

PERFECTING THE PACKAGE

COMING UP WITH A PACKAGE DESIGN THAT SCREAMS 'BUY ME!' ISN'T A SIMPLE PROCESS. CONSUMERS WANT MORE, BUT ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS MEAN USING LESS. **CAMERON BAYLEY** LOOKS AT WHAT'S INVOLVED AND TALKS TO ONE WOMAN WHOSE PACKAGING IS AS MUCH A PART OF HER SUCCESS AS HER PRODUCT

IN THE RETAIL WORLD, THE GENERAL RULE IS: CREATE A PRODUCT, THEN package it. But when Mia Klitsas decided to enter the retail sphere with her Moxie brand of feminine hygiene products, she turned the rule upside down.

"It really started with the packaging," she says, referring to Moxie's retro designs and eye-catching tins that hit the shelves in February this year. As with most entrepreneurs, Klitsas saw a niche that was begging for innovation. "It was something that was kind of obvious," she explains. "The packaging was the most obvious negative aspect. These products usually come in cardboard boxes that tend to break open and they're really quite flimsy and not hygienic. The idea came from thinking how can we make things better."

The answer for Klitsas, and business partner Jeff Gore, came in a tin. "They're recyclable, crush-proof and more fashionable and stylish, a bit more 'now'." She admits tin can be perceived as a sterile and stark material, so to combat this the design included "girly" aspects, such as candy striping, pale colours, and a black bow and drawstring influenced by women's lingerie: "Something that wouldn't date as much as the leopard prints or the spots that you see on current packs."

For Moxie, the key is in the simple, innovative designs. "Innovation is crucially important," agrees Gavin Williams, CEO of the Packaging Council of Australia, "in terms of design, graphics, easy-opening, and identifying market segments where you think there might be a gap or where existing products don't fill the need." And it seems Klitsas' idea is right on the money, with the council

awarding the Moxie crew a silver medal in the 'beauty through design' category at this year's Australian Packaging Awards.

The industry demands high standards, says Williams, as Australian products compete with international products more than ever. And global standards provide a challenge for current businesses, especially as Australia has a reputation more for following innovative trends than making them.

Despite the role of packaging remaining largely unchanged—"to contain, preserve and protect the product and to provide information about what's in the product," explains Williams—what consumers are demanding from it has definitely become more diverse. Current requirements include easy-opening, tamper-proofing



Packaging innovation: Mia Klitsas finds new ways to improve the packaging of an old product.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY MOXIE

and convenient and individual sizing, and these factors, influenced by such things as the increased number of smaller households, mean the amount of packaging used is increasing.

Joe Sieben, who heads graphic design company Spicy Company Imaging, agrees but makes this point: "You see more and more products these days with excessive packaging. With good planning you can reduce that and still have the same result." And in terms of environmental concerns, this is key for some businesses and their consumers. "A lot of people are noticing the use of packaging, and the use of recyclable materials is another thing that's becoming more popular." He says while the cost of using recyclable material can be more expensive, prices are coming down and making it a more viable option for businesses.

It was an easy choice for Klitsas and Gore, which is why Moxie tins can be thrown in with your recycling (if you're not using them to store your spare change).

While environmental issues have been important to businesses for years, Williams adds that reducing packaging also comes down to the bottom line. "For good commercial business sense—if you use more packaging than is necessary, the product's going to be more expensive."

Deciding on the correct amount of packaging to use is important, but it won't mean anything unless the design itself prompts a customer to want to buy it. "It connects the product to the consumer," Sieben says. "It's the key that makes them decide whether to pick it up or not. You really want to create impact. Also, you want to have your existing customers recognise which product is yours very easily, so they don't have to constantly search for it."

There's no magic answer to creating a standout package design but Sieben says shape is a key factor. He points to Coca Cola's instantly recognisable bottle as a yardstick in simple and effective shape design. "Colour is obviously another part of it, but you don't want to be too eccentric." He advises focusing on a target market rather than trying to appeal to everyone.

Although Klitsas' concept for Moxie hit her right from the start, she wouldn't have gone further without conducting extensive market research. "I really believed in it—the packaging and the product—we felt we'd got it right. So research just confirmed that for us, which was brilliant. But research is definitely important, because you might think something is great but other people might hate it."

As well as market research, it's important to be aware of changes in society in general, and both Williams and Sieben point to Australia's ageing population. "With an older population, you're going to have to meet their demands," says Williams. "You're going to have to have easy-opening packaging, you're going to have to have labels that are readable by an older population."

Sieben also recommends spending time thinking about the texture and feel of the packaging, making it something the customer wants to handle. "Obviously once they pick it up you want to emphasise the experience of the texture, make them feel like it's quality and something they want." Klitsas felt the same way about >

“SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES WILL ENSURE PACKAGING IS CONSTANTLY UPDATED AND ALWAYS LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO INNOVATE”



> her Moxie tins, so although they come in a sealed cardboard box, this has been designed with a cutaway hole so customers can see and touch the tins inside.

Klitsas (who has a marketing background) and Gore came up with their package design themselves, but you may want to budget for the services of a graphic design company to consult about what you are trying to achieve with your product, to research the industry and your competitors, and present you with options. “Do a bit of research once you get a sample: ask your target audience,” says Sieben, warning businesses to take their time with this process. He says people often rush the design and don’t spend enough time making sure their packaging is right.

For some, making sure the label contains enough information can be a challenge. “It depends on the product,” says Sieben. “If it’s a bigger product it’s a bigger package, and it doesn’t affect it that much. But on smaller packages it really becomes difficult to squeeze the information in so you really have to try and utilise less of your own space to grab the customer’s attention.” Even if you do have more room, Sieben warns against filling up available space with more information than is necessary.

Labelling is just one area governed by legislation which can place certain restraints on the process. Businesses need to make sure they are abiding by all relevant laws, says Williams. Packaging containing foodstuffs, hazardous chemicals or health products, for example, are some areas with specific requirements. Klitsas had to check with the Therapeutic Goods Association to ensure the Moxie packaging

complied with all appropriate standards. “There was a lot of stuff we didn’t know about,” she says. “We were aware that there were standards, but it is quite tricky.”

You can also go to the Packaging Council of Australia with queries regarding the legislation involved in packaging. Williams says other sources of advice in this area include the relevant state departments of Consumer Affairs, specialised packaging consultants, or legal firms.

It’s worth taking the transportation of your product into account, too. “You’ve got to ensure the product is packed or handled in a right manner so it doesn’t end up damaged. Which is definitely something we considered,” says Klitsas. “I mean, the tins are crush-proof, but we were concerned about the outer box ripping or anything like that, and so it was really important that it was handled properly and that it reaches the consumer in premium condition.” Williams says even in this area of design, you can make an impact on the environment, citing one company whose new packaging meant more could fit on a pallet and, therefore, less trucks were needed to ship the product.

And even if your packaging is working, don’t just rest on your laurels. Talking again about the Coca Cola designs he favours, Sieben says a lot of it’s success is due to creating a strong brand, but one that is a little fluid and can keep being reinvented. Williams agrees. “Successful companies will ensure their packaging is constantly updated and are always looking for new ways to innovate and achieve excellence and stand out on the shelf.” ●