

Brands turn to packaging and presentation to gain trust, confidence

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The biscuit brand Parle-G reassured customers with a film about its packaging process, Flipkart has stepped up its advertising around sustainable packaging and Coke Vio promises clean packaging

From home grown e-commerce major Flipkart to global cola giants such as Coca-Cola, the brand story during the pandemic is as much about the packaging, as it is about the product. As consumers put safety above all else, packaging innovations that ensure safety and damage-free, clean delivery are emerging as new avenues for brand building. And everything, from safety shields that keep employees and customers safe to the material used to keep the product from spilling over or getting contaminated, is a part of the brand narrative.

For instance, Coca Cola chose to launch its spiced buttermilk brand 'Vio' in a 180 ml 'aseptic' packaging which ensures consumers that the product has been packed in a sterile and hygienic environment. The customer-brand interface is a part of the advertising narrative across categories—Vodafone Idea India, for instance has been

advertising about the protective shields it has installed at its newly reopened telecom retail outlets. Grocery retailers, be it chains such as Big Basket and Amazon Pantry or premium retailers such as Nature's Basket, the emphasis is on the way products are sourced and packed.

Brands are promising a safe packaging and delivery facility, with ads for everything from liquid hand wash to clothes reiterating the attention paid to the way the product makes its way from the factory to the customer. Some brands are using the concerns generated by the pandemic to reiterate their commitment to eco-friendly packaging. For example, Flipkart. It set out on a self-proclaimed mission to reduce the use of plastic in its packaging last year has been emphasising the same in its ads promising safe delivery too.

Packaging design service providers such as Tata Elxsi are part of the changing brand narrative. “Covid-19 has thrown newer challenges in consumer behaviour, which has changed considerably and is going to change further. Brands are trying to re-innovate, in terms of safety as well as how to reach the right consumers. One of the big changes we are seeing in all brands is their search for sustainable solutions for their requirements, not just environmentally friendly material but how to reduce overall carbon footprint,” says Shyam Sunder BK, chief designer, Packaging and Product Design at Tata Elxsi.

Having worked on certain projects with customers in Europe, Shyam Sunder says that the design team is revisiting the standard industry packaging templates for products such as liquid hand wash that has quickly climbed its way into the essentials list in the pandemic. He warns that while brands are concerned, but the emphasis on safety is more than an advertising or trust-building story.

“Companies and brands may be looking at automation at factory level but at packaging there is human interaction involved and one of the challenges is to prevent contamination. Just communicating that package is not contaminated is not enough,” Sunder adds.

Harish Bijoor, CEO of Harish Bijoor Consults and brand strategist says that the pandemic has brought several sensitivities around packaging to the fore, including reusability and carbon footprint, which many brands are yet to attend to. “It is only now that companies are once again looking at packaging as a whole. Even within the distribution chain, packaging has gained significance in terms of how well does it take

IN SAFE HANDS

To reassure consumers, advertisers are talking up the hygiene factor in the packaging story

- Coke promises aseptic packaging in its recent campaign for its dairy brand Vio

- Vodafone Idea said it has provided its employees with safety shields at newly reopened retail centres

- A Parle-G ad that focuses on the biscuits being packed by employees wearing masks and gloves

- PepsiCo India has repeatedly emphasised the safety in packaging and delivery of its brands

care of the product. What has begun is a long term movement where lot of brands have begun focusing on R&D around packaging in terms of durability, messaging and innovation,” he adds.

Founder director of Left & Right Communications Robinson Varghese believes that while packaging has been an integral part of the brand story in the past, the pandemic may force a systemic transformation. “The packaging innovations have to relate to the consumer habits or lifestyle changes, otherwise it's a short-lived expensive buzz. It involves restructuring of processes right from the manufacturing stage to the supply chain, from shelf-life to communication, the entire cycle has to be rethought,” he says.