

FACING OFF AGAINST 'WRAP RAGE'

Consumer frustration with packaging has come to a head, and

brand owners are stepping up. BY KATE BERTRAND CONNOLLY

You know the drill. You get your new cell phone or electric toothbrush home from the store, and the first thing you do is look for scissors, a knife, a box cutter or any tool to get the clamshell open.

A while later, a little sweaty and possibly also bloody, you have separated the product from its packaging. Best case, you're mildly annoyed. Worst case, you're in the throes of what's come to be known as "wrap rage," and the brand experience has taken an ugly turn.

Packaging that's difficult to open

may prevent theft, protect the product or keep children out, but it can also undermine your product sales.

"All of the great things you're doing, from advertising to product delivery to package graphics, can all be undermined or destroyed through a poor experience," says Scott Young, president of Perception Research Services.

In developing such packaging, marketers may be looking more at theft protection than at the usage experience, Young says. But one frequently gets in the way of the other.

That can be devastating in any

instance, but especially with a new brand launch. "It's very disappointing when the result that comes back from the market test is, 'I can't tell you what it tastes like because I couldn't get into the package.' That's when we get a call," says Hugh Ross, president of Payne North America, a supplier of tear tape, an adhesive tape applied to packaging that is designed as an easy-open feature for consumers.

The raccoon technique

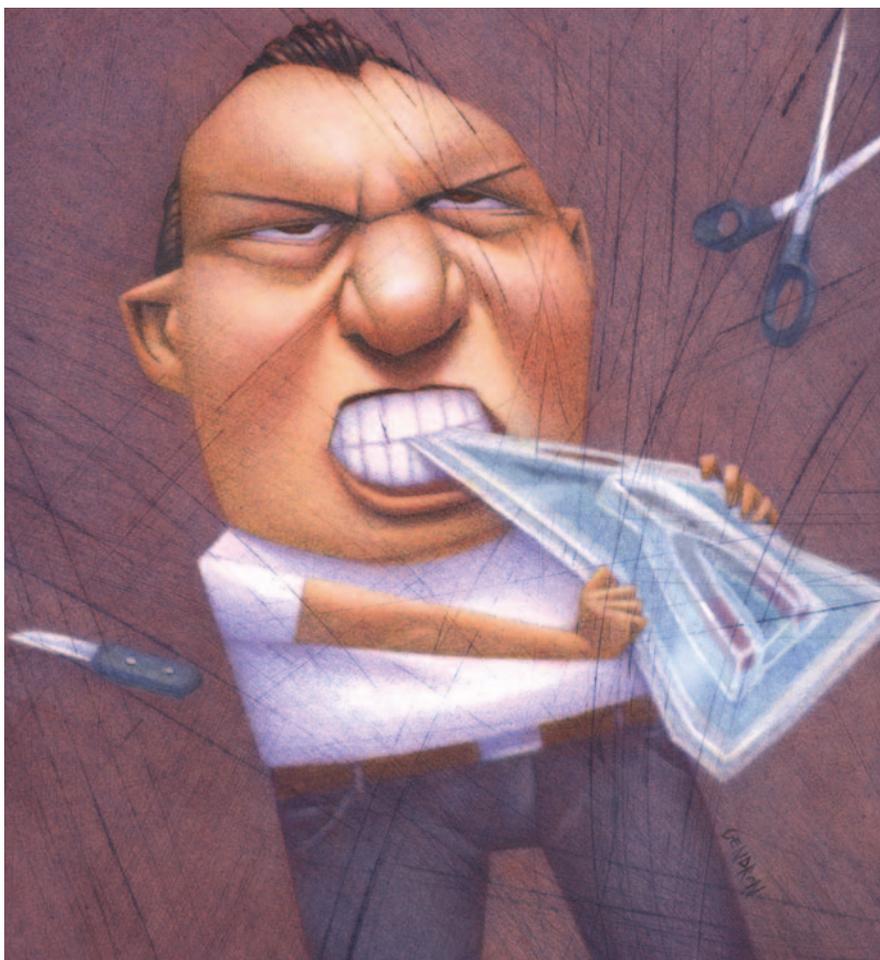
Among all package formats, the clamshell scored as the worst offender in *Consumer Reports'* 2006 Oyster Awards for hard-to-open packaging. That designation was based on the time it took to open the package—nine minutes, 22 seconds—and the need for sharp implements to open it.

