

REXAM

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# All in the mind

Using psychology during packaging design can help create products that have an emotional and subconscious appeal to consumers and which they won't mind paying a premium for. Andrew Cave reports

*The toy like design of the Kandoo foam soap pump (above right) is inherently appealing to kids*

Brands and design are now inextricably linked, with many leading products recognisable from the shape and feel of the packaging without consumers having to necessarily read the brand name. Think of Coca-Cola's iconic bottle, for example, or Red Bull's eye-catching can design.

However, this evolution of brand recognition and values also means that packaging plays a key role in the core task of any consumer product: to delight its end user and enhance the consumer experience.

How can packaging achieve this, particularly when its effects may be subconscious? Even in today's design led world, most consumers would not necessarily be cognisant of the influence packaging plays when buying consumables. Yet, the visual and sensual qualities of the materials that products are presented in are very much part of what makes customers feel good about their purchases. Quality packaging, designed to have innate emotional and subconscious appeal, is a key part of consumers' experience and their trust in well known brands.



So how do consumer goods companies and their packaging partners ensure that they are dialling into how customers want their favourite brands to look, feel and taste?

The answer lies in understanding what is increasingly being referred to as 'the psychology of design'. This involves studying the myriad ways in which consumers respond emotionally to product designs, based on materials used and other influences such as colour and texture.

One way of doing this is what is known as 'affective engineering'. Dr Cathy Barnes, Managing Director of Design Perspectives, a Faraday Packaging Service, based in Leeds, says: "Affective engineering is all about using psychological techniques to gain a much better understanding of the aspect of design and people's emotional response to it as a way of finding out how to really delight consumers. ►

"Depending on the context, different products and the way they are used have different influences on us. With some products, it's because of the way they look; with others it's the touch and feel that gets an emotional response. So the way that products are packaged and designed can have a direct effect on consumers' enjoyment of them. For example, the frog shaped Kandoo foam soap pump manufactured by Rexam is extremely appealing to children because of its fun, toy like design; and the foaming cleanser stays in a child's hands easier than other soaps making washing more efficient."

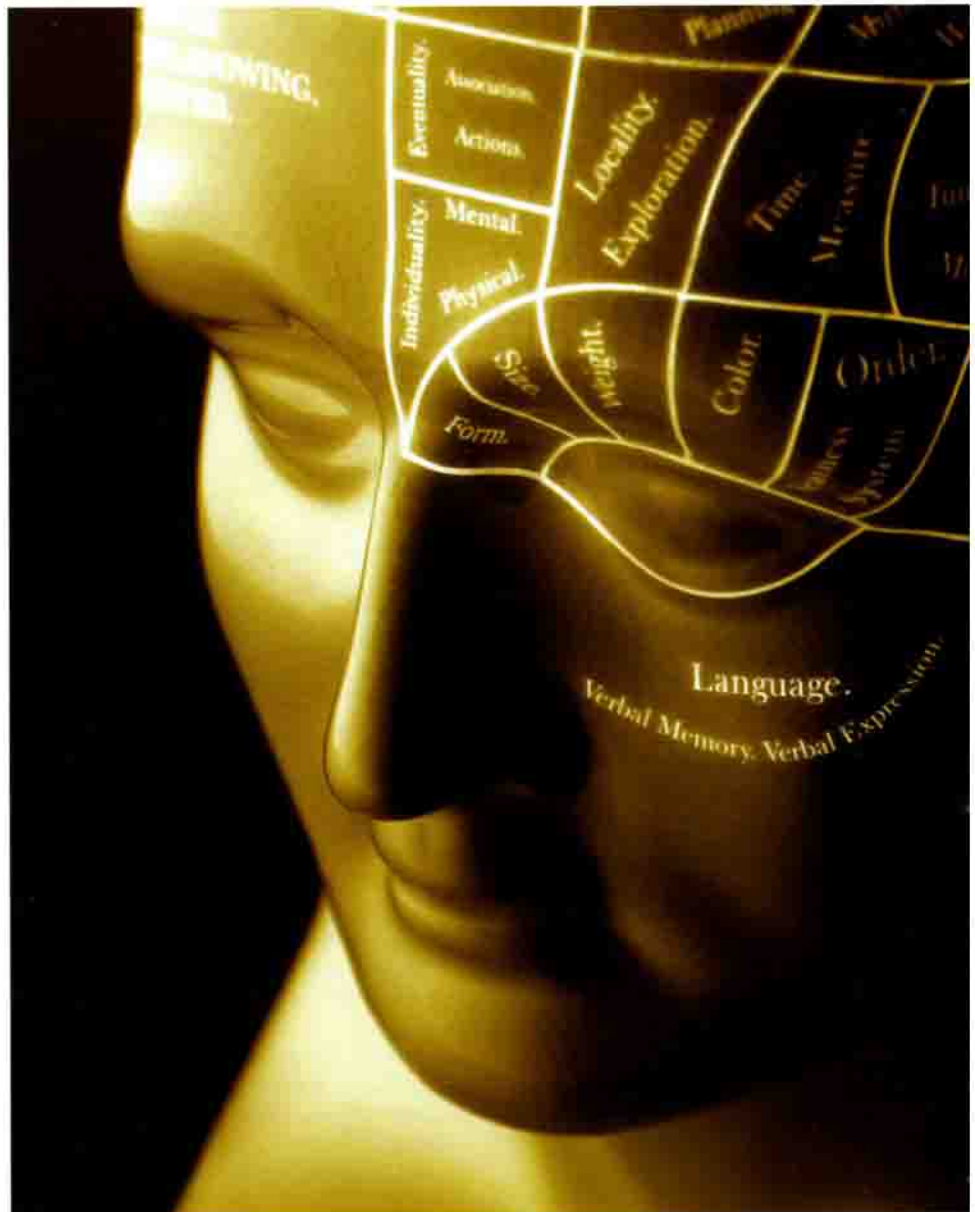
Dr Barnes continues: "In these sorts of ways, psychology of design can play a key role in helping people feel better about the products they use and enjoy them a lot more."

