

AdeptGroup
ENGINEERING EXCELLENCE

Designing Packaging **FOR CONSUMER EXPERIENCE**





Engaging Consumer Experience

A product only gets one chance to make a first impression on consumers, and packaging can play a significant role in shaping that perception.

Whether the point of purchase is the highly competitive retail environment or the convenient, but equally competitive [e-commerce channel](#), packaging is the first point of contact for the consumer and has considerable influence over how they think about the product and how likely they are to talk about it within their network, both in person and on social media.

Providing an engaging consumer experience with a product and its packaging makes it stand out in this competitive environment. Design that attracts the eye or encourages consumers to touch the packaging can help a product break through the noise of crowded retail shelves, and an impressive opening experience for e-commerce products can increase the likelihood that the consumer will share information about their purchase with friends and family.





About Consumer Experience

The initial consumer experience is defined by the first impressions and use of a product through its packaging.

In traditional brick-and-mortar retail, it starts before purchase with how the item presents itself and stands out among its competitors. Engaging colors, eye-catching graphics and unique printing techniques will draw attention to an item and distinguish it from other products in its category. Packaging that includes texture such as rubberized coating, embossing or combined coatings creates both visual appeal and an interesting feel. This can increase the likelihood the consumer will pick the item up and rotate it to experience the other graphics and textures. Even if they don't read all the text on the package, a consumer who picks a package up is more likely to buy it, talk about it with friends or remember the product for a future purchase.



This initial experience is equally important for products purchased online. The popularity of unboxing videos on Instagram, YouTube and other video-sharing platforms makes perception of the package used for shipping an important opportunity to get noticed. The success of subscription services such as Birchbox, Julep, Trunk Club, FabFitFun and Glossier demonstrate the power of creating a fun, personalized unboxing experience.



The Important Role of Print

Designing the print that appears on a package is vital part of creating a unique shelf presence.

A channel audit can be an important first step to inform decisions about print and graphics, as careful review of competitive products reveals important information about what the target consumer expects and how to stand out on crowded shelves. Spot colors are an excellent way for consumers to identify a brand among its competitors and can aid with brand recognition, especially with a bold color that isn't commonly found elsewhere. Using a specific font or memorable logo across a brand's product line is also important for recognition.

Gloss coatings are eye-catching, as they reflect light compared to the standard uncoated boxes on the shelves. They can be effective when applied to the full package or as a spot gloss coating to add flair to package. Pairing gloss and matte coatings can create intriguing contrast for the consumer's eye, and when used properly can draw attention to descriptions of product features that distinguish it from competitors.



While several types of print and coatings are intended to amplify visual appeal, there are also coatings that can be effective for their texture properties. Rubberized coatings have a matte appearance but offer a unique texture when held by the consumer. They can be impactful when applied to a matte package or paired with a spot gloss. Other specialty textured coatings include reticulating UV, UV grit, UV Glitter, flocking and ventricular coatings.

When choosing coatings, it's important to weigh the options and consider the trade offs. While some aqueous gloss or matte coatings can be applied as a flood coat, most must be done as a spot coat. These are generally run on a press as a color would be, so if the package is run with a four-color process print, adding a coating requires it to be run as a five-color process print and likely means it will need to run on a six-color press, increasing costs. UV coatings, while they offer incredible depth to print and are of the highest quality, require special drying processes. UV coatings also have a higher carbon footprint than aqueous options and require spot coatings for any package that includes glue, as inline gluing machines do not yet have an adhesive that will adhere to UV Gloss coating. Thicker textured or UV coatings may crack when scored and require tolerancing, which also adds to cost.



E-commerce

While shelf appeal and visual distinction from competitors aren't priorities in the e-commerce stream, experience still plays an important role.

The first impression a package makes on the customer can influence future purchasing behavior and impact how likely they are to talk about the product with others. If it is a memorable opening experience, it creates an impression the consumer purchased a high-end, luxury item.

Apple's packaging is a great example. They use a thicker stock than needed for product protection and a turned-edge design for added thickness and stability to the package, with minimal and very clean branding. The package fits together nicely and separates easily, with each piece serving a unique purpose and very little filler. These intentional design choices reinforce the brand's appeal, which would be betrayed if the product shipped in bubble wrap stuffed into a tuck box. The presentation emulates the experience of shopping in one of their retail stores and reinforces their brand image, which makes consumers feel good about buying what is likely an expensive product.

Another key element of the e-commerce experience is avoiding wasteful packaging that creates concerns about sustainability. Primary packaging that is robust enough to survive the e-commerce distribution environment eliminates the need for additional packaging and likely puts a brand ahead of its competitors in terms of sustainability. Many consumers express distaste for excess packaging, especially for small items shipped in large boxes filled with air pillows or other dunnage.

It's important to find a balance between packaging that holds up against unpredictable conditions during last mile shipping and avoiding excessive packaging that makes consumers feel like their purchase was wasteful. Careful design and engineering, paired with testing that accurately simulates the distribution environment, is the key to striking this balance.





Sustainability – A Crucial Consideration

Sustainability is an important consideration for more than just e-commerce packaging. It is a primary concern for many consumers – especially among younger demographics – and continues to grow in importance.

Consumers expect sustainable packaging, but they may not be willing to sacrifice convenience to get it. A common sustainability issue is the need to separate materials on the consumer's end. If a package is made of multiple materials, such as corrugate with polystyrene filling, it is unlikely the consumer will separate the items into the different recycling streams, preferring instead to throw the entire system away. When sustainability is a priority, it is in both the brand's and the consumer's best interest to design packages out of a single material or a small number of materials that can be easily separated for recycling. Good substitutes for polystyrene include be molded pulp, folded corrugate and a variety of other materials that may work well for different types of products.

Other aspects of material selection also play an important role in sustainability. While coatings are good at drawing consumer attention, they can impact recyclability. Consumers view paperboard as a sustainable option, but if paired with print or coatings that aren't recyclable, the materials are likely to end up in the waste stream.



There are many factors that impact a consumer's experience with a product and its packaging, and the importance of each can vary depending on the brand, the product, the target consumer and the point of purchase. Identifying the most important elements for a product's unique needs and finding a balance between competing priorities requires careful planning and packaging resources that understand all the options. If you're looking for help designing packaging that provides the experience your customers seek, [reach out to Adept Group](#). Our team of experts has experience working with brands in all industries to deliver packaging solutions that create memorable experiences.