

Don't Think Like A Package Designer. Think Like A Woman.

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva



Since October was Breast Cancer Awareness month I've seen a plethora of pink packaging. Some of it good and much of it not so good and the reason behind it is because they don't understand their core consumer.

Some of the most successful package introductions have come from people who knew nothing about package design. How can that make sense? Designers are creative. They get paid to design packaging, which may or may not necessarily be what the customer wants or needs. Good designers keep up with the latest design trends and technologies. What's hot and what is not in might be the perfect answer to a package design. But what if it is not?

We all get caught up in established rules and parameters. You can't do this because of the way it needs to be manufactured or if it's this product it has to be packaged this way or in this particular material. Or the concept the designer has in mind is the latest rage in package innovation so it will work for this product and any product too. But let's think laterally about design for a minute.

Do you continually challenge stereotypes? Why does a particular product need to be a certain shape? Is the product in a particular package because it's always been done that way before? In my recent survey about packaging products for female buyers there were dramatic differences between what packaging designers and packaging professionals perceived as important and what the perception of its importance to female consumer or the ultimate end user.

One package design characteristic I asked about particularly was shape. Designers were drawn to it. They believed, as do most packaging professionals, that shape was an important component of package design. Designers see a dramatic new shape and are immediately impressed with the creativity of it.

However, women aren't as intrigued by the shape as by the functionality of the package. They believe, 'Make it work for me first, then worry about how pretty it looks.' So don't think shape like a package designer think shape like a female consumer.

Consider this during the design process: who do you expect to use the product and how? If it's women, the 80% purchaser or influencer of purchasing decisions, what is really going to impress them? Hint: its not necessarily design. If its not women then it better be a very targeted niche.

My survey results demonstrate that convenience and ease of use and storage were particularly important to women. After all, the woman does most of the shopping and in most cases put the products away. Isn't this a logical conclusion to designing what women want in their packaged goods? Think about what makes it easy to use the product.

Consider the age factor too. Ergonomics and ease of opening were rated highly by both women and seniors. Products designed for specific age groups need to work for that group and not just look pretty on the shelf. Spend time scouring the isles when working on new products. Don't just focus on the category in which you are designing.

Look for features and innovations that can cross boundaries. Look at emerging trends. Don't just look at products in your category either. Go to multiple types of shopping outlets and don't forget to use the Internet. A recent example is the complete reworking of power tools or other typically male oriented products. They are now produced in female friendly colors with comparable packaging. It has created a whole new brand category of marketing for traditionally male DIY products.

Put yourself in the buyer's position. It helps if you can get different perspectives too. Not everyone will view the same packaging attributes with the same opinions. Cross a spectrum of potential buyers with a few targeted questions. Don't be surprised by the answers.

One last point, just because it's highly publicised or advertised doesn't mean it works. Consider all the celebrity endorsements and money spent courting high profiles figures. It is designer this or designer that. The most surprising outcome of my survey was that a staggering 89% of women would not be induced to buy a product because of a celebrity endorsement unless it was some type of cause marketing such as breast cancer.

So put on your thinking caps designers and start thinking like a woman the 80% influencer or purchase maker.

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