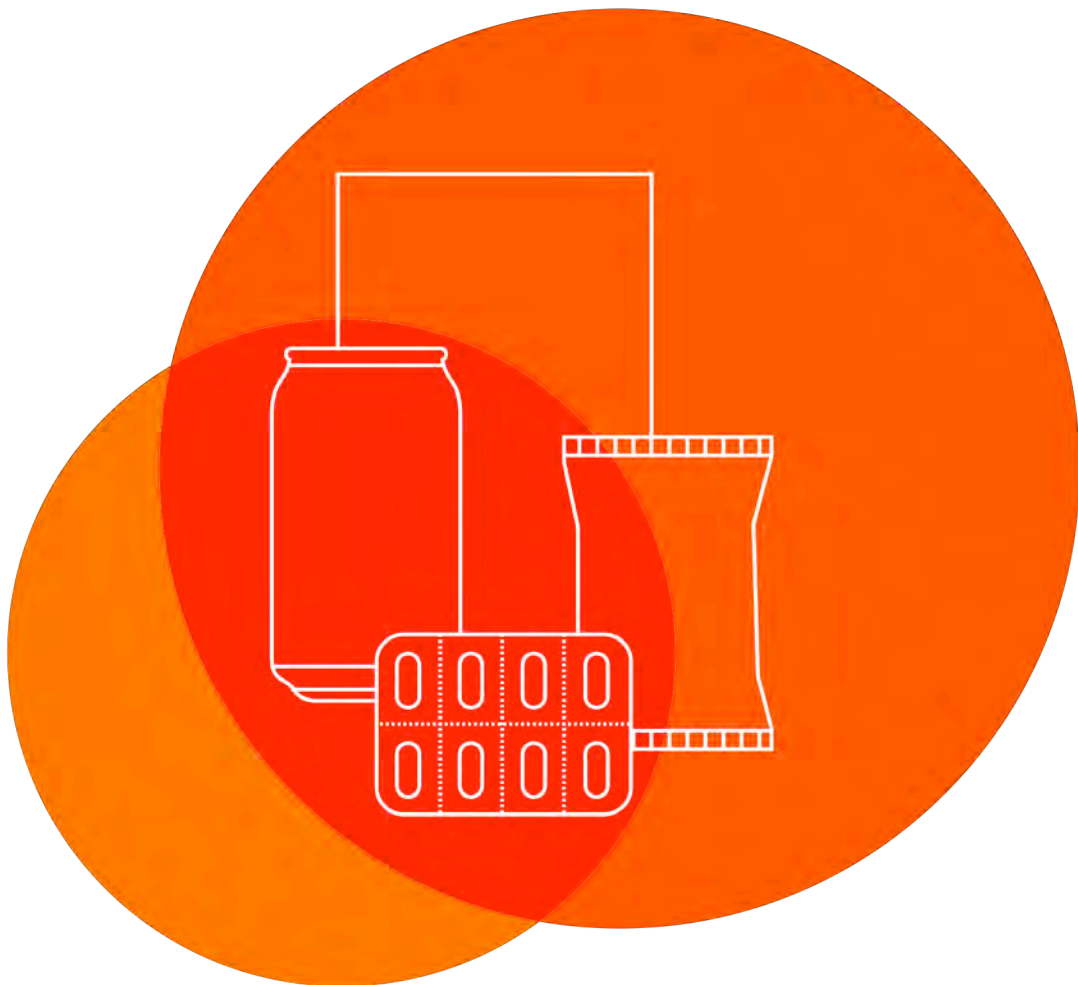


# Trends in Consumer Packaging

*How trends impact packaging*



Shikatani Lacroix is a leading branding and design firm located in Toronto, Canada. The company commissions assignments from all around the world, across CPG, retail and service industries, helping clients achieve success within their operating markets. It does this by enabling its clients' brands to better connect with their consumers through a variety of core services including corporate identity and communication, brand experience design, packaging, naming and product design.

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A trend has the potential of becoming a long-term influence on the future of a market

### What's hot, what's next, what's a trend?

By definition, a trend is a general direction in which something tends to move; or a gradual change in a condition, output, or process over time.

A trend is very different from a fad. A fad is defined as a short-lived movement, usually lasting only a few months. A trend, on the other hand, can potentially become a long-term influence on the future of a market. A fad and a trend may resemble each other at first, but there is usually a definite life span to a fad, whereas trends tend to grow and evolve over time. For example, the use of hot pink wall paint may be a fad, but the idea of using designer colours would be a trend.

The points raised in this presentation will identify the current trends that are most likely to have an enormous impact on consumer packaging in the years ahead. These trends include:

1. Sustainability: increased emphasis in all areas - recyclable containers and recycled materials.
2. Aging population: portion control and easy-to-open packaging.
3. Safety: tamper-resistant dispensers and closures.
4. Accessibility: convenience and portability.
5. Design: clean, simple design that will stand out on-shelf.