Toy packaging that features excessive plastic and wire constraints for the product also works consumers' nerves, according to *Consumer Reports*. So does CD packaging, with its unfriendly tape seal.

Additional items on the magazine's Oyster list are blister packs for pills; pet food bags with string sewn across the top; and anything sealed in cellophane.

Business traveler Martin Kleinman recalls a vivid scene from a recent Jet Blue flight when a fellow traveler engaged a bag of Terra Blue Potato Chips.

"This woman couldn't open her Terra Blues—the only food they serve on a five-hour flight—and she lost it, just lost it, and started frantically gnawing on the package like a raccoon," recalls Kleinman, managing director of Communications Strategies LLC, a New York-based marketing communications firm. "Then she started pulling with



both hands to try and separate the glued parts, and her elbow slammed into the guy in the middle seat and woke him up. He was not amused.”

Nestlé's initiative

Kleinman's is an extreme illustration, but scenes of frustration play out every day with consumer packaging. In fact, non-easy-open packaging is the number one complaint consumers make about food and beverage packaging, according to Helmut Traitler, VP for innovation partnerships at Nestlé.

Though, drilling down, Traitler says there are certain categories within 'not easy-opening' packaging that are more important than others, such as stick packs and pouches. And, he says, caps on water and other drink bottles have also become more difficult to open.

Nestlé's approach to the problem is universal design, a method that attempts to make packaging equally friendly to consumers of all ages and abilities. The company specifically targets children and seniors as it designs packaging, because "if it's good for the very young and the very elderly, obviously it will be good for everybody in between," Traitler says.

In 2004, the company launched a worldwide initiative to make its packaging easier to open and, since then, it has successfully modified scores of packages. Nestlé's approach includes both easy-open features and on-pack text or pictograms to illustrate use.

Particularly with stick packs, "it's the communication to the consumer that counts most. You really need to lead the consumer to that little notch or cut to say this is where you start to open it," Traitler says.

For flexible pouches, which Nestlé uses in many of its markets around the world for products like Purina pet food,

Costco switched the packaging for its Lexmark printer cartridges from clamshells (left) to a theft-resistant, easy-open coated paperboard product that's sealed to a plastic bubble (right).



Nescafé, and Coffee-Mate, the company has incorporated either an easy-open notch or a tear strip with a zipper. And, increasingly, Nestlé is using laser pre-cutting on flexible packaging.

In redesigning paperboard packaging for its Turtles chocolate brand, Nestlé Canada replaced the old cellophane-wrapped box with a container that provides ease of opening.

The old package lacked shelf presence and there was a "little bit of hostility getting into the package, given the cellophane," says Ken Miller, managing director at laga | One80 Design, which worked with Nestlé Canada to redesign the Turtles package.

The new container is a paperboard bucket with tabs on either side. When the consumer pulls on the tabs, the package's sides splay out to form a serving bowl for the individually flow-wrapped candies.

The side tabs also provide tamper

Nestlé replaced the cellophane-wrapped box for its Turtles brand with a paperboard bucket with tabs on either side. Consumers pull the tabs, and the package's sides splay out to form a serving bowl.

evidence as well as "an easy directional way to get into the box without prying it open," Miller says.

New security packaging

Others, like Costco, are meeting the clamshell problem head on. For its Lexmark printer cartridges, the retailer has switched from clamshells to a new theft-resistant, easier-to-open form of packaging—a MeadWestvaco coated paperboard product called Natralock that's sealed to a plastic bubble.

