1940

The Package Has Its Face Lifted

Margaret Kumlien

Iowa State College

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker

Part of the Home Economics Commons

Recommended Citation

Kumlien, Margaret (1940) "The Package Has Its Face Lifted," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 20 : No. 3 , Article 5.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol20/iss3/5

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Homemaker by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
The Package Has Its Face Lifted

Packaging is now a complicated and fascinating industry declares Margaret Kumlien Read.

"I'll take that one, please," a customer says, and the chances are that whether "that one" is a bit of sheer lingerie, processed cheese, or skates for the six-year-old, it will be thoroughly packaged. Gleaming colored boxes, sacks, cylinders, folders and spheres enclose each individual item for sale.

Shopping has been made infinitely more fun in modern department stores and groceries through packaging developments. Food display counters present a holiday atmosphere the year around.

Today a rapidly enlarging industry centers on the art of packaging and home economics women have an important influence in this industry. Every time you open your kitchen cupboard you see packages labeled with information and instructions prepared by home economics women, whose sincere purpose is to help the homemaker.

The place of the package in merchandising has been profoundly affected by several important changes in marketing. Development of the supermarket and self-service grocery stores has changed consumers' buying habits. In lieu of a clerk's recommendation, a successful package must attract, explain and identify itself.

New types of products, such as frozen foods, influence food packaging. Consumers are demanding that manufacturers package foods never before packaged. The production of superior and adaptable packaging materials is an important factor in the new industry.

The present trend is toward simplicity and purposefulness. Packages are easier to store, easier to grasp, easier to open and more attractive. Pliofilm, Cellophane, Glassine and plastics have thrown open a new world of possibilities. Growing demands for descriptive labeling have forced the manufacturers to describe more accurately and concisely their products to the homemaker.

The growing popularity of re-use containers forms another branch of the expanding industry. Boneless chicken may be bought in a glass baking dish, pork sausage in a white glass bowl, mustard and honey in jars with special dispensers.

Food is not the only type of goods packed with this attraction. Towels and sheets come in flower containers and boxes, manicure preparations come in a case, shaving products and talcum powder come in their own dispensers and children's tooth powders may be purchased in soldier containers with after-use as a toy.

Such containers, however, enjoy a relatively short-lived popularity and must be re-designed frequently. Consumers hesitate to discard re-use packages and will frequently substitute a competitive brand of merchandise to avoid accumulating them.

The success of a product and the package in which that product is wrapped are subject to the whims of Mrs. Consumer. Reports on her likes and dislikes, whether actual or imagined, are vital information to the manufacturer. Often a well-established package design is revolutionized because of sufficient evidence that consumers want something else. Nor does the packer...
need to educate the consumer to be label conscious. For reasons of their own, consumer groups are carrying the banner for truthful and informative labeling.

One method of contact with the buying public is through research organizations, whose purpose is to obtain and analyze information concerning consumers' reactions to products and packages.

Manufacturers of catsup had noticed for a long time a general dissatisfaction with the conventional tall bottle. That it was hard to pour from, difficult to store in a refrigerator and had a tendency to topple were some of the complaints from homemakers. With this problem in mind, a glass manufacturer developed a medium height catsup bottle, about one inch shorter than the tall one, and considerably lighter in weight.

Under the same label, a trial pack was made in the new bottle and was placed for sale by the side of the regular package for the same price. The new bottle outsold the regular by 60 percent. Later a carefully worked out questionnaire was sent with the two unbranded bottles to nearly 400 homemakers. Almost 90 percent preferred the new bottle to the old after actually using it on the table, storing it and discussing it with their families.

Another extensive survey revealed that over three-fourths of all homemakers interviewed thought that sticky products such as syrup and honey were poorly packaged. A glass container with a narrow neck and a screw top was designed as a tentative package.

Two samples of waffle syrup, one in the usual tin container and the other in the new bottle, were given with a questionnaire to a sample of homemakers. An overwhelming number preferred the bottle because it was more attractive, easier to open and easier to pour from.

A number of homemakers suggested that the package be further improved by the addition of a spout or lip to facilitate pouring. A container recently appeared on the market which has a dispenser screw-top for batters and syrups.

Tests to discover preference in types of extract bottle showed that most homemakers would rather buy a bottle with a large base because it was more convenient to use. These surveys sometimes reveal other interesting, if less pertinent, information about the consumer. One question asked was, "What uses do you have for extracts in addition to baking and cooking?" Answers mentioned uses including remedies for toothache, keeping mice away, soothing burns and perfuming the kitchen.

The packaging idea itself is not new. During the Renaissance period Leonardo da Vinci designed the first package to preserve perishables, but it was not until later that the idea of using packages to identify their contents evolved.

In the 1700's several patent medicines of the "Dr. So-and-So's Female Pills" variety appeared on the market in familiar, crude containers and sold like hotcakes. About 1750 the canning industry came into being.

One of the high-lights in the history of packaging came when an ingenious English merchant in 1884 conceived the re-use container. He filled a trinket box with delectable chocolates and advertised that "... as a present for a lady we can conceive nothing prettier, for after enjoying the sweets, she still has left a useful receptacle for her trinkets, and an elegant adornment to her boudoir."

The opening of the twentieth century marked an important milestone for packaging. The National Biscuit Company took a few crackers out of the customary retail store barrel and put the first nickel carton "on the shelf."

Contrary to the implication of this phrase, however, the cracker barrel was rolled into the cellar where it has been ever since, and packaging became an industry. In rapid succession many new devices were introduced—the vacuum can, the crown cork, automatic bottling machinery, lithography and four-color printing.

Manufacturers disagree on the frequency with which a package should be redesigned. One group firmly believes that a package design, once consumers have accepted it, should not be changed. Another group believes that a package should be frequently re-designed to keep up with the times and to prevent the package going stale.

November, 1940