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PROFECTA'S PERFECTION

Leading Quebec labelmaker rolls into digital age

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Done by the book



PHOTO: COURTESY OF AVC CORP.

Packaging innovation helps manufacturers execute effective branding strategies without environmental burden

In the world of retail packaging—if not in most businesses—the ongoing quest for profits often runs counter to what best benefits the environment. Rare is the case when a manufacturer can select the ideal package that induces maximum sales of its product, while reducing the package's ecological burden.

But it doesn't have to be the case forever, thanks to the recent introduction of a new packaging concept.

The so-called "reusable retail packaging"—resembling a book, while serving as a permanent storage device for multi-component products—appears to have a promising potential to add value for all the concerned parties: the manufacturer, the retailer, the consumer, and even the Earth Day advocates.

At the retail level, most small, low-cost consumer products such as toys, novelty items, batteries, cameras, video games, etc., have for the longest time been packaged either in clear blister-packs or the vacuum-formed clamshell packages.

Such packaging has survived for as long as it has in large part because it allows a potential customer to visually inspect the item, while also discouraging pilfering.

However, extracting the article from the package after the purchase usually involves cutting and tearing the plastic clamshell—inevitably resulting in the permanent destruction of the package and, consequently, adding that package into the waste stream.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), paper and plastics account for almost half (46.5 per cent) of the 236 million tons of municipal solid waste generated in the U.S. in 2003—representing a steady rise from 205.2 million tons in 1990—with no let-up in sight.

Moshe Begim, president of Torrance, Ca.-based contract packaging company AVC Corp., thinks he can help reverse this trend with a package design innovation that has potential to transform the standard retail package into a usable storage device that most consumers would be happy to hang on to for a long time.

"It happened one day when I was playing with my four-year-old son, and we tried to find a cassette tape that went along with a reading book," Begim recalls. "The child had several tapes and books, but matching them became a puzzle since they were scattered about in different places.

"Right there and then I conceived the idea for creating a single package that could act as a permanent album to store matching pieces of a product, like a software program on a CD that comes with instructions," he expands. "When I presented the idea to management at Leap Frog, the local maker of the book and the cartridge, they immediately grasped the value of this packaging for their product, and have since adopted it." (Picture Above)

In basic terms, this book-style RRP (reusable retail

packaging) format achieves its purpose with two sections joined by a spine and folded into a book or album-like structure to house the product components.

Since this outside cover is formed by transparent plastic (polyvinyl chloride, polypropylene, polyethylene or polystyrene), the manufacturer can easily build see-through windows into the package so that the products are clearly displayed for the consumer, while also providing ample advertising and branding space on the exterior and interior surfaces.

Since the book is secured shut with tamper-resistant tape that can't be removed by a prying fingernail, this package combines the appearance of a blister-pack with the security of a vacuum-formed clamshell.

This kind of utility and convenience appears especially apropos for products that have multiple components that need to stay together—such as CDs, books, audio cassettes, tapes, digital photo disks, pen and pencil sets, etc.—or products that come with manuals or other product literature.

This new type of packaging goes one step further in terms of convenience, as its design can incorporate extra storage space for other, similarly-sized items.

Used this way, a manufacturer of digital photo memory cards, for example, can build into its packaging extra indentations to hold future memory card acquisitions—turning the package into a sort of a "mini-library," storing the items in one single, reusable package.

CASHING IN

But for all these self-evident advantages offered by RRP, can manufacturers and retailers cash in on this design, and will the consumers be able to appreciate its inherent value?

"Any extra cost, minimal as it may be, is quickly eclipsed by the intangible benefits we received from the buying staff at Sam's Club, for example, who were thoroughly impressed with the classy appearance of the reusable book-style packaging of our product," states Peter Vos, principal partner of Forrester & Vos, a Long Beach, Ca.-based supplier of reading glasses, protective eye-wear, hand-held magnifiers and fashion mirrors.

"So if it costs us 15 cents more to package our product, but gets us a buck back in goodwill and respect, we'll take that deal every time."

In the case of Forrester & Vos, one of its main products is a set of reading glasses of similar ocular strength but in different colors. Inserted four to a package, this product provides users with easy means of instantly matching the glasses to their outfit.

Upon being introduced to the RRP packaging by Begim, Vos immediately recognized its appeal.

"The book-style package has a high level of sophistication and 'freshness' about it," states Vos. "It is

reusable in a way that you can store the glasses there, and it provides good print room for writing about the reasons why you might need our glasses.

"We are now shipping our glasses to all the Sam's Club outlets as a new product—replacing the old packaging." (See Picture Above)

One of the biggest allures of this new reusable packaging concept is the fact that since the manufacturer's promotional material, logos, and other marketing text and graphics are built into the album/book package, it stays in front of the consumers as long as they keep the package—enabling the manufacturer to cross-sell its other products and services.

"We've been in business since 1990 developing educational software products, but one of our most recent products is a complete kit that teaches how-to buy, bid, and sell on eBay," relates Robert Rositano, chief executive of ePower and Profits and managing partner of Latitude Venture Partners, LLC, a high-tech venture capitalist company located in California's famed Silicon Valley region.

The company's bestselling kit, called the ePower and Profits System, contains all the essential elements required to help consumers start selling on eBay, including: a quick-start video; an instructive, interactive CD-ROM; a popular trade-book; and a two-disc reference library on CD-ROM.

"We asked ourselves how can we package all this stuff so that someone just does not just rip open up a clamshell and then have to deal with having a CD over here, a video over there, and a workbook somewhere else," recalls Rositano. "We found it in the RRP format.

"I didn't see anything else out there that was so attractive and user-friendly," Rositano reflects. "The package's windows display specific verbiage for the consumers, even on the inside, so that when they pull the CD out there can be wording, such as instructions, behind the clear plastic, and the book format was perfect for permanently storing the many components of our kit." (See Picture Below)

Moreover, the reusable-book type packaging allowed the continuous cross-selling of several of the company's services that bundle well with the ePower and Profits product, according to Rositano.

"We support the purchaser with a whole network of Web-based services intended to get them up-and-running as an eBay seller," explains Rositano. "For example, we provide a 'back-end' to host of all the seller's images, and we also offer an ISP arrangement, along with access to wholesale products that users can sell on their site.

"The AVC packaging really lets the consumers know that all these other services are available from us," Rositano concludes. "Being reusable, this packaging really enables our cross-selling message to stay in front of the consumer for a long time.

"Hence, this reusable packaging has been far more cost-effective for us than the old blister-packs." □



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