

Package the Promise: Creating Brand Allure

Synopsis: Designers, printers, and brand managers are turning to uncoated paper for high-value print packaging to communicate brand value. Premium brands make big promises to their buyers. Those buyers expect packaging that reflects their personal values and self-image. It is vital that the package that surrounds them lives up to those promises and maintains that allure.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I	Power of Premium
II	Key Premium Categories
III	Three Rules
IV	Neenah Packaging Solutions
V	Summary
VI	End Notes

I. POWER OF PREMIUM

Premium = High Quality Not High Cost

Packaging is a utilitarian necessity. For many years product manufacturers put its principle purpose—labeling and protecting contents for distribution—ahead of its marketing potential. That has changed as crowded store shelves mean packaging carries much greater value and importance. Packaging must now meet the needs and desires of consumers by packaging the brand promise. It is perhaps the most essential tool any successful brand manager has to convey the product's value and image. Designers, brand managers, and printers understand this.

“Premium Brand” means more than high-priced goods. It suggests “high-value” products, too. Premium labels must appeal to loyal brand enthusiasts, such as parents who desire the kid-friendly tablet for their child's entertainment and education as well as to the millennial shopper looking for a new moscato or prosecco to sample. Consumers purchase goods and services that say a lot about who and what they are. Savvy brand consultants and designers build brands and package them to create allure.

Consider Whole Foods. People shop there not only because they prefer organic foods for their families, but also because it is an attractive and sophisticated place to shop. Whole Foods' house brands are elegantly packaged. Their shelves are stocked with beautifully packaged products. Customers are willing to pay top price for everything from bread to a small vintner's bottle of wine and chemical-free skincare products. Whole Foods customers expect more from the goods they buy—and they are willing to pay more for them.

Creators of premium products aim to make their goods a part of a customer's daily life. Their value reference is quality, not quantity or cost. Packaging can convey intrinsic value and shape consumer perception, converting casual buyers into lifelong customers.

In her book *Brand Thinking* (2011), Debbie Millman, president of the design division at Sterling Brands (NY), discusses the evolution of the relationship between consumers and the brands they love. Millman believes people seek meaningful connections with products because they believe those products reflect their identity. Branding helps establish those connections by enticing customers to engage and identify with the holistic brand experience.

“Slowly but surely, branding has become the umbrella under which advertising, marketing, and PR reside. In the fluid, dynamic landscape of contemporary business, forward-thinking people must speak the language of brands.” Millman reminds us that the goal of any marketer is to “expose the underpinnings of how people respond to the ideas of designers, and how the best brands can open avenues for cultural dialogue and become a positive presence in our lives.”

“Green” Means Ethics Not Hype

Consumers today find packaging that is more thoughtful and intentional. Product makers and marketers expect greener, leaner, and more useful packaging. Wrote Rebecca Bedrossian in *Communication Arts Magazine*, “Green design is not just a matter of choosing the recycled or biodegradable paper and inks—though sustainable materials are a big part of the solution. Sophisticated designers view ‘green’ holistically: it is ethical, it appeals to buyers, and it adds to the value proposition.”

The point is this: boasting 100% Post-Consumer Waste (PCW), chlorine-free recycled paper is no longer enough. Package designers look for real innovation in packaging and retail promotional applications to distinguish their brands as ethical, thoughtful pieces of the consumer world. Companies like Neenah Packaging are creating packaging alternatives to meet this demand.

II. KEY PREMIUM CATEGORIES

See, Touch, Remember

Who throws away a Chanel shopping bag? Who tosses a Tiffany gorgeous blue box? Beautiful packaging connotes status—and consumers of premium products love to project their taste, style, and success.

Consumers interact with packaging more than any other form of communication design, whether the package sits on a shelf at a brick-and-mortar store or on an ecommerce site. Customers want to see and touch the product at the point of sale. They open and close it after purchase. Online, they enjoy interactive 360-degree views that also allow them to “unwrap” the product for closer views. If they like the package and/or find it useful, they often save and display it in their homes.

The packaging experience is just as important online as it is in-store. According to DRUPA, the world's largest international quadrennial trade fair for printing equipment, “...Fifty-two percent of online consumers say they would likely return to a business for another purchase if they receive products in premium packaging.”ⁱⁱ

“Designers need to make it easier for them [consumers] to choose. Time and energy spent up front on brand strategy is essential to creating products that can reach their full sales potential,” says Eric Thoeke, principal and creative director of St. Louis, Missouri-based TOKY Branding Design.ⁱⁱⁱ

It's imperative for packaging to stand out to grab someone's attention on the shelf. Up to 76% of in-store purchase decisions are made at the shelf.^{iv} Packaging also must communicate why customers should buy a product. “We seek what is unique about our clients' product or story. What can marketers say that no one else can? What is the heart and soul of a product or its consumer experience? Everything about the brand's positioning has to be credible. The brand's product must meet the consumer's expectations,” adds Phillippe Becker of Sterling Becker. That means the package must suggest the value and promise of branded product inside.

