

# Get ready to wow them

When it comes to premium own-brand packaging, retailers should leverage current trends to create a unique consumer experience.

By Kathie Canning

**W**hether they feature high-end ingredients, a one-of-a-kind recipe or an exotic country of origin, premium foods and beverages are perceived as being a step above common grocery fare.

But if the specialness of the packaging falls short of the specialness of the product, the premium message won't get through to consumers.

One way retailers could communicate the specialness of premium own-brand products via packaging is by tying into some current premium packaging trends.

"We see premium as more of a mindset than anything: Consumers reconcile the cost implications with a perceived value for that spend," says Chris Ertel, managing director for Kaleidoscope, a brand consultancy with offices in Chicago and New York. "Because of this, we see several high-level trends that influence consumer choice for premium: ceremony, story and authenticity."

Within the ceremony trend, Ertel points to trends in structural design that are driven by "the rise of 'unboxing' and packaging as badge value." For instance, the Boxed Water brand was able to create a high badge value by communicating its "entire proposition" via its structure and brand name.

"Consumers will pay a premium for

packaging that provides secondary functionality, is beautiful to look at and [delivers] a layered experience from purchase to open to consumption and beyond," he stresses.

As for storytelling, retailers could talk about origin, ingredients, the brand itself or other compelling details. Design cues for storytelling, Ertel says, include hand-crafted details, slight imperfections, real people and more.

"Man Cave [Craft] Meats is an example of a brand disrupting a commodity category through the story behind the product more so than the story of the product," he says. "A retailer that can create a conversation, either through process, product or purpose, will be able to separate the taste/functional benefits of the surrounding competitive set."

Paul Stallard, strategy director for UK-based Storm Brand Design, agrees that storytelling is a major trend for premium product packaging. Consumers who gravitate toward premium brands want to know what the product is, where it's from and how it's made.

"When we recently developed a new brand for the five-times distilled premium vodka Brittains, we were inspired by the history of the stately home it originated from and the former owner's penchant for flamingos," he notes. "This led to a brand story combining authoritative heritage with Alice in Wonderland style eccentricity to deliver the brand message of 'an extraordinary spirit' — and a pack dominated by a beautifully crafted flamingo."

And storytelling that romances a premium private brand product's uniqueness could help retailers clearly separate that product from its national-brand-equivalent cousins, suggests Todd Maute, partner with New York-based branding agency CBX.

"When consumers explore trading up, they want to feel like they are getting a much better product and will also have an indulgent experience with the product and brand," he adds.

Authentic product stories could help retailers connect with millennials, too, says Jean-Pierre Lacroix, president of Shikatani Lacroix Design Inc., Toronto. Today's millennials are seeking brands that not only mesh with their lifestyles and social needs, but also give them a platform for story-sharing within their social communities.

"They are looking for brands that are truly



authentic and transparent, with product stories, features and ingredients that are both good for them and the environment,” he says.

Like Lacroix suggests, authenticity is linked closely to storytelling.

“The story has to be rooted in what is true about the product or brand,” Ertel points out.

Retailers have many opportunities here — from communicating a product’s locally grown status to detailing the simplicity of the process used to create a certain item, he adds.

Speaking of simplicity, Stallard says retailers could let the product “speak for itself” via understated packaging that evokes “artisan simplicity” and a real commitment to product quality.

## The experience counts

And all of these trends could be considered to be part of one overarching trend: delivering an experience to the consumers.

“Increasingly, premium branding is about delivering an experience that goes beyond the product itself,” Stallard explains. “The emergence of flagship stores delivering an involving, immersive experience around the product is



Publix Super Markets uses the back of the package to engage in storytelling related to its Publix GreenWise crackers.

testimony to this,” he adds, pointing to the Magnum (ice cream) Pleasure Store in London as an example.

Retailers could win on the premium side by ensuring that premium own-brand packaging delivers an experience that extends beyond the store, he says.

Maute points to Ahold USA’s Simply Enjoy and Walgreens’ Good & Delish as brand names that are all about consumers’ experience with the product. Simply Enjoy communicates that experience

through bright colors; large, clear product descriptors; and simple, clean imagery. Good & Delish, meanwhile, “romances the experience,”

Harris Teeter uses a fun, quirky design to communicate the oversized nature of its HT Traders peanuts.



conveying the product origin or experience through clever imagery.

