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Confectionery packaging trends from Europe to Australia

PKN examines the impact of the latest confectionery packaging trends from Europe collated at the international trade fair ProSweets Cologne, held in February.

COMMENTATORS HAVE LABELLED the confectionery industry 'recession-proof', as cash-strapped consumers continue to comfort-eat and treat themselves through the hard times. Of course this overlooks the role of packaging manufacturers and designers, who have been innovating constantly to make products appear as desirable as possible and boost impulse purchases.

Multi-sensory packaging
More and more, manufacturers are integrating multi-sensory effects as a way of adding a new dimension to the look and feel of packaging. Finishes such as foil lamination, varnishes, and positive, negative and textured embossing are being used to provide brand differentiation and improve shelf impact.

Market research has shown that addressing several senses at once increases brand loyalty by up to 60 per cent. In the Australian market, this trend is particularly noticeable at large confectionery companies, and on luxury products, especially when they're first launched as budgets are often larger than later on in the product's lifecycle.

Keith Chessell, Cadbury Australia's packaging technical specialist, says: "Our Australian packaging suppliers have been actively presenting the range of print options available, particularly the effective use of foil embossing and varnish and non-varnish areas to provide a consumer pack with a noticeable point of difference on retailer shelves."

Last year, Cadbury updated its packaging for its Dairy Milk block range, using hot foil stamping, embossing and varnish effects to improve the branding and product pictorial.



Festivals and occasions
Seasonal business is becoming more important and in order to maintain sales momentum, confectionery brands are looking at different festive occasions for opportunities to push their products. Special packaging for 'one-off' promotional activities is increasingly in demand.

A good example of this was Cadbury's release of confectionery for Halloween 2009, despite the fact the holiday is not widely celebrated in Australia.

Wayne Horrobin, general manager of Australia's oldest chocolatier Ernest Hillier, says because of the shorter runs for promotional packaging, it's usually more expensive to produce, so there is added pressure to innovate and produce something unusual.

For Easter, the annual peak of festive chocolate buying, Hillier has launched an Easter egg product with cardboard packaging that doubles as a children's toy fire station.

The value-added product comprises eight chocolate eggs contained in a three-dimensional cardboard fire station, with cut-out windows to display the confectionery. The fire station opens with a side hinge to reveal a toy-house style interior with separate rooms and detailed images.

"The fire station is a unique concept, which attracts attention, is novel and very saleable," says Horrobin.

"At Hillier's we always try to develop differentiable products that give the retailer

high turnover and strong margins, and this design certainly achieves that."

The company also created intricate



packaging for a box of Christmas chocolates designed to look like a flower when it opens.

"It's all about product differentiation. You have to keep pushing boundaries, so other people can't catch up," he says.

Colour palette

The visual immediacy of colours means they're often one of the first things designers look at when updating packaging, and consequently there's a fast turnover of colour trends.

Confectionery companies have the constant of their brand colour (most notably the Cadbury purple, of which the manufacturer is highly protective), but they will often introduce new colours for promotions or premium products in a bid to set them apart from their standard range.

In Europe, white has been noted as the colour de jour for chocolate packaging. A report from the organisers of ProSweets Cologne refers to white as 'the new black' and says: "A plain white is becoming the stylish colour in the design of new premium products... In the food industry white also symbolises freshness and lightness – and as it's a reserved colour, it also reflects a certain qualitative value."



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Nestlé effectively uses the colour for the packaging of its Nespresso luxury chocolates. The report says: "The Nespresso packaging series reflects high-class understatement. The Nespresso logo is simply positive-embossed onto the smooth, matt surface. Fine finishing effects, used to a limited extent and combined with elegant white shades, ensure the stylish presentation of the premium chocolate."

While brands like Lindt and Guylian use shades of white and cream for their luxury boxed chocolates sold in Australia, the trend has not really taken off over here.

"The difficulty in the Australian market with the use of white in pack design is a strong consumer association with grocery homebrands," says Chessell. "White has been used to identify these brands as simple, at a low price and in some cases, low quality."

He adds: "Companies who use significant amounts of white need to have the credentials and the strategy that picks up the clean and natural aspect achieved by the colour."

Sustainability

A major trend that in many ways runs contrary to those previously discussed, but is hard to avoid nowadays, is sustainability. Reductions in the amount of packaging used and the use of environmentally friendly, favourably

certified packaging materials are two key issues. Materials derived from sustainable forestry are also becoming more common.

Climate-neutral printing is also being pursued, with water-based inks and varnishes introduced to reduce the use of chemicals. And colour-mixing systems are making it possible to create colours precisely using modern thermal printing plates, almost completely eliminating the use of chemicals.

Cardboard is increasingly used as it's based on renewable raw materials and can usually be recycled domestically.

Cadbury, which is reducing excess packaging as part of its Purple Goes Green program, changed the laminated film packaging for its milk chocolate Dairy Milk block range to a recyclable card box and foil last year.

Another company that's doing its bit is

Colorpak. The pack-printing specialist, which recently achieved ISO 14001 environmental accreditation, created packaging for chocolate to be sold through Vuedemonde's high-end restaurants.

Matthew Johnson, Colorpak's sales manager, says: "The packaging is created out of recycled cardboard that looks very raw, similar to the grey recycled look of the inside of cardboard boxes. We also used soy-based inks and didn't use any water in the process, which is very unusual."

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But flexible films remain widely used for confectionery, and interest in bio-based films is growing.

Alan Adams, sales manager at bioplastic film specialist Innovia Films says, "We are definitely seeing more interest in sustainable packaging from the confectionery industry as a whole. Large brand owners are now carefully considering environmental impact of their packaging by investigating biopolymers, compostable packaging and using evaluative tools like PIQET [Packaging Impact Quick Evaluation Tool]."

Outer packaging is also coming under the spotlight. To avoid waste, Hilliers delivers its products in cartons with perforated lids, so they can be put straight onto shelves without needing to be transferred to separate trays. Horrobin says retailers are demanding this more and more.

In the highly competitive and impulse-driven world of snacks and sweets, it's essential to stay ahead of trends and keep pushing boundaries. And while tomorrow's trends probably haven't been thought of yet, the issue of sustainability is certainly here to stay.