# DIGITAL CUTTING FOR POWERFUL PACKAGING

## Luca Bartalini examines the communicative function of packaging and explains how, in an increasingly competitive arena, advanced cutting can help to create standout

**If any of us, thanks to a time machine, could suddenly enter a shop in the 50s or 60s, surely we would feel disoriented. We would not find anything vaguely resembling today's infinite choice of similar products, neatly positioned on shelves and enclosed in eye-catching packaging.**

The 'market', as we understand it today, did not yet exist. Companies didn't feel the need to differentiate themselves from the others or to establish themselves in the market on the basis of the presentation rather than on the quality of the product. A milk bottle would be refilled on a daily basis without worrying what 'kind' of milk it contained. I imagine that if our time traveller asked what brand the milk was, the response would be "the dairy downtown" or "X's cow".

Nowadays it is known that packaging has the power to influence consumer attitudes and purchasing decisions. Apple's Steve Jobs once said, "Packaging can be theatre, it can create a story." The question most companies ask themselves is, "Is our packaging design eye-catching, attractive and instantly recognisable?"

It is unlikely that anyone would willingly buy an inferior product, even if well packaged; similarly, a consumer would not typically buy, at least on impulse, a quality product in undesirable packaging. Starting from this reflection, we cannot fail to consider packaging as one of the most important aspects that characterises a product.

### PACKAGING REQUIREMENTS

Packaging design can mistakenly be deemed an easy activity, especially if we consider it as a simple envelope to contain or transport items and not as a communication and marketing tool. In reality, packaging is the immediate way in which a company communicates its identity and



*A solid packaging design is essential to compete in markets and attract customers to your brand and/or your products*

it should not be underestimated because there are many ways to share information and make it original and creative.

Creating effective packaging involves multiple factors and skills; among these are
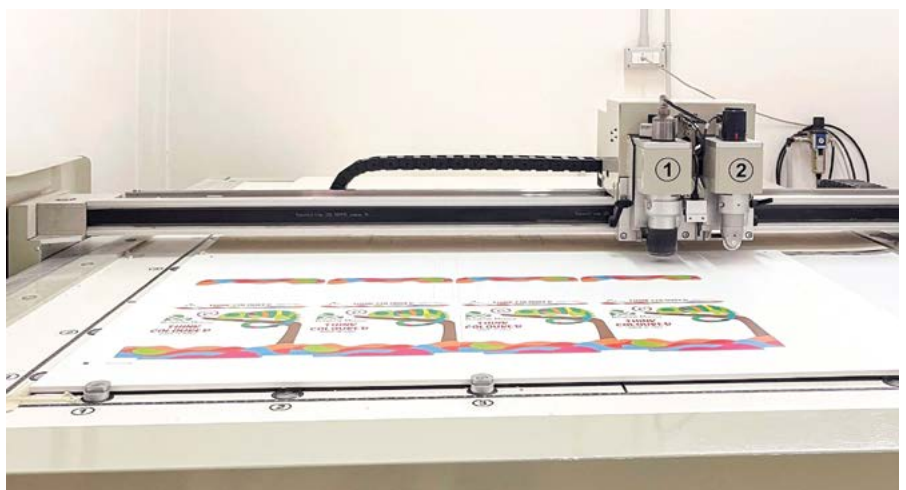
> ## *"Packaging can be theatre, it can create a story" – Steve Jobs*

graphic advertising, communication (with associated psychological aspects) and technical know-how – for the physical realisation of the packaging.

The graphics advertising task will be entrusted to a graphic designer/team, whose task is to create a presentation of the product that is captivating and that allows consumers to easily distinguish it from competitors' products. Within this activity, attention should be paid to the ability of the packaging to adequately protect and preserve the product. In the case of food packaging, it must guarantee the health of the consumers, while for other products the goal is to preserve integrity – ensuring the characteristics of a product are not altered. Preserving product integrity is linked to the design, which must provide for a certain rationality according to the transportation and the storage of the products, and must



*A typical modern supermarket aisle, with shelves full of branded products competing for attention*



*Complex die cutting processes can be achieved with Valiani's Optima digital cutting machine*

not neglect the choice of materials to facilitate recycling/disposal.

