

Getting a Measure OF CONVENIENCE

con · ven · ience [kuh n – veen – yuh ns] – *noun*
6. Package Design. the fitness or suitability for performing an action or fulfilling a requirement; something conducive to comfort or ease (as an appliance, device, or service)

By Simon Gainey

The stereotypical time-squeezed, over-scheduled, hectic consumers of the 21st century continue to show great affinity for products and services that make their lives more “convenient.” Convenience has become the mantra of many package designers as they pursue solutions for simplifying, speeding up, or just plain making it easier for consumers to complete everyday tasks.

We all talk about convenience as if it were a well-defined, specific measurement system, as if there were Newton’s three “Fundamental Laws of Convenience.” But what is convenience really, and how should we think about it in terms of package design?

At the very heart of convenience is the notion that in some way we are making a task or activity better, easier,

simpler, or faster for consumers without sacrificing all the things they have come to love about a product or package. Or in the words of a recent consumer I interviewed, “It’s all about eliminating the hassles and chores in life without losing the fun stuff.”

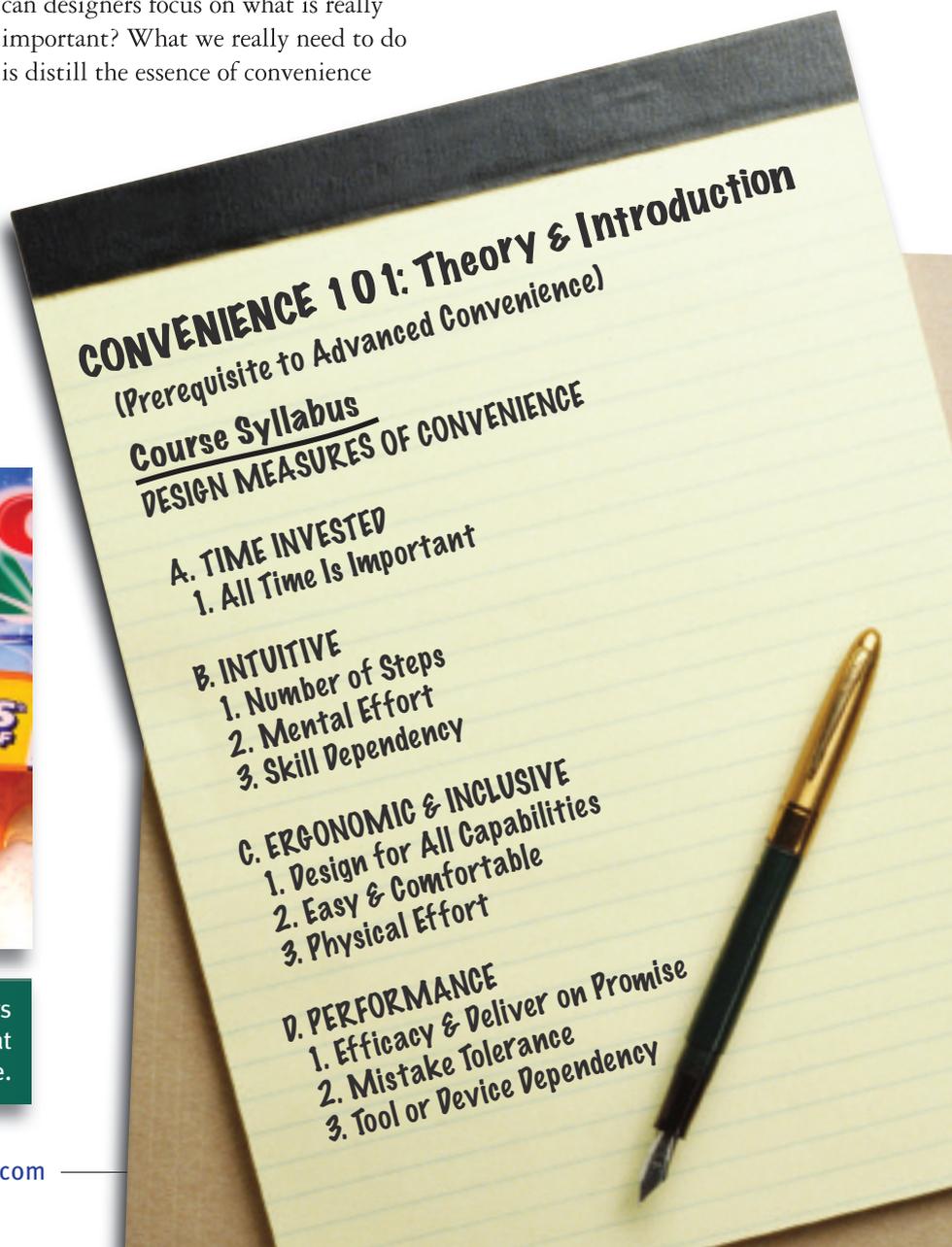
But what does that mean from a package design standpoint and how can designers focus on what is really important? What we really need to do is distill the essence of convenience

into measures that adequately reflect the human factors that are at work, and use these measures as a template for thinking about convenience.