### Handle with care

Just as important as being on-trend when it comes to premium packaging design is avoiding some common missteps. One potential blunder is falling back on overused “premium” colors such as black and gold and premium descriptors such as “signature,” “premium,” “select” and similar terms, Maute suggests.

“I don’t think retailers have invested enough in breaking away from the ‘traditional’ premium brand image,” he asserts. “President’s Choice from Loblaw’s pioneered the tier — leveraged black and beautiful imagery to separate the brand from No Name; this is still widely used today,” he says. “With the multitude of new and unique product offers available, it is truly an opportunity to step away from the obvious premium cues and do something different to communicate the product’s point of difference.”

Stallard notes that UK retailer Tesco recently relaunched its Tesco finest range, moving from a simple black and silver design across all categories to category-relevant styles and identities. He calls the change “a distinct shift from universality to eclecticism.”

He says retailers have an opportunity to do something similar, but in their own way.

“This requires thinking about the brand holistically and considering everything from the structure to the story and the experience of interacting with the brand — being distinctive and even disruptive to better meet consumer needs in the category,” Stallard says.

Another potential misstep is not capitalizing on the “foodie” trend in brand and packaging development here, Maute says. Instead of taking a product-led approach to brand development, retailers should consider appealing to consumers’ emotional side.

“Study food culture and try to understand why consumers love unique foods so much,” he advises. “This [is] about the experience consumers will have with a unique and differentiated product experience versus stating ‘extra chocolate chips.’ Create a brand that consumers can emotionally connect with, one that relates to their desires.”

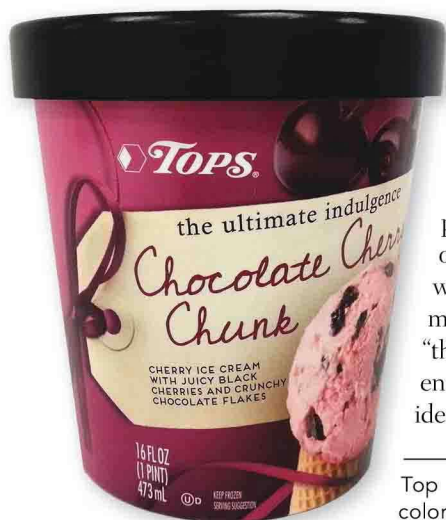
Retailers should avoid the “more is more trap,” too, in both product and packaging development, Ertel says. This baby

## Packaging

boomer mindset doesn't work to drive purchase like it did in the past. Instead, retailers should consider the job of the packaging structure and design.

"If it is to delight or engage, then that is the brief," he says. "Premium products, by nature, tend not to be staple items people need, but rather feel-good purchases people want."

And retailers that cloud their on-pack message with pragmatic benefits and reassurance about the product are "speaking the wrong language" to consumers who are looking for an emotionally driven reason to pay for a premium product, Stallard says. Instead of explaining to consumers why the product is worth more money, he advises retailers to "think about what drives irrational engagement." They should identify relevant visual cues such



Top Markets uses a differentiating color scheme for its Tops ice cream.

as "delight," "energy" and "respite" associated with the consumer "want state" and transfer those visual clues onto the packaging itself.

But perhaps the greatest mistake is ignoring the high-margin own-brand premium space altogether — something Lacroix suggests some retailers continue to do "as they rush to the bottom of the customer value pyramid." Or they price such offerings below national brands.

"Retailers need to seek premium brands that are rooted in unique value-added stories that talk to the emotional lifestyle needs of their customers who are willing to pay more if given an authentic reason why," he says. "Jump in — the water is warm, and your customers want to discover new offerings that give them bragging rights," he advises retailers.

Maute adds that retailers can't be afraid to step out of their comfort zone to create something truly unique.

"Go for consumers' heartstrings versus their ingredient intellect," he stresses. "Think about it — the whole point of a premium program is to tell consumers you have great food and unique products. ... If you do the same thing that everyone else does, it will go unnoticed. Be different." **SB**