



Package Design Drives Produce Sales

BY TERRY FEINBERG AND KAREN NARDOZZA

Whether a simple bib tie, a new bagged salad that will be sold in the US and Canada, or an intricate design for a product new to the market, there are a lot of elements that go into a successful package design. Since so many consumer decisions, and therefore product sales, are made at the moment the product is seen, the package design has a tremendous impact on fresh produce and food product sales.

An estimated 70 percent of shopping decisions for consumer packaged goods are made at the shelf (Nielsen Consumer Insights, 7/21/16). In the fresh produce industry, the percentage could be even higher. Whether the consumer decision is pure impulse, or if they are looking for a meal or snack but haven't decided what to buy, packaging design can determine whether your product calls out to them and ends up in their cart, or doesn't.

While the quality of the product is critical, the role of packaging in helping to showcase its quality and sell fresh produce (and other food and beverage products), cannot be understated.

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The packaging that holds your products plays many roles: protection, ease of handling and transportation, prolonging shelf life, and marketing.

In the winter 2016 issue of Coastal Grower, we discussed some of the important initial factors to consider when deciding upon packaging, including intellectual property, operations and production, and competitive issues. Now we're going to explore the role design plays in developing packaging that will move products from shelf, rack or bin, into the shopping cart.

MATERIAL SELECTION AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Package design involves much more than colors, graphics, copy (words) and images (photos). Function is an important consideration: Will the package be on display at the retail level, or will it function primarily for distribution and identification in the warehouse? What materials will it be made from? How will it be made? All of these are important questions that affect packaging design and production.

Physical features such as seals, handles, tabs and air holes need to be taken into consideration as well when design begins. Sales of bagged salad & fresh produce can be aided by the convenience of a re-sealable closure, but the location of the closure can affect the design. The fin created on the back of film-based bags from the seal can interfere with copy and images. If this is where your nutritional panel is, not only will it make it difficult for consumers to obtain the information they want, it could result in a regulatory recall.

NOT ALL GREENS ARE THE SAME

While field and plant operations often dictate the physical package configuration, the choice of material will affect the design. Different types of packaging use different types of ink and color standards, and printing quality can vary greatly. Also known as spot colors, there are over 1,100 PMS (Pantone Matching System) colors which have long been the standard for print graphic design, and are used to print film bags and most paper and labels.

The FLECO Color Guide, initiated by the Glass Container Manufacturers Institute (GCMI), is a group of 60 standard inks used for printing on corrugated cardboard. There are 200 or so silk screening inks that are often used on hard surfaces such as plastic seed pails and some retail food containers.

Adding to the complexity of colors is CMYK (Cyan Magenta Yellow Black), also known as 4-color process printing, which prints small dots of those four colors in such a way that the eye believes they are seeing many more colors.

On packaging and printed materials that can use PMS or silk screen inks, color photographs can be printed using the CMYK process. There is no CMYK option for GCMCI printing. CMYK can also be used to simulate PMS and other colors, but the reproduction will not be an exact match.

Knowing how the packaging will be printed is important because the different ink standards could make it impossible to match that perfect PMS 363 green you chose for your logo with the CMYK color on your bags and the GCMCI color on your cartons.

CARDBOARD BOX/CORRUGATED CARTON

Corrugated cartons are a mainstay of the fresh produce industry and the basic corrugated carton is printed on brown “Kraft” paper. These cartons are inexpensive and fully recyclable, but the GCMCI ink options limit color choices, and the brown substrate of the Kraft paper will make colors appear muted or muddy. If the cartons need to be waxed because of a wet environment, that further degrades the appearance of the printing (and also limits the recyclability).

One way to help the colors stand out or pop is to print white under the color ink, or to print on a white cardboard substrate, but both those options involve additional cost. Some cartons are designed to become retail displays – called Display Ready Carton, or DRC. In these uses, it is often worth using a laminated carton that combines a high quality, CMYK printed sheet laminated to a corrugated cardboard carton.

NEW MATERIALS

There are also promising new corrugated plastic cartons that are white, can be printed with PMS or CMYK inks and are recyclable. There are even compostable clamshells that hold interesting promise, especially for organic products and in markets where governments are outlawing all plastic packaging. And yes, those features all come at added cost, but often times the enhanced image and increased sales are worth it.

WHAT GOES INTO THE DESIGN?

Once the package materials and production process are determined, the visual design

can begin, starting with the copy and design elements – both mandatory and optional. Is an ingredients list and/or nutritional panel required? What is the country of origin? Is the package used for multiple products with required check boxes to indicate specific contents? Is the package being used for export (Canada, Australia, and the European Union all have their own unique regulations)? Optional items can include logos such as USDA Organic and Non-GMO Project certifications.

Optional items can also include recommendations on how to prepare and use the product, company stories and other information that might distinguish your

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products from others. Nutritional or (legally approved) health claims are often included, but we would caution you to be careful with jumping on the trend bandwagon. Will labeling a bag of apples, carrots or potatoes “gluten free” build trust and credibility with your consumers, most who will know those products have never contained gluten?