“Throughout history, trends have influenced and changed our society. And packaging has been impacted just as much by trends. By paying attention to today’s trends, we can glimpse what will influence tomorrow’s packaging designs”.

As written by Steven Dupuis in his article on trends in Step in Design, ([www.stepindesign.com](http://www.stepindesign.com)) trends are often met with opposition in the beginning. Tattoos, once a symbol of irreverence and rebellion for teenagers getting “inked”, has become popular with middle-aged men and women seeking the same mode of expression. People are tempted to follow new trends because they are different but we, as human beings, do not always welcome change. It is human nature to follow, to be a sheep; however, it is the individuals who lead — who break the rules and think differently— who are the trendsetters, the shepherds. Trendsetters and early followers are those who step out of their comfort zone and offer something new. As a trend gains acceptance, it is transformed and changed, taking on a life of its own through those who come to follow it. A trend’s life cycle looks a lot like a bell curve. Typically, it gains upward momentum as increasing numbers of people adopt it, but once it reaches mass appeal, interest in the trend lessens or stabilizes as it becomes a mainstream idea ... or it may simply die as another trend begins to grow and replace it.

*“Packaging has  
power –  
enormous  
power – over  
what we buy”*

Another difference between a fad and a trend is the number of industries each affects. A fad often appears in a single industry and is limited to one area, rarely crossing over into others. The 1970’s “poncho” fashion fad, for example, did not become incorporated into the youth culture or the music culture. However, Apple’s iPod broke down all the barriers and crossed over into the worlds of fashion, wireless communications and music. Lululemon bags actually have a designated pocket for your iPod, complete with a little insignia of an iPod. Portable electronic devices have become a trend, while fashions such as leg warmers or ponchos remain fads hopelessly trapped in time, waiting to be unearthed again at some point during the next few decades. Trends follow a steady movement while fads follow cycles, rising and falling in popularity once every few decades. For example, the leg warmer, popular in the eighties, was reintroduced as a fad a few years ago, but has since disappeared once again.

#### How trends work in packaging

Because packaging is so closely linked to consumer preferences, it provides a clear way to evaluate the stages of various trends. When trends are incorporated successfully, they help sell products.

Packaging has power – enormous power – over what we buy. The fashions we wear express who we are. Packaging does the same for products. We identify with a product because we believe that it does for us what we want it to do. We buy the “Brand Promise”, and the package carries a lot of that promise.

In packaging, trends grow slowly because there are longer lead times in product development cycles. We see early adopters and influencers coming from small start-up brands that have less at risk, while it may take years before big brands catch on to a trend.

Within the marketplace, it can be challenging to pick out new and emerging trends, as there are many different stages in a trend's life cycle. Also, consumers are at different stages of acceptance within the bell curve of a trend, so it is vital to understand who is purchasing the product. You must learn the buying habits of specific target audiences in order to better understand their comfort zones and the extent to which the packaging innovation can stretch to motivate a purchase. It is about knowing how far the brand you are designing for can be pushed.

Emerging artists, music, fashion, and the internet provide fertile ground to view tomorrow's visual trends, and although these trends may ultimately look different in later commercial applications, their roots can be traced back to their origins. These movements are typically five years ahead of the mainstream, and are dependent largely on the pace of a sub-culture and how extreme the trend may seem.

Being aware of these movements and watching them become trends is not enough to bring success; brands need to understand when and why to use a visual trend.

*“We want to simplify our lives so we are drawn to products that help us slow down”*

Since 9/11 small indulgences and simple pleasures have become popular, reflecting our uncertainties about the future. Portability of food and personal items are now more important—is this due to our busy lives or a need to be ready to run away at a moment’s notice? With such an unsettled feeling all around us, we have come to search for simple pleasures in everything we buy or consume. We want to simplify our lives, and therefore we are drawn to products and brands that help us slow down.

Environmental concerns have given rise to the sustainability and green movements. Consumers are more aware of their impact on the world, of the materials and the waste that packaging creates. More people understand the idea of a carbon footprint and market.

More and more clients are recognizing the strong effect great packaging can have on purchase intent. Not surprisingly, we see store-brands or private-label products embracing new trends more readily than the large global brands. Once considered to be less appealing and of lower quality, top store-brands now have loyal consumers in all categories. Design is a key factor in the increased market share of private labels because these brands are more flexible and have less to lose. They are taking risks that big brands are unwilling or unable to take.

Surprisingly, more often than not, we as consumers do not know why we buy. We do not know what factors actually affect us when we make a purchasing decision.

As addressed in the article Power of the Box, by Tuija Seipell ([www.thecoolhunter.net](http://www.thecoolhunter.net)) what we do know – and what marketers know – is that these decisions are all about emotions. What matters is how the brand makes us feel. Our first impression, whether about products or people, are strong and instantaneous. In many cases, packaging is the main influence. The billions of dollars spent on packaging and branding annually are not spent based solely on speculation. Marketers know it works, although even they do not always know the reasons behind the effectiveness.