A.1. TIME INVESTED – All Time Is Important. How long will this take? Convenience seems to hinge on how much time a consumer



Just because we know that consumers want convenience doesn’t mean that convenience is always easy to define.



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needs to invest to successfully execute a task. It's really an all encompassing measure, something easy to imagine, that encapsulates the physical and emotional effort required by figuring out how to open a package, what to do with it after opening, how to use the product correctly, and how to clean up afterwards. Measuring time is certainly a place to start, but definitely not the only measure that helps us understand the value that convenience brings.

B.1. INTUITIVE – Number of steps. How many steps are there really? Our ability to successfully learn, remember, process, and execute steps is inversely proportional to the number of steps. The more steps there are, the less likely we will feel that a product is convenient, the more likely we will take shortcuts, fail, or have a poor experience with the package and product. Convenience is about a minimum number of steps. Think about consumer frustration with complicated microwave products that require opening multiple packages and reading six to 10 steps of instructions. Also, you may know examples of so-called convenient products that overburden consumers with a clean-up step that defeats a convenient experience.



Convenience can mean packaging that delivers product more effectively and efficiently, like this Sainsbury's "Easy Steam" package that is popular in the U.K.



B.2. INTUITIVE – Mental Effort. How much do I need to think about this? Convenience carries a spirit of "no thought required." Today's consumers are thinking about too many other things to be bothered with complicated packaging. If we can eliminate some of the mental effort required, consumers will see it as more convenient. Packages and products that do not require learning completely new approaches, or that

leverage preset human conditions are hugely more convenient because they make it easier or more advantageous for us to use them. Preset conditions can include what is familiar, already known, previously learned, intuitive, or part of our human functional code.

B.3. INTUITIVE – Skill Dependency. Do I need instructions or training? There is something very comforting about products and packaging that



One of the most measurable and easiest ways to design for convenience is to save the amount of time a consumer feels is wasted trying to negotiate a package to use it correctly. The directions on this Uncle Ben's Ready Rice package could not possibly be more efficiently presented.

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require little thought and work by design. Did you ever look at your iPod manual? It would seem that if we can closely couple the performance of a package to what we already know, do, and understand, we are making it more convenient. Convenience involves simplifying the learning curve and leveraging what you are already familiar with.

C.1. ERGONOMIC & INCLUSIVE – Design for All Capabilities. Does it account for the capability levels of all consumers? It is foolhardy to think of your consumer population as a “singularly able” person. The population is made up of consumers of a huge variety of skills, intellect, physical and mental capabilities, and attitudes towards convenience. Think of the 80+ million Baby Boomers that, reportedly, are experiencing ever increasing

Package design “efficacy” can sometimes mean that the package functions as it is designed and delivers on its promise, which this innovative dispenser package does.



issues with eyesight (font size, contrast, glare), hand/finger dexterity, and their ability to learn and adapt to new things. Convenience for a Baby Boomer may need to accommodate for limitations of a boomer who can't get a easy grip, who isn't as strong as before, who can't easily read the small print, or who can't manipulate small objects. Inclusiveness is the spirit of designing for all capabilities.

C.2. ERGONOMIC & INCLUSIVE – Easy & Comfortable. Does it conform and function for my body? Every industrial designer and package designer understands the notion of creating solutions that work with the human form, are comfortable to use, and accommodate our differences. Convenience needs to embrace this because comfort helps to make things so much easier, more acceptable, and more readily embraced. It is always surprising to find so-called convenient packages that can cause serious grip burns, leg bruises, or hand cuts during opening. It can also be the smallest detail that trips up a convenient design. One example is frustrating shampoo closures that can inflict injury as consumers try to get their finger or fingernail under the sharp cap ledge.