1. Cosmetic & Fragrances: Keep it Personal

Cosmetic and fragrance consumers desire an experience from their product. Packaging is the first opportunity to portray the image, brilliance, and value of the product. Excellent design is essential: packaging must look, feel, and communicate premium. It must be aspirational, sexy, and beautiful. In the article “Fragrance with Attitude,” Beauty Packaging Magazine editor Jamie Matusow writes, “Few beauty products generate as personal a statement or create as strong an emotional appeal as fragrance—and the connection is triggered before the scent even reaches the consumer's olfactory nerve.”^v

Choices in folding board and box wrap are critical in consumer engagement. Color, texture, and package structure blend to create high-end, durable luxury packaging. Steve Corsi, director of design development for Markwins International, says packaging is the silent salesman in cosmetics, especially among high-end

fragrance makers. "The scent of an 'evergreen' like Chanel No. 5 will always be important, but in today's fragrance world...one could be forgiven for thinking that, in terms of sales, packaging and marketing is as important and often more important than the scent of the fragrance itself."^{vi}

2. Wine, Craft Beer & Fine Spirits: Keep it Real

The allure of wine, beer, and spirits packaging also plays an outsized role in consumer appeal. Spirit, wine, and beer merchants offer vast arrays of alcoholic beverages. Consumers identify strongly with their favorite spirits brands. So getting them to sample new ones is a marketing challenge. Spirits packaging helps define the quality of the beverages and the kinds of people who enjoy them.

"People aspire to be a part of an exclusive and trendy club, and this puts much responsibility on the message transmitted on a 3" x 5" label," says Ellen Bliske, a brand manager for Neenah Packaging. "This places much pressure on designers and brand managers to make a big impact with a limited amount of visual real estate." Both the design and the label substrate need to align with and support the brand story.

A. Wine Labels

"Branding is a concept winemakers understand," wrote Sam McMillan in a Communication Arts article about winemaker Bonny Doon. "Labels are the result of creative briefs that communicate the taste of the wine, the price point, and what a consumer can expect in regard to quality... Savvy graphic designers and illustrators working with a new generation of winemakers are at the forefront of this revolution."^{vii} Branding experts and their clients are reinventing marketing through the premium wine label.

B. Beer Labels

Micro- and macro-brewing is big business. Across the world, craft breweries are challenging the dominance of brewers. This is good news for designers and printers because it means more work as they strive to create innovative labels for new craft ambers, stouts, and IPAs. Design, paper, and printing are helping drive sales with wit, quality, and compelling brand stories that appeal to new customers. We have entered the era of the "beer sommelier."

Detailing recent data released by the Brewers Association (brewersassociation.org), Craft Brewing Business News reported that Craft brewers now exceed more than 10 percent of the beer volume sold in the U.S. marketplace. It is the first time this segment has reached double-digit sales volume.

"Unprecedented growth in the craft brewing industry continues. The Brewers Association, the trade association representing small and independent American craft brewers, recently released 2014 data on U.S. craft brewing growth. For the first-time ever, craft brewers reached double-digit (11 percent) volume share of the marketplace. In 2014, craft brewers produced 22.2 million barrels and saw an 18 percent rise in volume and a 22 percent increase in retail dollar value. Retail dollar value was estimated at \$19.6 billion representing 19.3 percent market share."^{viii}

Craft beer labels often feature an innovative mix of paper, colors, textures, and design that speak to the unique brand character of these brewers. Smaller breweries make small batches, opening the opportunity for the use of premium uncoated papers with beautiful textures and colors that give these products a more natural and genuine look and feel. Digital printing is a cost effective alternative for small-batch manufacturers. Neenah Packaging papers are providing designers and brand managers more paper options that did not exist only five years ago. As small brewers lead

with smarter branding and packaging, big brewers are feeling the pressure to up the ante with better packaging design.

C. Fine Spirits Labels & Boxes

Fine spirits have historically conjured up sophisticated images of great food, great times, elegance, and class. Today premium spirits brands use innovative, modern design, and packages fabricated from a variety of materials, including tin, wood, and paper. Bottlers use packaging to speak about heritage, craft technique, and highly individualized customer profiles. As with the beer industry, such stories must be communicated on relatively small labels and packages. Spirits packaging also appeals to gift buyers—a beautiful box only requires a personally signed gift card and cheerful gift bag.

