

Stop innovating ! Get practical instead

I pack, so I innovate

In modern packaging, it appears Descartes' philosophical statement *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am) has got a new meaning. Continuous innovation is the bubble that keeps products afloat in the wild waters of grocery retailing.

We are living in the age of *New!* Insatiable consumers are bored with the same old products and stories. Every so many months products need a new twist or get pushed off the market. At least, that's what most of us believe. So we happily join the innovation rat race. And if we can't, we try and renovate, restage or redesign.

Instant revival

Packaging is by far the easiest way to rejuvenate product perception. Change size, shape, colour and print *NEW* all over it – there you go! But nowadays, a new look and feel is no longer enough. In spite of the fact that most agencies and packaging designers deliver exactly that - new graphics, size or shape, the quest for innovative packaging is omnipresent.



Interpack 2011 did it again: innovation allover. But how many of the designs and solutions on display are truly new and innovative? Some are, like Tetra Top, although the next generation is on its way. In the Netherlands, Arla is the first company to introduce it and claim pack innovation. But how many others will actually adopt the system shortly? What will it involve? And by the time they do, how innovative can they claim their pack to be ?

Be realistic, and manage development accordingly

Most new packaging is simply a new version of an existing design. No use to complicate things more than necessary. Innovation generally involves a lot of skills, time and money. Putting it to use even more, as well as being prepared to invest in considerable change throughout the value chain. Always keep up with developments and assess the opportunities of new materials and techniques.

But the infrastructure associated with manufacturing, processing and distribution is not very flexible. Dramatic change is simply too expensive and too time consuming. So >95% of next year's products will be packed in a version of what is around today. Face tomorrow's challenges with improving what you have today. Nothing wrong with that.

Both feet on the ground: manage expectations

Packaging Management always involves a great deal of change. A high turnover of specifications with limited complexity is daily business. Breakthrough developments are a different league.

Tuning objectives, deliverables and resources in packaging development is matter of managing expectations. Attainable and affordable improvements often contradict with the implications and time to market innovative solutions. Pursue every route, but manage each appropriately.



Innovation

Breakthrough development in materials (properties) manufacturing and processing techniques, or pack applications.

A long term vision and strategy must justify the effort, switching costs and associated investments.



Skills **+++++**

Time **3 — 6 years**

Costs **high**

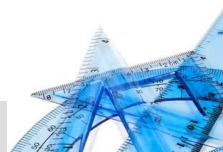
Risk **high**

Driver **packaging industry**

Development

Incremental improvement of physical properties and manufacturing techniques.

Optimisation and definition of basic styles with limited impact on supply chain, infrastructure and materials. Anticipate market needs to support the business case.



Skills **+++**

Time **1 — 3 years**

Costs **moderate**

Risk **considerable**

Driver **packaging experts**

Design

Graphic and structural definition, grid and shape to deliver a packaging solution.

Creative translation of functional needs into a style (range) making use of available capabilities and technology in place. Align with business tactics.



Skills **++**

Time **3 — 9 months**

Costs **relative**

Risk **low**

Driver **product management**

Application

Specify pack configuration and components of individual items.

Tune graphic, structural elements and dimensions to product variants making use of pre-defined abilities. Immediately respond to defined customer needs.



Skills **+**

Time **1 — 3 months**

Costs **considerable**

Risk **acceptable**

Driver **marketing & sales**