

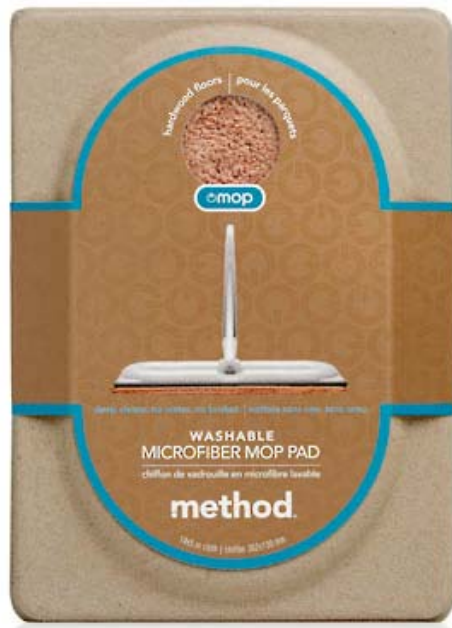
Package Structure: An Investment in the Brand Experience

One of the hallmarks of a successful brand is a distinctive look and feel that is consistently applied across all marketing efforts, to the point that an unmistakable presence develops, stirring customer emotions. The result is a more differentiated and memorable brand experience, which is a valuable commodity in a competitive market. As its most tangible asset, the package is a powerful ambassador of the brand, and the package structure in particular is an important opportunity to reinforce the brand story and company values in the mind of the consumer, ultimately growing your business.

A unique structural shape can attract attention and provide differentiation, but, unsupported by a meaningful brand story, a wildly different package structure only looks forced at best and hypocritical at worst. Now more than ever consumers respond negatively to packaging for packaging's sake and do not tolerate wastefulness. Although no longer physically limited, the form and function of a structure should still follow naturally from the product and story behind the brand, enhancing the consumer experience of the product in such a way that the structure becomes an inseparable part of the brand. This is an important step in the establishment of a proprietary package structure.

Consider the recent release by Kleenex of fruit wedge-shaped tissue boxes. Generations of consumers have been accustomed to seeing tissues in square or rectangular boxes with little more than colors and patterns printed on the boxes to enliven or differentiate them; a functional but emotionless form. With the flexibility of current printing and assembly methods, Kleenex was able to play with the structure to inject some whimsy into the boxes, freeing them from the six-sided limits of their "stuffy" predecessors. This structural freedom allowed Kleenex to change the perspective on what is otherwise a mundane product, target a younger consumer, create a unique offering that resists quick copycats, and stimulate incremental sales.





A package structure can make an even greater impact if it implicitly supports the brand values in some way. Method is a good example of a company that backs up its all-natural approach to household products with packaging that is both ecologically responsible and graceful in its simplicity. The cleaning product packages are continually upgraded to use ever more readily recyclable materials, the bathroom product structures are modestly labeled to allow them to blend into the customer's environment, and the popular Omop packaging, though simple in its look, continues to earn admiration for the tidy way it compartmentalizes the product with a minimum of highly sustainable, bamboo- and paper-based material.

Product no longer needs to dictate the form of its package, which can now become a more active vehicle for engaging the customer at an emotional level. Customer engagement ultimately returns value to the brand, giving companies the freedom to move away from purely functional, cost-based thinking toward packaging decisions made from a more customer-oriented, emotionally driven perspective. The Pangea Organics package uses for its bar soap is a particularly "clean" example of a unique structure that supports a broader brand story. On the shelf, it invites the customer to explore the product by visually drawing attention with its distinctly different appearance, then offers a window through which the product can be both touched and smelled. Add to this the biodegradable nature of the boxes and the fact that they are infused with wildflower seeds and the connection to the brand values begins to shine. The inclusion of the seeds (which, by the way, are responsibly chosen from non-invasive species) is not the least bit gimmicky since it symbolically supports the brand story of Pangea Organics products coming as directly as possible from the earth—with their packaging giving directly back to it.



A brand cannot sit at the top for very long without constantly changing the conversation with its consumer through innovation and renewed purpose. Structural evolution can assist in re-engaging the consumer experience. For example, the evian bottled water company decided that its pure mineral water straight from the French Alps deserves a special bottle, one that stands out on shelf and represents the preciousness of the water. The standard bottle accomplishes this with tall, sleek lines, chiseled impressions of the Alps and a minimal approach to the messaging. But they didn't stop there. Seeking to truly set the brand apart, evian periodically commissions notable designers, such as Christian Lacroix and Jean Paul Gaultier, to design more fancy, collectible versions of the bottle. These are quite different from the standard bottles, yet easily tied to the evian brand look by the inclusion of subtle lines that mirror the iconic features of the brand, particularly the chiseled Alps. The special bottles complement the style and culture of fashion already tied to the brand, lending themselves to, and further elevating, the unique brand experience that emanates from "the source." (We will provide some examples of evian bottles).

So, will the average brand perform significantly better with more careful attention to the type of package it's in? Given the ample opportunities for further brand definition and integration, as well as a means to generate true excitement and enthusiasm for your brand, the answer is Yes, if sales and profit margins can be achieved. The challenge for those designing the packages and defining the brands is to change the conversation with those who would make cost-based arguments against originality or change, to help them see that rethinking packaging structure can be a highly profitable investment in the company.

Many companies demonstrate a willingness to make investments in information technologies, new plants, software, outside consultants, etc., to increase business efficiencies, but often don't see a unique structure as a comparable investment. But even the most skeptical can become more open if the conversation begins by proving how structure can revitalize the brand. They should be informed how a carefully planned new or refined package structure can produce returns that include increased sales, greater differentiation from competitors on shelf and even increased packaging efficiencies that will reduce the company's financial bottom line. Furthermore, a meaningful change to an existing package can have the effects of attracting new customers as well as galvanizing existing customer loyalty. Ultimately, a package structure that uses the right combination of material and value-based qualities to contribute to a meaningful brand experience that authenticates the brand story and generates devoted consumer interest is a priceless thing.

Optional Example: Revolution Tea

The unique structures created by the Revolution Tea company are especially compelling because they are far more than mere curiosities. They support the company's brand mission of making premium teas available for everybody, anytime, anywhere, and to fundamentally change the way people think about tea. This began with the pyramid-shaped tea "infuser," so unique that calling it a tea "bag" severely understates not only its form but its function, which is to more properly brew premium full-leaf teas. Then came the T-Pot Infuser, which extends the pyramid idea to larger batches. Finally, the T-Mini travel tin dramatically changes the conversation with consumers to say "Hey, don't limit yourself, take our tea with you wherever you go," definitively setting Revolution apart from other tea companies.