

Tata Elxsi – Futuristic packaging design

Convenience versus environmental impact

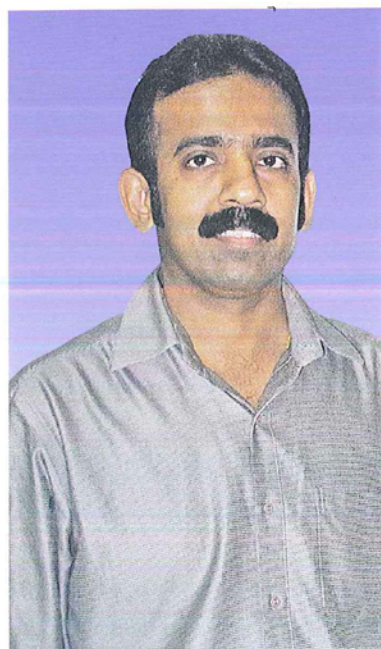
A part of the US\$ 100-billion (approximately ₹630,000 crore) Tata group, Tata Elxsi is one of the well known design houses that blends technology, creativity and engineering to help customers transform ideas into world-class products and solutions. Tata Elxsi addresses the communications, consumer products, defence, health care, media and entertainment, semiconductor and transportation sectors. A talent pool of over 3,500 employees supports the network of design studios, development centres and offices worldwide. Tata Elxsi is headquartered in Bengaluru, India, and its operations are supported by offices in the US, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The company has a state-of-the-art facility in Mumbai for visual effects and a near-shore centre in Japan. Krishanu Dutta takes forward our ongoing series of interactions with the company and its chief designer Shyam Sunder BK.

In conversation with *Packaging South Asia*, Shyam Sunder BK, chief designer at Tata Elxsi for over ten years, says, "The importance of design in product packaging is undeniable. Imagine when you go to a supermarket, you scan the aisles looking for familiar products — sometimes pick up new items that catch your eyes. We often see some of the products succeed while others fail to attract consumer's attention in the FMCG world. The main reason behind this is because of the way a product is designed, packed and sold. Thus design plays a crucial role in packaging. However, packaging design today is no longer just limited to aesthetics alone; it has to succeed on many variables. The fact that a package is created to hold a product is really a secondary goal from the designer's perspective. The main goal of packaging design is to make a product effective and at the same time, affordable. This means designing products by eliminating the use of unnecessary materials, reducing the size, weight, and cost without compromising on the product quality and safety. Thus developing sustainable, innovative and sensitive designs is the foremost challenge faced by designers today."

Solutions and innovations

Tata Elxsi works with leading global FMCG companies such as Unilever, GSK, PepsiCo and P&G across product segments such as food and beverage, personal care, beauty care, home care, health and wellness and snacks. It is also engaged with leading Indian companies such as CavinKare, Emami and Marico. In the personal care-beauty talc segment, it has developed innovative built-in dispensing mechanisms and tamper evident features for talc brands including Ponds talc, Navratna Cool Talc, Spinz and Dermicool which provide not merely differentiation to the product category, but also enhance the user experience.

In the edible oil segment Tata Elxsi has created some significant designs which have helped edible oil companies like Cargill Foods and Gemini Edible Oils and Fats to establish a distinct identity for themselves against competitors. Adani Wilmar's Fortune Oil jar is a prime example. Usually the 5 litre jars or containers available in India weigh about 220 to 230 grams. The major challenge was to reduce the weight of the jar at the same time make it visually appealing. Combining design and simulation expertise Tata Elxsi optimized the weight of the 5 litre Fortune Oil jar to 200 grams which very few Indian brands apart from Fortune are offering. This light weight jar enables easy accessibility as well as offers convenience to users.



Shyam Sunder BK, chief designer at Tata Elxsi. Photo: PSA



Tata Elxsi packaging design for refined sunflower oil brands — Fortune, Freedom and Gemini

It also worked with Gemini Edibles and Fats India (GEF India) a Hyderabad, based new entrant in the edible oil segment. The company approached Tata Elxsi to design the packaging for its 5 litre Freedom Refined Sunflower Oil. It wanted to create a custom container for the brand that is notable both for its shape and striking colours. Tata Elxsi designed the 5 litre HDPE container which is a single-wall, blow-molded bottle with a very convenient shape and grip for easy accessibility to users. Keeping in mind the theme — 'your right to happiness' colours like orange and yellow have been used to make the jar more appealing visually. The bright hue has been developed to indicate the freshness of the product as well as reflect the brand attributes — liveliness and youthfulness. While the label comes with an offset-printed sticker along with waves and has a unique shape which gives a distinct look, the packaging has a good shelf throw and has helped the client achieve significant sales from the time of its launch.



Challenges

The main challenge for Tata Elxsi has been to churn out quick and innovative design solutions at affordable prices. Thus it is a constant battle between the time taken to complete a project and the cost of delivery. Shyam Sunder says, "Both have to be done in an optimized way by doing proactive work. What I mean here is that we have a dedicated team for Innovation Labs — a strategic initiative taken by Tata Elxsi where our designers come up with new strategies, ideas and designs which are futuristic. We guide our customers on the futuristic product ideas which could be relevant to their business or product category and involve ourselves right from the new product development stage."

Different tastes

It is quite a challenge for designers to tailor a product according to the changing requirements of customers geographically. Shyam Sunder explains, "Definitely the tastes and preferences of customers in different parts of the globe vary. In Asian countries for instance, consumers are more cost conscious. The cost factor has to be kept in mind while designing any product for them. As far as the requirements of packaging design are concerned, most overseas customers look at developmental work which is mainly customer research and strategy. This gives us a fair chance to engage with global clients to provide them with India Entry strategies."



Focus and new tie-ups

Packaging design will continue to remain one of Tata Elxsi's key focus areas. Apart from that it is looking at working with MNC's to provide them with 'India Entry' strategies. Through its recent strategic tie-up with Brash Brands it is also looking at scaling its branding and visual design capabilities.

Future of packaging design.

Shyam Sunder says, "Convenience versus environmental impact will drive the future of the packaging industry. The key drivers and trends shaping the packaging industry include economic or demographic trends and technology along with environmental issues. Inevitably, the Indian packaging industry has become more diverse. Many international brands are entering the market and are changing the way local brands approach packaging. Therefore the benchmark of packaging has soared in the past few years with the advent of innovation in design and technology. Thus in today's context, the packaging design industry is always striving to create packaging that is sustainable, feasible, creates exponential value as well as provides an enhanced experience to consumers. In the future we can see several new forms of packaging that combine high performing materials with innovative design. Sustainable packaging is likely to see its greatest growth in the Asia Pacific region owing largely to the size of the food and beverage market in the region, driven in large part by India, China and Indonesia.

"With rural markets becoming more aspirational, the packaging industry would face constant challenges to develop new product formats which would require the need to design suitable and innovative packaging concludes solutions to cater to rural needs," concludes Shyam Sunder. ■



Himani Navratna Cool talc designed by Tata Elxsi