Packaging the mystique of the brand personality is as vital as the taste of the beverage itself. To tell such stories, premium spirit brands often use the same level of luxury packaging materials as the fragrance industry. This includes finishing effects such as foil stamping, embossing, and die-cuts. Additional elements are not uncommon, including bottle hangtags and handle straps for individual packages and cases that are made of rope, ribbon, or plastic.^{ix}

Such embellishments communicate the tradition and craft. While these luxurious touches lend to the perception of value, the most popular material used in luxury spirits packaging remains paperboard, accounting for a projected 41.9% share of luxury packaging market value in 2014.^x

3. Consumer Electronics: Keep it Innovative

Consumer electronic packaging often features a visual play between package design and product performance—the product’s functional wonder is often expressed through technical design, paper, and print aesthetics. This industry looks to package designers to provide innovative ideas that balance form and function and communicate brand essence through packaging.

San Francisco-based agency Character partnered with Uneka to execute the engineering and manufacturing portion of Adobe’s new Ink & Slide stylus. The simple elegance of the product’s hinged box as well as the precise layering of components and materials reinforces the wonder of the technology inside the box.

Creative director Paul Miller worked on the Ink & Slide project: “The stylus category is crowded and driven by a marketing mentality that is often too busy and over-wrought with photography, design, and content featuring every benefit listed on every panel (in 10 languages) of a very small box. The choice of paper stock has to meet both conceptual and tactical needs. We wanted an uncoated sheet with a tactile quality reminiscent of traditional drawing but also suggested new tools within this category. The sheet needed a mark of some kind, in pencil or ink, that evoked creative expression.”

4. Shelf Appeal: Keep Them Looking

Shelf appeal is the Holy Grail in retail branding. Packaging must leap off shelves into consumer hands. Shelf appeal can be achieved through design, paper, and printing choices. In an article on the power of hang tags and other point-of-sale tactics, author Sam McMillan writes, “Marketers realize their one last best chance to sell a product is at the point-of-sale. That is when the mall-walking consumer crosses the line from browser to buyer.”^{xi}

Artisanal and specialty foods are a prime example of where the high-touch factor of uncoated papers is prevalent. Paper texture exudes a limited-edition, handmade feel. Its luxury is tangible. Marketers are not only appealing to consumer “taste,” but their appetites as well. Paper weight, texture, and color work with great design to grab attention and whet appetites.

Wafa Miladi of Masmoudi Design in Barcelona says, “Packaging material has a deep impact on the overall impression of a high-premium confectionery package. Haptics, stiffness, and print characteristics are the bridge between effective artwork, attractive shape, and the factual value on the shelf. We don’t talk about mass production here—it is the opposite: we speak of exclusive packaging of limited volume for a very special customer.”^{xii}

To’ak Chocolates packaging is transforming the fine chocolate experience. The cacao plants are grown in Ecuador and the brand message pays homage to that land. Created by Mexico-based design firm **Unelefante**, the packaging is designed to simulate the visceral and tactile experience of the harvest process. Only 574 bars were produced in 2014, with each bar packaged in a handcrafted Spanish Elm wood box—the same wood used to ferment To’ak’s cacao. The packaging is as delicious—and beautiful—as the chocolates.^{xiii} At their price point, they must be.

III. THREE RULES

Three Rules to Creating Brand Allure

Rule 1: Design Defines Brand Essence

The brand experience begins with packaging, and it must communicate the value and promise of the brand. Choose a good designer. Choose a good printer (or converter) and choose an uncoated paper that alludes to the specialness of the product inside. We select fonts, layout, and messages that define the brand. Together they make a potential buyer notice, investigate, and sample. When design and product performance are in harmony, people develop an emotional connection and return for more.

Rule 2: Weight & Texture Add Perceived Value

Paper weight and texture are image drivers. They add to the perceived value of the product just as they do for luxury products such as crystal, china, jewelry, or cutlery. Heavier weights and texture draw consumers in so they spend more time with the product.

MIT psychologist and researcher John Ackerman published research in Science magazine concerning the growing field of “embodied cognition”. Writing in Psychology Today of Ackerman’s research, reporter Ray Williams said, “Josh Ackerman, a MIT psychologist, claims that people understand their world through physical experiences, and the first sense is through touch. He says that you can produce changes in peoples’ thoughts through different physical experiences.”^{xiv}

Rule 3: Premium Packaging Speaks Volumes

Packaging from Neenah is versatile, beautiful, durable, and environmentally responsible. It suggests product attributes that should reflect a buyer’s personal style and values.