How are you going to highlight the product? Clamshells, clear bags or wraps and windows on cardboard boxes are all tools that can be used to highlight fresh products, and good design will not get in the way of showing off the product. Color photographs can be used to show the product in recipes and plated meals that give people ideas on how to prepare and serve your products. Photos can also show the whole raw product such as watermelons, mangos or carrots if what you are selling has been peeled, cut or otherwise processed.

SHOWCASING QUALITY AND HIDING FLAWS

While showcasing fresh produce is often an important design consideration, sometimes hiding less desirable elements, such as stems, butts and juice, is also a goal. Solid or opaque

design elements can be used at the bottoms of clear packaging to do just that.

Design helps the package convey tone and image and speak to its intended audience. A cut-fruit product targeted at kids will work best if it’s bright, colorful and fun. A more sophisticated design could be used on packaging for specialty herbs targeted at chefs and foodies.

BE THE SAME OR BE DIFFERENT

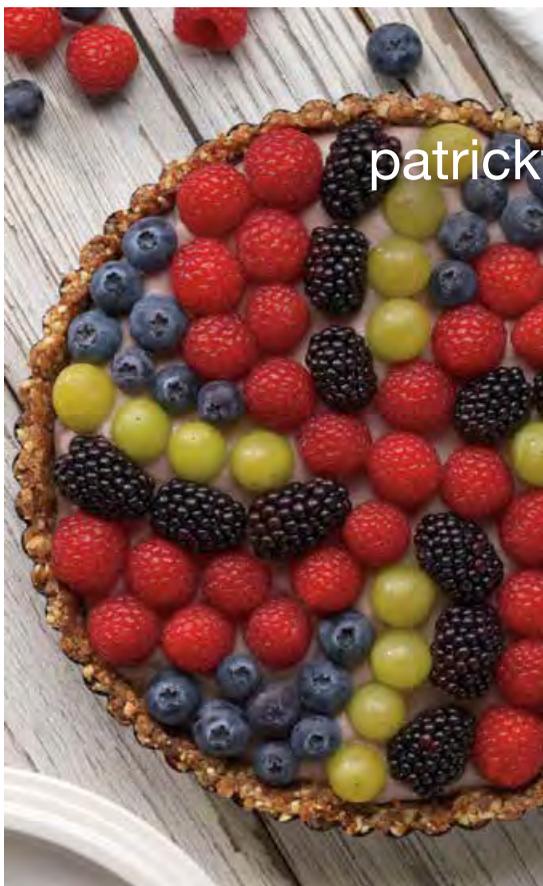
Design can also be used to show familiarity, or establish a distinction, especially in value-added or processed products. Peanut butter typically comes in glass or plastic jars. A similar package for a new nut butter could help it compete against the familiar peanut product; a squeeze bag, while unique and functional, could be too different for consumers to be comfortable buying it.

In another example, if there are already several competitors in the market with a packaged product similar to your new product, using a similar color and/or design elements will make your product seem familiar to consumers, and could make them more likely to add it to their shopping cart. This also helps in big box stores that might only have one brand of a product at a time, so if a shopper is looking for the familiar orange bag of cut butternut squash, she might miss your bag if it’s red.

Familiarity can be an important packaging strategy, but there is also value in standing out and establishing brand identity and preference across all your products. Distinct logos, colors, patterns and shapes can help tie all your products together. If purple stripes are part of your branding, and a consumer has had good experiences with your wrapped cauliflower, she’ll likely have a favorable reaction when she sees the purple stripes on your banded and tagged broccoli or the label on your clamshell spinach leaves.

WILL IT SELL?

Let’s assume you’ve taken care of any intellectual property issues, have worked with your packaging supplier to identify a packaging material that meets your operational needs, and worked with your designer or agency



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to develop a design that meets regulatory requirements and you think does a good job of representing your company and products. So how do you know if your new package design is going to work?

Research is a vital step that often does not get enough attention. At the simplest level, have your agency develop a visual mockup of how your new design will look on a rack or shelf amongst other products. How does it look next to the competition? Does it stand out? If you were a consumer quickly scanning the produce aisle, would you grab it and put it in your cart? Show it to some people on your team, family members and buyers for your most critical customers. Ask probing questions beyond “what do you think?”

How much do you trust your gut and value the opinions of those you’ve shared the designs with? If you’re convinced you have the right design for your target customers, that could be enough (keep in mind your sales team might not be representative of the final consumer). However, before you spend tens of thousands of dollars in package printing, it might be worth the investment in some additional research to get the opinions of typical shoppers. This is especially true if you have multiple design options. Focus groups are a good tool to assemble consumer panels and dig into their perceptions and reactions. The results of this can give you even greater confidence in the decisions you make.

GO TO MARKET

From meeting all legal requirements, to protecting and presenting your products in the best light to support consumer purchase decisions, successful package designs require a combination of art and science, and demand careful attention to details. **ce**

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