Consumers still need scissors to cut through the paperboard, but because it's flat, they can cut in a straight line rather than around welded ridges. After they are cut, the parts of the package separate easily.

"We saw a tremendous amount of consumer frustration [with clamshell packaging]," says Michael R. Skrovaneck, general manager of the Natralock project at MeadWestvaco. That, and retailer demand for security packaging, were key drivers of the



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Costco project, he says.

Indeed, club stores have a strong need for packaging that is both pilfer-proof and easier to open. With relatively high per-SKU prices, and few employees on the floor, secure packaging is essential for the channel.

For small, expensive electronics, the answer until now has been “these monster-size clamshells,” Skrovanek says. “The idea is you can’t get into it in the store but you also can’t stick it under your coat.”

In addition to being smaller and easier to open than clamshells, the new coated paperboard product is said to be more environmentally conscious. That apparently struck a cord with Costco, which chose the material to reduce its use of plastics and because the coated paperboard is recyclable.

“The key thing I look for in packaging materials is that they fall within accepted parameters for recycling,” says Scott Carnie, general manager of Costco’s East Coast packaging facility. Also with an eye to the environment, Costco chose recycled PET for the plastic bubble on the Lexmark package.

Pharma’s challenge

In the pharmaceutical industry, child resistance has often stood in the way of easy-open packaging. Child-resistant closures and blister packs are classic examples.

“It’s a dichotomy. You’re attempting to keep children out but at the same time allow elderly patients to access the product,” says Renard Jackson, vice president and general manager of global packaging services for Cardinal Health.

Cardinal Health has developed senior-friendly, child-resistant blister packs that require multiple actions to open. To use this Pill Calendar, consumers slide a release mechanism with one hand and push the tablet through the foil backing with the other.



Cardinal’s research shows that kids will use anything available to open packages,

THE EIGHT PILLARS OF PAIN

The pain threshold in opening clamshells and blister packs is both mental and physical. Bryce G. Rutter, Ph.D., founder and CEO of Metaphase Design Group Inc., has identified the following “pillars of pain” associated with these user-unfriendly package styles:

1. Superhuman strength required. The strength required to separate the two parts of the clamshell or to peel the backing from a blister can exceed human hand strength. The problem worsens with age, as strength declines and using scissors or other tools becomes more difficult.

2. Lack of visual direction. Visual cues that show how and where to enter the package are woefully lacking. Package designers should know the structure’s weakest point and, as a result, they may know how to open the package with relative ease—but they don’t share the information.

3. Non-intuitive. The actions required of your hands and fingers to open a package should be intuitive. After looking briefly at a package, it should be explicitly obvious how to get into it.

4. Can’t get a grip. Clamshells designed to be opened by grabbing one half of the shell and pulling it away from the other half typically lack grips that are large enough for you to get a good hold.

5. Hard on the eyes. Particularly for the 40-plus crowd, glare and lack of contrast make it difficult to see through the blister, read package copy and/or

see the edges of the package. Some designs compound the problem by incorporating difficult-to-read typefaces and small type sizes even for informative copy, such as directions for opening the package.

6. Causes injuries. Applying scissors, knives, corkscrews and/or box cutters to the package leaves the plastic sharp enough to cut through skin, if the tools themselves haven’t already.

7. Puts product at risk. After twisting, cutting and jabbing at the package, you finally tear it open. But you do so with such force that the product flies across the room. By that time it may already be scratched from the implements used to liberate it.

8. Difficult to dispose. Particularly for large products—envision a handheld vacuum—the blister’s size and resistance to crushing make it a pain to throw away. And, if the plastic is non-recyclable, it’s a pain for everyone on the planet.

Where to go for more information...

