

The OTC Drug Aisle:

‘Did you find everything that you were looking for?’

By Simon Gainey

In a world where consumers are looking for ways to speed up the shopping process and get through the “chore” of shopping, they are seeking ways to find shortcuts and be smart about how they shop.

Watch them in their grocery store and you’ll see that they have the layout committed to memory to aide them to navigate quickly to the places they need to go. Shopping in the same place for consumers is not only about convenience because of location but also because the store layout is familiar, easily recognizable, and stored as a memory map. Consumers feel successful because they do not have to spend time decoding an unfamiliar layout and they can predict how to get to what they want quickly. Thus, enabling consumers to feel successful by making the shopping experience quick, convenient, and simple from the way a store is laid out to the way an individual SKU is presented on the shelf is a good benchmark of performance.



The OTC pharmaceutical aisle is one place that well-executed package design can bring better “shopability” to consumers and gain a critical edge. Information hierarchy on a package can help ease consumers’ pain and frustration in more ways than one.

Reducing frustration

If you spend any time with consumers in stores, you would know that there are few places that frustrate, confuse, and enrage consumers more than the “shopability” of the OTC drug section. It



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is all too familiar behavior: Consumers often enter the OTC aisle and over-shoot the first 12 feet, and then they stop and try to locate themselves.

Next, they are looking for something quickly recognizable to help them make some memory associations—the broad “buckets” that they categorize by. In their heads they are asking: “Is this the allergy section or cough/cold?” You see consumers make rapid movements of the head, seemingly scanning for something that they can quickly recognize, searching for a quick draw out of memory, or screening out the stuff that is not relevant. Signage helps, but who has time for signage while they are already on their phone, dealing with screaming kids, trying to remember what they need, and battling through the crowds at the store?

But this is just the start for many consumers. The challenge now is to locate the right group of products associated with the consumers perceived needs and preferences. The rapid head scanning continues but in a more focused zone. As the consumer slowly gets closer and closer, they look to draw on memory triggers to help them get to what they want. They look for a color, a brand name, a package shape, a brand block, or a break in the shelf to help them. They are close now but it is not getting any easier. Which one of these 40 SKUs is the right one?

Consumers peer at, pick-up and poke at the rows and rows of boxes trying to figure out which one matches their exact needs and symptoms. It’s no easy task. The seemingly endless variants blend together, and the brand name is no longer the guarantee of the drug benefit. Self-doubt creeps into that frustrated consumers mind: “Maybe they moved it,” “I can never find what I need,” “I can’t tell the difference between these.”

What we can find

From spending time researching consumers’ in-store behavior, I believe the OTC drug section creates significant barriers to enabling the consumer to shop both successfully and quickly. There is layer upon layer of information for consumers to process, screen, interpret, and translate. It’s no wonder

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consumers get frustrated.

The OTC shopping experience appears to be counterintuitive to the lessons learned in other markets and other sections of the store:

Consumers feel stupid, slow, and unable to complete the task at hand. To a consumer with a limited capacity to hold, retrieve and process information and with a desire to accomplish the task quickly, the OTC section is cluttered, confusing, and frustrating. Consumers are overloaded with too much visual information and are forced into slowing down, and clear visual shelf organization and segmentation would enable consumer navigation significantly.

The shelves blur and everything tends to look the same. Consumers need visual cues to help them accomplish their task. Even within specific sections of the OTC drug area, there is little visual differentiation between brands, products, and sections.

Packaging is vastly underutilized both

graphically and structurally. Package design should enable consumers to recognize and locate their products quickly. There is very little about the package design that consumers can store as a memory aid to help them remember and navigate the shelves. Consumers can't screen out products easily when similar packages compete, so this overloads their ability to process information quickly and disrupts their "shopping conditioning." Visual differentiation can be important both to locate a specific SKU and to "signpost" a section.

The packaging is too graphically complex. Consumers have to decode layers of information to find what they need. For Boomers and seniors, small font size, layers of information, low contrast, glare, and the similarity between brands makes shopping a particular difficult task.

Poor product or benefit segmentation. When every SKU of a product line is packaged the same it becomes hard for consumers to figure out what is right for them. They have to sift through each individual item. OTC drug manufacturers

should use package design as a vehicle to communicate with and enable consumers at the store shelf to make the right selection fast.

Package designs tailored to "usage" need and behavior. Some consumer groups have specific needs beyond the drug benefits and make selections based on the way the product is delivered. It could be the product form, the way it is dispensed, the size of the package, its portability, or whether they can open it with an arthritic hand. Creating differentiating, unique, "benefit communicating" package designs can help provide good memory triggers for consumers and help to break up the blur.

It is high time to change the shopability of the OTC drug section and use package design, shelf layout design, and merchandizing design to make life easier for consumers. Aging boomers, shoppers searching for convenience and shortcuts, competition from store brands, and an ever increasing array of products and benefits are screaming for more distinctive packaging. ■

Luxe Pack New York Expands Into Altman Building

Luxe Pack New York enters a new era by entering a new building, expanding to occupy both the Metropolitan Pavilion and The Altman Building. This year's luxury packaging trade exhibition, to be held May 21-22, 2008, will also host a fuller seminar schedule, including a keynote address by Dr. G. Clotaire Rapaille, best-selling author of "The Culture Code" and "The Seven Secrets of Marketing in a Multi-Cultural World."

Nathalie Grosdidier, executive director of Luxe Pack New York says: "Our goal is to maintain Luxe Pack New York's spirit of intimacy, while accommodating the luxury manufacturers who wish to participate and allowing the show to evolve. We've also worked to develop a more sophisticated and full content program for the event." The Altman Building adds 13,200 square-feet, which will accommodate additional exhibitors as well as the new show entrance (at 135 West 18th Street between 6th & 7th Avenues).

In addition to seeing more innovative packaging at Luxe Pack New York 2008, visitors will have the opportunity to attend a number of compelling seminars and conferences during the two-day event. Among the top level presentations will be:

"Basta! Does Luxury have to mean Excess?" – A distinguished panel headed by Luxe Pack mainstay Marc Rosen

"Sustainability and Luxury Packaging," by Andrew H. Dent, Ph.D., Material ConneXion v.p. library and materials research

"Packaging for the Wine and Spirits Industry" – a panel moderated by Saverglass

"Cross Cultural Branding" by Dennis Furniss, Kaleidoscope executive v.p.

"How International and Vertical Markets Influence Beauty Packaging," by Nathalie Dessirier, co-owner of CapBeauty, the product-watch experts

"Sustainable Packaging: What's New from our Exhibitors" with Alcan Packaging Beauty, Curtis/Monadnock Paper Mills, Design and Source Productions, and Meadwestvaco