Designers and printers practice the art of balancing design, weights, and textures to lend drama and pace. Consider a fragrance package housing a crystal 1.5 oz. bottle: the package exhibits confidence and strength with a strong folding board box; as the buyer opens the package, they transition to a soft, smooth interior. The final touch could be a satin nest holding the crystal bottle

like a jewel. The best packages set a mood and entice customers into the brand experience. Product is king—but packages are the royal robes.

IV. NEENAH PACKAGING SOLUTIONS

1. Folding Board

While aesthetics play a key role in packaging appeal, it fails if packaging does not protect the product. Structure and durability are vital. NEENAH® Folding Board, available in solid core paperboard, provides both performance and beauty. The print surface of NEENAH® Folding Board is an elegant canvas for brands, from pure white to deep black.

2. Labels

Consider a well-stocked wine shelf at a specialty wine shop or big-box grocery store. Buyers encounter thousands of labels on bottles of identical shape containing liquids in three principle colors: red, white, or pink. While price point and shelf location help brand presence, labels make them leap off the shelf. The label is the window consumers peer through to judge quality and the value. Premium uncoated, moisture resistant paper labels lend distinction.

3. Paper Gift Cards & Card Carriers

Paper gift cards and gift cardholders distinguish a premium brand from competitors and quickly convey its brand message. Premium gift cards do not have to be glossy, plastic cards. Plastic, no matter how you dispose of it, is bad for the environment—and consumers now expect environmentally responsible retail solutions. The NEENAH® Paper Card (DURAMAX™ Card and IMAGEMAX™ Card) for gift cards are perfect alternatives. They are smart, sustainable, and capable of demonstrating eye-catching specialty print techniques, such as foils, etching, flocking, engraving, and embossing. Moreover, gift card carriers (sleeves and envelopes) can be made of almost any Neenah cover stock of any color, weight, or texture. This affords designers and brand managers a virtual galaxy of creative choices to choose from.

4. Box Wraps

For box wrap packaging, Neenah offers distinct specialty papers that jump off the shelf. With a range of rich color options as well as smooth, tactile, or shimmering textures, consumers respond to the look and feel of quality. By mixing and matching these papers, designers and brand managers add depth to their messages.

5. Hang Tags

Creative, unique hang tags are a valuable branding opportunity that should not be overlooked. The quality of the hang tag—the color, weight, texture, design, and print techniques (e.g., embossing, die-cuts, foil stamps, and duplexing) speak volumes about a brand's image, conveying information about the quality of the product's materials and manufacturing. Hang tags may be small, but they say so much.

6. Bags

Premium product designers and brand managers celebrate when buyers exit the store carrying branded bags. Such bags are walking advertisements, carrying the brand's messages out of the store and into the streets. Neenah offers hundreds of colors and textures with exceptional print performance for premium bags.

7. In-Store Materials

Successful brand managers do not rely on great products. They tell great stories by packaging the entire retail experience. In-store signs, promotional displays, shopping bags, hang tags, box wraps, and labels create a holistic brand experience.

8. Custom Packaging Solutions

Brand-conscious buyers know Bijan yellow from yellow pages, Burberry's plaid from common plaids. Premium brand makers and marketers require exact color matches and custom textures to reinforce their brand messages and ensure visual continuity. Custom folding board, box wrap, labels and bags give them this power.

V. SUMMARY

While websites, mobile devices, apps, and HD interactive displays have led to much paperless communication, premium brands still rely on its tactile and the tangible experience. Design, paper, and printing offer strategic advantage. Nowhere is this more evident than in premium package design, a high-touch tool that brand marketers deploy to win hearts and minds and inspire enduring brand loyalty.

Uncoated premium package options are encouraging mass-marketers to reconsider the limits of corrugated and coated paperboard. As the use of uncoated packaging grows printers, print technologists, and paper makers are finding new ways to meet the rising demand. Great brands not only sell, they seduce. Adds Debbie Millman of Sterling Brands of New York:

"No longer is beauty limited to a pretty face or a pretty package: beauty has come to personify and reflect the social and cultural issues of our day. Now we end up defining a generation by the products it buys. Think of the iPod. Think of the Mini-Cooper. [Such] products are no longer being differentiated by flavor or form or price. They are being differentiated by the difference they make in our lives and the attitudinal difference it creates in the passionate zealots that participate in these new consumer cults. Design has become the leading factor in that difference."^{xv}

VI. NOTES AND ATTRIBUTION

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ⁱⁱⁱ Packaging: Design on the Frontline by Rebecca Bedrossian, Communication Arts:
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^{iv} 2012 Shopper Engagement Study, POPAI

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