



engage research

POINTS OF VIEW

Packaging testing - FAQs

1. Can you really test packaging online?

Most design briefs can be handled via online research and thus gain the speed and cost advantages of that methodology.

However, there are occasions when the physical properties of the pack are difficult to represent on a computer screen and thus where the respondent needs to interact with the pack. For example;

- a new material or finish is used in the packaging
- the texture or weight of the packaging is changing (such as going from traditional to reduced weight wine bottles)
- the pack has a specific functional benefit such as opening or closing in a certain way

There are instances where the pack in finished quality cannot be produced for the research. It is usually better to test the idea online rather than a physical prototype that doesn't do full justice to the design.

An online approach can be effective for both gaining an understanding of the impact of the pack in a competitive context (e.g. on a shelf) and for evaluating the individual elements of the design, and how the whole design communicates the brand / product.

The ability of the pack to stand out against the competition can be measured by asking respondents to find a particular product in a display. The proportion finding the correct pack and the amount of time it takes to do so are useful diagnostic tools (particularly when comparing new versus current designs or the competition). We believe these measures to be more relevant than short timed exposure tasks. Consideration should also be given to the shoppers eye view. The use of shelf ready packs means that the whole pack and outer needs to be tested. It is not unknown for key information to be contained on parts

of the pack which are then hidden by the shelf ready outer.

Understanding which elements of the pack are working well and less well can be achieved by getting respondents to click onto different parts of the pack image. This is essential information for fine-tuning the design.

2. Can a new pack beat a current pack? (amongst current users)

When testing packaging changes the following pattern of consumer response is common;

- new packs can often win over existing packs where there is a clear functional benefit e.g. the addition of a sports cap to a soft drink bottle. This can be the case even where the pack itself is iconic e.g. 'Upside down' Heinz Ketchup has been very successful and now accounts for majority of sales - although the bottle was retained in range. (Of course, some new designs may not be convenient in use e.g. a large shampoo bottle might look like good value but may be tricky to open with wet hands)
- where there is no functional benefit in the new design, the new pack often performs worse than current amongst existing buyers, and better amongst non-buyers. In volumetric terms, the predicted change would often be a small loss in sales. In market experience suggests that there is an element of "protest vote" from current buyers and sales are not lost amongst this group provided that they can still find 'their' brand.

More broadly, changes to the pack should be considered as a potential investment in brand equity and not something which is likely to drive short term sales.

Brands must update and refresh packaging over time. Thus with the exception of a few iconic brands where the

package itself is core to the identity (e.g. Tate & Lyle Golden Syrup, Marmite) most packs do evolve over time - though there can be key visual elements which are retained e.g. logos, colourways. The modern Coke can or Guinness bottle is subtly different to predecessors but retains key elements.

In summary, changing the packaging from time to time is a necessity. There is however a requirement that the new design retains key visual elements and that, crucially, it still allows current buyers to locate the brand.