

Companies waking up to packaging to lure customers

Remember the days when our grandmoms, would save all the empty cans of hair oil, milk bottles and cold drink bottles in the house? It was not because they loved them so much that it became souvenirs. Sometimes the packs were very useful, made of materials like high-grade plastic, so a detergent pack ended up storing pulses and masalas. When an household had more bottles and jars than it could use, the bangaarwala came calling.

Nobody recycles like our grandmoms anymore, but product packaging is undergoing a renaissance. After cutting costs and stripping-down product packs to a bare minimum, product packaging is once again becoming a compulsion for a host of product manufacturers.

It's not just the obvious categories like tobacco and alcohol that are burning midnight oil over their product design for obvious reasons (the pack is their best way of communication as advertising is banned). Even the plain-Jane water bottle is now a work of art. Brands like Bisleri, Qua and Himalaya are trying to outdo each other when it come to their bottles.

In an retail environment that's slowly but surely moving towards the larger format outlet, brands are realising the need to enhance the 'shelf value' of its products. Sameer Satpathy , marketing head, Marico, says, "Packaging is the primary form of communication in modern trade. Packaging brings alive your brand and communicates the brand promise to the consumer." Marico recently employed Umbrella Design to revamp the packs of Parachute Therapie and Parachute Aftershower. Deven Sansare, ECD, Umbrella is happy that brands are looking beyond corporate branding.

"When a pack is revamped, it stays in the market for a longer period of time and the investment is long-term. When companies realise this, they will start looking at design more seriously," he says.

Another company which has been very active in the packaging space is Britannia. Be it the good old Marie or the newly launched Health Starter Kit, each of its products stands out for vibrant colours and unique packing. Pune based Elephant Design has been helping Britannia change colours. Ashwini Deshpande, director, Elephant Design talks about a recent assignment, "We made stand up packs for Pure Magic. We had to keep the costs under control as it is already a premium product and any increase in pack cost would add to the final price." Besides Britannia, Elephant has also done work for Lacto Calamine, Venky's Chicken and Titan Eye+ among others.

When industry veteran Elsie Nanji decided to move out of advertising, design was the natural choice. Today with a four-member team, Red Lion, which Nanji heads, has done work for Bisleri, Knorr soups, Russian pharmaceutical Remedia and a beauty major. "This is so different from traditional advertising. Although I meet the same clients that I met back then, it is different. We get enough time to work on projects, clients hear us patiently and there is no rush," says Nanji.

Some design companies are even focusing on the functional aspects of design. Pune-based Lokusdesign has created an anti-counterfeit and child resistant packaging for Bilcare Research, a pharmaceutical company. "The company will be retailing in the US market and those markets have very strict regulations," says Chandrashekhar Badve, director, Lokusdesign, which has also done work for ITC's Fiama Di Wills shampoos and Park Avenue deodorants. Badve says the packaging industry is coming of age. "Companies want to eliminate their carbon footprints and are looking for packs that are eco-friendly," he says.

While the area of design is slowly but surely catching the attention of businesses, one interesting aspect is the faith that local companies have in this area. Ashwini Deshpande of Elephant Design has been working with Symphony Air coolers, an Ahmedabad based company for a long time and the Aurangabad based Nirlep cookware for almost 20 years. Badve of Lokusdesign also thinks that the SME segment is a good opportunity waiting to be tapped. For design agencies to achieve the cult stature of an ad agency will take sometime, but what these specialists have done is make brands see the value that they bring to the table. Sameer Satpathy of Marico sums it up well: "Design is important, it cannot work in isolation, but it is an important part of the communication package which includes other media."