◆ **Ergonomic design.** At Metaphase Design Group Inc., call Bryce Rutter at 314.721.0700 ext. 123 or visit www.metaphase.com

including their teeth, and that children can be as strong as seniors. However, children typically lack an adult’s dexterity and the ability to perform a two-handed opening action.

That’s why the company’s senior-friendly, child-resistant blister packs incorporate multiple-action opening features. To use the Cardinal Health Pill Calendar, for example, the consumer

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slides a release mechanism with one hand and pushes the tablet through the foil backing with the other hand.

Beyond easy-open

It's clear that brand owners are starting to take their understanding of "wrap rage" to a higher level with package designs that are not only easy to open, but easy to buy, transport, store, use and dispose.

Dispensing systems are part of this focus, particularly in the personal-care category. For example, new packaging for Clean & Clear, Neutrogena and

Aveeno foaming cleansers features a dispensing pump that locks without squirting out residual product trapped in the pump.

Rexam Airspray Inc., which supplies that pump, also provides pumps for children's foaming products like Gerber Grins & Giggles, Pampers Kandoo, Johnson's Kids and Softsoap Foam Works. For kids' ease of use, these packages include oversize pump tops, one-finger operation and containers with a stable base.

Experts say that by addressing potential frustration points, whether



To prevent consumer frustrations with their packaging, brand owners are looking beyond easy-open features to the in-home experience. P&G's Kandoo line considers kids' ease-of-use with oversize pumps, one-finger operation and containers with a stable base.

A PACKAGING REPORT CARD

Developing a package that is truly consumer-friendly starts with assessing the performance and convenience of your existing packaging. By watching how consumers interact with your packaging and asking some tough questions about its performance, you can learn what's working—and what's not.

Simon Gainey, a partner at package research and design firm Competitive Innovation LLC, suggests rating the package in question on the following performance dimensions.

First, how well does the package:

- Provide access to the product?
- Create the right opening geometry, enabling product dispensing or release?
- Protect the closure mechanism so it's not destroyed upon opening?
- Protect the product from damage as the package is being opened?
- Eliminate spills upon opening?

Secondly, with an eye to convenience:

- How many steps are needed to open the package?

- How much time is consumed?
- What is the integrity of the opening mechanism within the context of storage and repeated use?
- Is opening the package intuitive?
- Is it mistake-tolerant, in the event that the consumer is rushed or doesn't open it just right?
- What's the skill level required to open it? For products used by all segments of the population, the design should be inclusive.
- What level of physical ability is required? Can kids, boomers and the elderly open it?
- Is it age tolerant, recognizing that limitations in eyesight, strength, flexibility and cognition vary with age?
- Is the package consistent, working the same way every time?
- Is it implement-free to open?

Where to go for more information...

◆ **Package research and design.** At Competitive Innovation, contact Simon Gainey at 610.627.1699 or visit www.competitiveinnovation.com.

in opening the package or dispensing the product, brand owners can set themselves apart.

"Functionality is important in itself but also in the context of differentiation," says Perception Research Services' Young. "It's part of the larger picture, seeing packaging as a marketing vehicle as opposed to a cost center." BP

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Where to go for more information...

- ◆ **Paperboard packaging.** At MeadWestvaco, contact Lisa Collins at 804.327.6331 or visit www.natralock.com.
- ◆ **Consumer research.** At Perception Research Services, contact Scott Young at 201.346.1600 or visit www.prsresearch.com.
- ◆ **Tear tape.** At Payne Worldwide, contact Hugh Ross at 804.518.1100 or visit www.payne-worldwide.com.
- ◆ **Package design and innovation.** At laga | One80 Design contact Ken Miller at 212.268.1801 x 24 or visit www.one80design.com.
- ◆ **Pharmaceutical packaging.** At Cardinal Health, call 215.613.3001 or visit www.cardinalhealth.com/pts.
- ◆ **Dispensers.** At Rexam Airspray, contact Robert Brands at 954.972.7750 or visit www.rexamairspray.com.