C.3. ERGONOMIC & INCLUSIVE – Physical Effort. Does it require a lot of effort? It is also important that we account for and understand the physical effort required. Convenience embodies the idea of “easy” (by definition) and so as designers we need to bring an understanding of the physical effort required for all relevant consumers. Take time to watch a young child try to get the drinking straw into a juice pouch for a good example. The design is not convenient because kids lack the fine motor skills and physical strength to get the package to work. On top of that, the consequences of failure—spills and mess—are very high.



Convenience can simply mean that consumers don't have to think too much about how to use a package or product correctly. Simply put, the goal is to make the experience with a package intuitive, comfortable, and efficient.

D.1. PERFORMANCE – Efficacy & Deliver on Promise. Does it really work? At the end of the day, a convenient solution needs to actually deliver the product correctly in a way that is consistent with what the consumer is expecting, and it needs to do this every time. It seems an inherent flaw in thinking that a more convenient package or product should ever actually expect consumers to compromise their expectations on how well it performs or their expectations for product delivery that fits their convenient

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lifestyle (i.e., not too many, not too big, not too messy).

The challenge is often about creating “consumer reasons to believe” in the ability of something new to do what it promises to do. Have you ever looked at the Scrubbing Bubbles Automatic Shower Cleaner and thought: “How can that possibly scrub my walls really clean without any physical scrubbing?” or looked at toasted microwaveable products and thought: “You can’t cook bread in a microwave.”

D.2. PERFORMANCE – Mistake Tolerance. Does it have the flexibility to allow for error? There is nothing worse than a convenient product or package that isn’t versatile or robust enough to be able to work under most, or all, conditions. The fact is, many times packages are used in a rush or used in situations where using them “correctly” is not always an option. Convenient is about quick and easy, so why not make a package work correctly when used in a big rush? How often have you opened a bag of cereal or coffee quickly and inadvertently torn the side of the package open, ruined the reclose function, and spilled the contents on the floor?

D.3. PERFORMANCE – Tool or Device Dependency. Do I need anything else to make it work? Lastly,

convenient packages and products should really not be about having special tools and devices to make them work. Special tools for packages frequently become broken or lost parts, time-wasters, or a hassle that adds time and gets in the way.

Review

The essence of convenience is thus about an integrated design approach focused on these human factors to make tasks simpler, easier, and more comfortable and to create a better overall experience for the consumer. In the case of a task that a consumer really hates to do, the experience is about taking away the hassle and allowing the freedom to do something else more enjoyable. For other tasks, a convenience improvement could be as simple as making a package that actually works correctly for a consumer’s lifestyle. So, as you experiment creatively to design the next generation of convenient packages and products, think about breaking down the problem analysis into these human measures. Then you can evaluate how the task at hand performs against these measures—and see where opportunities for improvement still lie. ■

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front of most of the new packages is the reassuring tag line: “Same Pepsi inside, new look outside.” Miller explains that it is customary and important to reassure consumers for at least six months in situations like this.

Miller also sees today’s youth as demanding authenticity from the products they come into contact with

in their day-to-day experiences. The new Pepsi design strategy is versatile because it can be authentic and stay current, and it could also make introducing special seasonal or regional designs more intriguing and less disruptive. “This is a new way of using packaging as media,” explains Miller. “The consumer is looking for more variety and expecting more from their brands. They want to have a dialogue with their favorite brands.” ■

Luxe Pack Preview

Luxe Pack New York 2007 will be held May 23 and 24 at New York’s Metropolitan Pavilion.

This year’s event will showcase more exhibitors than ever before and will offer a compelling series of seminars, with the highlights shown here. Other special exhibits include FiFi Award Nominees Display and Winners of the Pratt Institute “Marc Rosen Scholarship for Graduate Package Design.”



Wednesday, May 23, 2007

11 a.m. – “Democratic Beauty” by industrial designer Karim Rashid
Luxury is becoming democratized, and Rashid says, “I always believed that our everyday inexpensive packages could be highly aesthetic, very human, and extremely contemporary.”

3 p.m. – “When the Package Becomes the Brand” moderated by Marc Rosen with a panel of experts
Graphic branding has become the emotional tie to consumer recognition and trust, and packaging can instantly brand a product with a lasting impression.

6 p.m. – Cocktail Party
Celebrating CPC Packaging Magazine’s 2007 Editors’ Choice Award Winners

Thursday, May 24, 2007

11 a.m. – “Sustainability and Luxury” by Nicole Smith, environmental director, Design & Source Productions Inc.
New sustainable materials lend themselves to the needs of luxury packaging, giving sleek presentation, and the promise that sustainability is modern.