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A BRAND NEW WORLD

Changing consumer expectations and behavior bring branding opportunities and challenges.

TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Brands are moving toward simpler package design that tells their story at a glance.
- ▶ Shoppers want a cohesive brand experience across channels.
- ▶ Brand loyalty is harder to earn in a commoditized world.
- ▶ Consumers are looking for more transparency and authenticity from brands.

Standing at the shelf. Looking at a phone. Tapping on a laptop. Talking to a device. As shopper expectations, demands and behavior rapidly evolve, branding experts are rethinking brand design to ensure their clients' products break through the clutter no matter where — or how — they're found.

We recently spoke to three branding experts — Daymon Creative Director Steve Cox, AMP Agency Vice President of Strategy Greer Pearce and Hatch Design Director R. Eugene Heard — about brand design and why yesterday's best practices don't work today.

The demand for personalization, the increase in social media use, evolving brick-and-mortar strategies and the rise of e-commerce: How have changes in consumer behavior and the retail landscape made brand design more challenging?

STEVE COX: The consumer landscape is constantly changing and branding needs to work much harder now to stand out.

With retail becoming more and more crowded, there is increased demand on consumers' time to navigate the shelf and make the right decision. Packaging design needs to work quickly to capture consumers' attention from 5-7 feet away. If the design is successful in drawing them in and they pick up your product, consumers might grant you another three or four seconds at 4-5 inches away to convince them this is the right product.

Simplicity in packaging is one way to accomplish this, distilling the concept and the key points of difference for a brand or a product into as few elements as possible. This will help consumers grasp what you feel are the most compelling attributes that will drive them to a purchase.

The e-commerce space is a different landscape, but the idea of simplicity in the visual communication and message lends itself well there, too. Whether in an e-commerce environment or on a social platform, consumers move fast, so how best to capture their attention quickly is the game for brands to win in this environment.



Advantage is a leading provider of technology-enabled sales and marketing business solutions designed to help manufacturers and retailers across a broad range of channels drive consumer demand, increase sales and achieve operating efficiencies.

GREER PEARCE: In the digital age, our avenues of information are so diverse that a customer journey is no longer linear or simple. At any given stage in the marketing funnel, a person might bounce around from Instagram to billboard to blog post to text exchange and back in mere minutes.

That means providing a cohesive brand experience is more complex than ever. The left hand always has to know what the right hand is doing and when you have so many moving parts, it becomes a challenge.

Because of this complexity and the quickly shifting landscape, it's more important for brands to have a strong and clearly defined purpose. If they've identified their true reason for being, they can use that as their North Star to help them make decisions about where they should be playing and what they should be saying and doing.

Our client Eastern Bank is a great example of this. Their true brand purpose isn't just about financial services, it's about doing good things to help people prosper. That North Star helps guide decisions across their business, from where they open branches to what products they launch. It led to their recent Good Votes campaign, where they actively fought for transgender rights in Massachusetts. For everything we work on with them we ask ourselves, "Are we doing good? Are we helping people prosper?"

R. EUGENE HEARD: New brands and startups, especially, are considering more intently how the brand makes you feel and how the brand and consumers are coming together. So much of our work is about creating an emotional connection between consumers and the brand.

Joolies, for example, is a new brand of organic medjool dates grown on a family farm. Dates are a beautiful food that haven't had much excitement in the American marketplace.



► The Joolies brand speaks to an organic and sustainable lifestyle.

During our work for Joolies, we talked about the brand as we would a person who is living an organic and sustainable lifestyle. The inside packaging for the whole dates has a place to put the pits and is compostable. It costs a bit more, but the owners want to be part of the sustainability movement.

Our job was to make people feel connected to the brand and invite them to try it. One way we did that was making the package beautiful, but simple. We considered how the brand would look from in-store to in-app. The Joolies package tells the entire product story and by creating a window in the package, shoppers can see the actual product.

Creating a strong connection between a brand and consumer isn't easy. Where do you start?

PEARCE: Brands have to understand their consumers. If you can uncover real, illuminating insights about your audience, you'll be able connect with them in a meaningful way.

As part of that, you have to establish what you want people to feel when they interact with the brand. Then we can use brand design to develop multisensory cues that establish that feeling.

For example, working with a financial client recently we determined the central emotion of their brand is "freedom." We needed to answer: What does freedom feel like? How does it smell and sound? How do we use design elements to evoke freedom at every touchpoint?

Establishing the brand around one central feeling has shaped our exploration of a completely new look, feel, tone and messaging for the brand — all designed for emotional connection.



“ We had to go deep into the mindset of the modern man. ”

Another example is our client Just for Men, which we recently repositioned. We first had to go deep into the mindset of the modern man and the evolving definition of masculinity, the changing dynamics of the American family and the cultural zeitgeist around gender equality to harness insights that allowed us to better position the brand to make an emotional connection around self-expression. The result was the Better Man campaign, which has significantly increased brand equity and sales.

