotrend: Packaging

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As the packaging industry embarks upon a new year, it seemed fitting to ask Philip VanDusen, executive creative director at **Landor Associates**, to identify some key trends for 2013. A critical fact mentioned by VanDusen: packaging has to connect with the consumer or the product and the brand will fall by the wayside.

Q: What trends are you keeping an eye on in 2013?

A: One thing I am seeing across product development is to create packaging that connects with consumers whether through social media or some additional means. It used to be that simply traditional advertising could accomplish this, but that is no longer enough. The ability to engage in dialogue with the consumer is an important macrotrend for 2013. This is a way for a company to respond to consumers in order to build a level of trust. Competition for attention is at an all-time high and established trust will help you rise above the fray.

One way to deepen this trust is [by] leveraging a company's history. Consumers come to trust brands that have a history. But if they don't have a long history, companies can and will use packaging more in 2013 to convey a sense of history. For instance, using vintage design cues, like simple label design, mason jars, and wax paper seals all work to give the look and feel of a vintage brand. Vintage design hints at a brand lineage. We're seeing this in the beauty sector with vintage-inspired apothecary jars and in the food category, where more curved, fluted label borders are being used to give that look of homespun, handcrafted design. All of this creates a natural-looking package that connotes warmth and approachability and speaks to sincere values.

Q: From what you have seen, are the faux lineages (Cindy: better explain faux lineages. Not sure I know what that is. Maybe put a dash after lineages and then say "or ...;" to give an explanation) being created through packaging actually working?

A: Yes, they are. There has to be a level of authenticity about it though to help establish that customer relationship and trust that we discussed before. If there isn't a level of truth to it, the consumer will see right

through it, tweet about it, and your brand will be vilified. It's up to marketing to tell a story that's authentic. The package look and feel has to link to the product and the brand for a true holistic experience. For instance, you can't tell a feel-good humanistic story about your product and then test that product on animals. All the pieces have to align.

Q: Please explain how building a level of trust dovetails into another trend I know you've identified as sensory packaging.

A: There has to be a physical experience with the package. Retail shopping has become so complicated and competitive that the package itself has to drive trial and purchase intent. This can be done with engaging more of the senses. Of course the consumer can see the product, but can they feel it, smell it, and maybe, in some cases, taste it? Try to engage the consumer at the shelf by giving them a little more. For instance, *Crest* toothpaste has a scratch-and-sniff label to show you the varieties of flavors available. *Downy Unstopables* has a cool feature where little holes are punctured in the lid and the consumer can squeeze the package to release the scent. *Downy Unstopables* is all about scent-the packaging helps consumers engage with that. Understand that Downy wants you to trust that you are getting the scent you want.

Another sensory trend is tactility. There are a lot of printers doing new techniques with raised varnishes and sparkle varnishes and different elements that can provide a tactile experience when you interact with the package. A good example is *Skyvodka's* limited edition holiday package for this year. It has velvet flocking on the outside of it. It's super-luxurious and gives you a cozy hand feel, hinting at the warm glow it will give you when you drink it. It all aligns.

Q: What are some other ways that packaging can drive the purchasing experience?

A: Another trend we're seeing is a new level of originality and personalization. *Absolut* vodka actually just did a package where they had to completely retool their production line enabling them to make every bottle completely unique. The line was called *Absolut Unique*, and every single bottle was an original - a different abstract painting on every bottle.

We were involved with the design of *ID Gum*, which is unique in that the artwork revealed when the package is open is a surprise. When the shrink wrap is removed, the consumer is left with a beautiful box covered with one of a dozen different illustrations. The words *ID Gum* are nowhere on the external package once the shrink wrap is removed. You just have a cool gum carrying case that's a conversation starter with your friends.

We're also seeing in packaging the ability to personalize your experience with the product. *MiO* is a great example of that - you can add as little or as much as you like to make your beverage exactly what you want it to be.

Of course, all of this works in the retail environment, but in the digital space, it is much harder to establish a relationship with the consumer and take advantage of these tactile shopping experiences. In the

digital shopping experience, the package has to work to communicate with the consumer at the small scale of an icon and do so very quickly, using color, photography, and brand identity.

Q: How do you see smart packaging doing more to engage the consumer in the year ahead?

A: This goes back to the issue of transparency and building trust. When consumers pick up a package and scans a QR (quick-response) code or enters a number in a smart device, they are starting a conversation with the brand in the digital realm. The brand needs to provide meaningful content to foster that trust. *Lays* potato chips did a great job with this by enabling the customer to locate the exact farm where the potatoes came from that were in the bag they were buying. You just had to enter the bag number into their website on your phone. You were able to track the product's origin, which is extremely important when building a trust-based consumer relationship.

Q: So much was discussed this year about sustainability and using bioresins in packaging. What more will we hear about this in 2013?

A: A lot of energy and scientific muscle is being spent developing sustainable methods to package and deliver goods in a responsible way. Green is, and will continue to be, "the new black." It's a must have. It used to be that soy ink received accolades when it was used in packaging. Now it's expected. You don't get a pat on the back for that anymore. You only get kudos now if you are innovating and doing something truly buzzworthy. If your plastics isn't recyclable, it needs to be. Don't think people don't notice or won't care. They do.

Q: How do you see packaging changing in response to evolving consumer demographics?

A: As our culture becomes more and more mobile, packaging trends need to stay ahead of our lifestyle changes. I heard recently that 20 percent of meals in the United States are eaten in the car. Packaging structures are going to need to take advantage of that and be mobile, easy to handle in the car, and [available] in portions for being used on the go.

There are also more single person and smaller, non-traditional households in the United States. Twenty-seven percent of households in this country are single-person households, and packaging must address single-serving as well as easy-to-prepare meals for a person living alone.

A great example of this is *Ready Pac* salads. Also, [there are] **Safeway Signature Cafe** chef-prepared meals, which are prepared by a chef in the Safeway store and taken home and reheated. They're fresh meals and not shelf-stable. We're also seeing a lot of single-size items being developed; single-serving or single-dose sizes have been common in developing countries for a while and now we're seeing them for sale more in other countries. Because of the recession, the "new normal," people don't have as much to spend. They want to control the portions of what they're using, whether it's single servings of toothpaste or with *Tide Pods*.

Q: What is the advice you are offering to brands as they make packaging decisions in 2013?

A: First, especially for CPG (consumer packaged goods) companies, being faster and more nimble will be important. Large companies have become slow in their development pipelines. They need to spin off smaller innovation groups. This will enable them to quickly create a recognizable flow of new products and stay competitive. It used to be that it took two years to develop a product, but the world is speeding up and newness has to show up every six months to keep your brand top-of-mind.

Second, brands need to be authentic and listen to consumers. Give consumers an opportunity and pathway to communicate with you using Twitter or Facebook, etc. Then really listen and respond. A two-way communication between the brands and the consumer will be the cost of doing business going forward. If you leverage that, your brand wins.

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