According to Dr Barnes, the secret of good branding is recognising "congruence" between what a product does, how it is perceived and what it looks and feels like. Human brains, she argues, are programmed to subconsciously recognise such continuity and to quickly pick out anything that jars. This can then be used to generate packaging that helps products stand out on supermarket shelves.

Dr Lisa Carroll, Rexam's Group Lean Enterprise Director, agrees that translating feelings and emotions into packaging design can help it better represent to consumers the qualities of the products they are purchasing.

"For example," she says, "when developing packaging for a body or facial moisturiser, the affective engineering approach would seek to understand what a consumer is thinking about when they go to purchase the product. If they're thinking that they want a moisturiser that is creamy, velvety and luxurious then you would aim to design the pack so that it is perceived that way. People are more likely to be drawn to packaging that represents the experience they are seeking. We have many technologies in Rexam to help us create packs to represent experiences, whether we're looking at surface finish, colours, shapes or print styles."

For Anne Lise Kjaer, a Danish national who founded Kjaer Global in 1988 as



a forecaster for the design industries, understanding how consumers want their products to look and feel is part of what she calls "emotional branding".

What, then, will future consumption look like? "All shoppers will become guests," says Kjaer. "The idea is to create an emotional connection between the brand and the consumer hoping that the 'guests' will want to purchase a token that takes them back and reminds them of the friendly feeling they had during that experience. People seek out emotional and empowering experiences and don't begrudge paying a premium when the encounter feels right."

So how do companies find out what feel

and shape their customers desire in their packaging? Dr Barnes' team at Design Perspectives relies on detailed interaction with customers to find out as much as possible about the ways in which they react to colours, shapes and textures.

Questionnaires filled in by consumers ask them to state on a sliding scale how much they associate products and designs with a series of descriptive words. This enables data to be developed that can be used to design packaging aimed at generating the sorts of responses that are sought by consumer goods companies.

Stergios Bitisios, a member of the Design Perspectives team, says: "It is extremely complicated and much more sophisticated

than simply saying one colour is better than another. It's about how brands engage with customers. Our aim is to help companies do this better by producing design guidelines."

Dr Barnes believes her team's in-depth approach delivers superior results. She stresses: "It's not our opinion that matters but what consumers actually think and believe. The key to successful design is the insight into what consumers perceive."

According to Marjolein Aben, Rexam Plastic Packaging's Consumer Insights and Innovation Manager, "We continually

remind ourselves that we are all consumers. So we are constantly forging closer relationships with our customers, and our customers' customers, to ensure that we, as packaging partners, understand the dynamics shaping the market so that we can deliver innovative packaging consumers need and want."

At Rexam, there has long been an emphasis on innovation that connects with consumers. One example is a miniature version of 'Kiss Kiss' lipstick for Guerlain, a replica of the full size version (also

produced by Rexam) for on the go use. Kiss Kiss uses a sculpture of three cubes engraved with intricate detail, to represent the product's 'precious, opulent, sensual and enigmatic' feeling. "Essentially," says Aben, "if we couple our outstanding knowledge of packaging manufacturing with a deep understanding of what consumers really want, we can better partner and offer packaging to our customers that will set them apart. It will enable us to enter into a proactive marketing to marketing dialogue from which everyone benefits, but most importantly our customers." ■

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Anne Lise Kjaer, founder of Kjaer Global

'Kiss Kiss' lipstick evokes an opulent, enigmatic and sensual feel