What brand design strategies of the past no longer work today?

HEARD: In the past, a product could have an ugly brand design and as long as people knew the brand, people would buy it. Now, the logo and packaging have to be beautiful.

COX: We would more frequently see packaging that was cluttered with icons, seals, badges and claims. There was significant overcommunication of what the product promised as a way to outshine the competition.

Now, the use of fewer elements on package creates a clearer visual hierarchy and puts more importance on the product point of difference, helping the brand stand apart from the competition.

How have the dynamics of brand loyalty changed — and how does that affect brand strategy?

PEARCE: In more commoditized world, it's harder to gain loyalty. When consumers can compare product prices online no matter where they are, they're only going to stay loyal to a brand that they've connected with, that really speaks to them.

Transparency plays a big role in that. If a brand is making claims, consumers want to see if you are putting your money where your mouth is.

They want simple labels, simple ingredient lists and want the manufacturers to be upfront about what is in a product and where those ingredients came from. If your brand aligns with a cause, consumers want to see how the brand actually supports it.

Take our client Eastern Bank again. They say they value social justice and know it can't be an empty claim. People want to know, “How are you partnering with marginalized communities? What action are you taking?”

We helped them revamp their social media strategy and content, including a campaign aimed at educating its audience on LGBTQ issues and encouraging voting to help protect transgender rights. The campaign drove people to the polls and significantly outperformed social media benchmarks. That Eastern Bank is open, transparent and committed to their values drives their customers to be committed to their brand.

COX: Gaining brand loyalty is becoming increasingly more difficult as the physical and digital shelves become more cluttered. Established brands have a leg up. They have created trust and brand loyalty over time, which is a very powerful connection. Their branding is easily recognizable and top of mind for consumers, and while this gives them a clear advantage it also makes them comfortable. They are less willing to make big changes for fear of breaking the loyalty with their consumers that took so long to establish.



► Eastern Bank's Instagram Good Votes campaign supported transgender rights.

The advantage for new brands coming to the market is their ability to make a bigger splash because they aren't hampered by established brand equity. In fact, they need to be more daring and bolder just to grab the attention of a consumer and get noticed. Only then can they start to build the brand loyalty.

Today's customers want the same brand experience no matter where they find it. How has e-commerce, the need for strong digital content and social media influenced your work?

PEARCE: People want to move from physical stores to a digital experience without friction. This is even more true of the next generation. One of the key things we've seen with Gen Z is they have a totally different experience of the world — they don't distinguish between online and "real life" experiences. For instance, they may talk about hanging out with their friends, but for them that means Snapchatting each other or playing video games with people across the country. Online and offline are part of one reality to them.

Because of this, we try to think holistically about a brand's ecosystem and how each touchpoint interconnects. In a digital world, "social media" has expanded beyond the Facebooks of the world. All advertising has the opportunity to be social. Of course, if you're on Instagram it's super easy to share an ad or a piece of content with your friends. But even traditional mediums are turning social when anyone can snap a photo of a billboard, an in-store experience or the product and packaging and easily post it or share it with their friends. No matter the touchpoint, we're always thinking about if our creative is sharable.

COX: There are several design principals that translate really well from the physical retail shelf to a digital environment. The impact of color, heroic use of imagery and expressive personality are all ways to capture a consumer's attention within the challenging e-commerce environment.

A shopper isn't going to read anything on a thumbnail, so they need to trust from that image of the package, the color and type style that they are getting a quality product.

According to recent research from Sprout, when consumers follow brands on social media, 67% say they're more likely to increase their spending on that brand. How has increased use of social media influenced brand design?

COX: Some brands mistakenly lump everything — social media and e-commerce — into "digital." But they are two very different things. Success on e-commerce is more closely related to traditional design and what you can communicate really quickly on a small scale — linking color and imagery to brand equity. When brands get this right, they're able to make a meaningful connection to potential buyers and get them to add products to their cart.

When thinking about the specific challenges associated with social platforms, incorporating design elements like QR codes in packaging to link to social platforms, websites, brand promotions or cross-selling opportunities are just a few ways that packaging can link consumers to platforms that will drive their brand loyalty.



HEARD: Smashmallow, a premium "snackable" marshmallow made of organic ingredients, is made for Instagram, where the brand offers recipes and links the brand to a lifestyle. The packaging is simple, but stands out.

Considering the changing nature of effective brand design, should legacy brands rethink their branding strategy?

HEARD: Some brands are doing great just as they are. Great brands don't need to make too many changes to the packaging or message. Some may need only slight adjustments to the package to better convey their message. Other legacy brands, though, are not moving quickly enough and could benefit from new branding. •