For the communication aspect, the creative team in combination with the product manager has the task of researching the deepest soul of the product, giving it shape and voice through the elements of visual communication to establish a direct and personal dialogue with the consumer. Good packaging should arouse particular feelings or moods in the buyer, provide information on the product and how to use it, and finally, increase consumer loyalty.

### EFFECTIVE DESIGN

Having said this, we could hypothesise some basic rules to follow to design an effective packaging. First, the identification; it is important that the packaging conveys something about the product it contains and differentiates it from direct competitors. Security and safety should always be taken into consideration because the packaging must also protect the product from dirt, shocks, humidity and other risks factors, keeping it safe even during transportation. In addition, the packaging must provide information such as composition/

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ingredients, instructions for use, recycling methods and everything related to the use of the product.

Having solved the practical aspects, we must not forget marketing activities with the choice of colours, lettering, creation of an original packaging and whatever helps to make the product unique and recognisable.

### MYRIAD MATERIALS

Having completed all the theoretical activities, presented the idea to the client and hypothesised a promotional campaign, we are still missing our mock-up – something the customer can hold in their hand and experience. A good marketing agency must never forget that the first customer is the company that asks them to let their customers start the dream of buying a product.

There are now myriad options for creating effective packaging because the range of materials – and therefore processes – is continually increasing. The packaging process is no longer limited to the use of paper and its variants, but has expanded to take on materials such as foam, cork, composite materials and any kind of fabrics, leather and plastic materials.

The wide range of materials implies having to create completely new shapes and this is where technology comes to help us. The cutting plotters, that for many years were the tools of a few, today live in a golden age filled with unprecedented requests, mostly because they allow us to create things that until a few years ago could be only dreamed of.

### CRITERIA TO CONSIDER

Once the strategy has been identified and the technology with which to create our packaging has been defined, we can introduce some of the criteria and objects that dictate the guidelines in the choice and creation of packaging. First of all, the types of packaging. Here we are faced with two possibilities, the first which consists of opting for what is already available to the market – that is, all those products that industries produce in a standard way. These products require neither studies nor special processing; they cost relatively little and are ready-made; we are 'only' asked to add the graphic design.

The second, which has grown rapidly in recent years, is the personalisation of packaging through innovative packaging which, in addition to less conventional forms, often includes the use of special materials that characterise their uniqueness. Indeed, sometimes packaging itself can become a cult object and a collector's item.

Thanks to the concept of personalisation, we can introduce a second criterion, the choice of materials. As mentioned earlier, the

*Creating standout with creative cutting*



*A digital cutting machine has the potential to deliver incredible finishing*

materials available are many and the choice of material becomes fundamental to transfer to the consumer that feeling of a product's uniqueness, as if it had been made 'exclusively' for them. Even in a consumerist society, product customisation is essential to transfer to the consumer that idea of uniqueness that makes us feel 'special'.

Finally, the third and last criterion, which takes into consideration the overall appearance. A package does not just have four sides, it can have a multitude of faces, and all of them can be used to tell the story of the product or the brand. When we talk about appearance, we are not talking exclusively about the aesthetic aspect but rather about the organisational aspect, because the form of the packaging determines the distribution of all information, not only the purely communicative messaging but also that which reflects the product/brand's personality.

## CHOOSING THE RIGHT MACHINERY

All this talk about the packaging of a product, considered superfluous no more than 50/60 years ago, is crucial to the encounter between consumer and packaging. This is what can determine a product's success or failure. A solid packaging design is essential to compete in markets and attract customers to your brand and/or your products.

As a conclusion to these considerations and the importance of packaging, it is natural that a company should focus on machinery that can best support the product packaging phase.

There are several benefits deriving from the acquisition of a good digital cutting machine, and they are essentially: flexibility, quicker demand response and cost savings.

Flexibility is understood as the ability to progress quickly from the project to the mock-up; fast response to market demand is being able to manufacture without quantity constraints or shape limitation; finally, cost savings equates to a reduction in start-up cost, realisation of the die and a drastic cut in downtime. ∎

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