



You Taste How It's Packaged

THE QUEST FOR CLEANER, LESS PROCESSED FOODS

As food manufacturers strive to develop cleaner, less processed foods that appeal to a more discerning consumer, I frequently find that the design of food package structures are often not fully appreciated for their ability to influence consumers **actual taste experience** of the food.

Can a package really change, either positively or negatively, the way we experience food taste? Are our brains so unsophisticated that we can't separate the frills of the package design from what our taste buds tell us? From my research, the truth is our brains are easily tricked, and the package can directly influence consumer's sensory response to the food the package contains.

So listen-up all those budding "less-processed" food marketers and product developers out there; Everything you do to convey the fabulous quality of the food you are working on will be wasted well before your food is ever eaten by the last minute decision to pack it in something that imparts negative food taste cues.

UNCONSCIOUS INFLUENCE ON TASTE

We are not talking here about the tainting of food from the inside of a can - that metallic after taste - or the slight off-odor of charred plastic coming out the microwave; but something much more fundamental.

We are also not really talking about the influence of visual cues from the food inside the package (although very important).

What we are talking about is how the structural package design can inform, trigger memories and associations, and short-cut our sensory systems to influence how we experience food taste. When I see the way a food is packaged, my brain generates triggers that tell me first what my perception of that food (taste) might be, and secondly **imprints what I actually taste**. Consumers carry through memories and associations of various packaging types and cues through to expectations of taste, and those memories and associations transfer unconsciously to how the senses decode taste.

RETHINK APPROACH

We have known for a long time that everything about the way a package looks and feels imparts a perception of a brand, the food, its quality, and its value. We all sweat the look and feel of the graphics to make sure we convey the right impression. As a designer of packaging, it's at the core of what you think about as you strive to get products noticed at the shelf. But how often are you asking if the package structure itself is having a profound impact on those consumers taste experiences? Do you take the time to include a sensory evaluation with packaging included? My experience suggests not very often. Frequently we find all the *hard lifting* is expected to come from the graphics on the package, that the package itself is selected from what you can do today, what fits on the current (processed food) equipment, and what is the more affordable. In a world ever more sensitive to processed food it might be time to rethink this approach.

This is nothing new but perhaps a forgotten insight; *Louis Cheskin* **pioneered** the idea of *sensory transference* in the 1950's and 1960's working with some of the leading brands of the day.

So, as you look to create, develop, and transform your food products, and appeal to a new consumer less tolerant of the highly processed foods of their parents, ask yourself how **hard is your packaging working to elevate the actual taste**. If you're not sure, it might be time to invest in some consumer sensory packaging research to understand more about the influence of packaging on taste and dig deeper into the complexities of sensory transference from packaging.

Simon Gainey, Founder of Hardworking packaging LLC : *Helping make your packaging work harder for your consumer, customer, and business.*