Packaging has a huge impact on many other things as well, not just on our buying decisions. On store shelves, the battle for space and shelf impact is fought tooth and nail between competitors. There is a reason why a box of twelve pills is at least five times larger than it needs to be to contain the pills. Theft is one concern, as is anti-staking it away from the competition, drawing the consumer's eye.

#### Trends

##### COLOUR

Strong feelings about increasing cultural unity and personal commitments for a better environment make consumers more attracted to bright, layered colours contrasted with earthy, neutral tones, according to the 2009 edition of ColorForward™.

“People tend to respond well to colours that reflect the broader influences on their lives,” explains Cristina Carrara, ColorWorks Designer.

*“Colour  
increases brand  
recognition by  
80%”*



Cristina thinks we will be seeing a lot more retro and vintage colours in design and packaging. Many brands have been releasing limited edition products with retro packaging, and since it is a successful way of marketing, she feels other consumer goods will start doing so as well, e.g. Coke limited edition bottles.

Colour can be very powerful in connecting us emotionally to a brand and increases brand recognition by 80%. For example, the colour orange is a strong visual connection for Tide detergent.

Many colours have meanings that trigger certain responses in consumers:

**The colour green** is the colour of nature, fertility, life. Green symbolizes self-respect and well-being and is considered the colour of balance. It can also mean learning, growth and harmony.

Adding some green to packaging can suggest:

- A new state of balance
- A need for change or growth
- Natural attributes and freshness of the product
- A support for the environment

**The colour blue** can imply inspiration, sincerity and spirituality. Blue is the colour often chosen by conservative people. Turquoise is the symbol of youth, and aqua is the colour of high ideals.

Put some blue in your packaging when you want:

- Calm and relaxation
- To reinforce stability, trust, dependability
- To support a premium image, build on tradition

The colour yellow is full of creative and intellectual energy. Yellow symbolizes wisdom; it means joy and happiness. People of high intellect favour yellow.

Put some yellow in your packaging when you want:

- To communicate value
- To reinforce radiant-type energy
- To achieve strong shelf impact



#### PHYSICAL PACKAGING

High visibility packaging is a new influence in brand packaging, based in part on advantages for theft and tamper-deterrence as well as for product showcasing. Carded blister packs and clamshells present the best opportunities. The food industry will be the biggest player in the packaging arena, with the medical and pharmaceutical industries following closely.

Pouches are another popular packaging alternative, as opposed to cans or boxes. Cans and boxes require more storage space and transportation when compared to the storage area required for pouches. Pouches can also provide significant cost savings in production.

The user can further reduce costs by eliminating multi-layer packaging – by packaging products in a pouch instead of a cardboard box. Pouches also help meet the consumer's demand for convenient foods such as ready-to-serve meals like Uncle Ben's Bistro Express.



Spouted pouches for beverage/liquid products capitalize on this growing trend, while providing a cost saving alternative to bottles or TetraPaks. The spout can be used much like a traditional straw, while other liquid products can be squeezed through the spout. This provides an alternative for a variety of applications including pre-packaged meals, dressing, sauces, juice and pet food. Method soaps have recently launched a new liquid soap refill pouch.

Ziploc leads the way in another packaging trend. A zip reseal feature on flexible packaging provides consumer ease-of-use. The zip reseal option has broad customer appeal as it provides many consumer benefits, such as freshness and extended conservation time. The zip reseal function has the added bonus of providing increased brand recognition because the consumer keeps the product in its original packaging, example Herbon cough drops.



### GREEN

This trend has spread very quickly and has caused a lot of concern among brands, because it affects all aspects of a package—from materials to shipping to reusing and recycling. The growth of the “Buy local” movement and the “100 mile diet” have emerged as associated trends; Green is about treading lightly on the earth, and for many consumers it has become a lifestyle. Green, organic designs have just started to catch on, with more and more people becoming eco-conscious and with more and more brands/ organizations reducing their carbon footprint. As a result, the need to develop identities and create designs that are green and organic will vastly increase.

Caring about the environment and our personal footprint on the world is no longer the domain of fringe groups or activists. Films such as An Inconvenient Truth have helped raise our awareness of our impact on the planet through our consumption habits. The backlash against unnecessary food miles, plastic bags and over-packaged products are only the beginning of a shift towards less conspicuous consumption.



### SUSTAINABILITY

High-quality products that focus on “Ethical sourcing” pride themselves on packaging that is either 100% recycled, recyclable, refillable or reusable. The appearance of products like reusable shopping bags are examples of this new mentality.

A good example of sustainability is the increased use of polymers, a 100% biodegradable film made from corn, which have properties similar to the traditional petroleum-based plastic films it replaces.

### LESS IS MORE

This trend is an offshoot of the idea of simplicity. Its use in packaging has grown steadily and continues to demonstrate value, moving up the bell curve to be adopted by many large-store brands.

Simplicity is often both a designer’s and a consumer’s dream, because it makes so many things easy and more compelling. In the packaging world, this approach has come to imply a quiet elegance, an uncluttered freedom from gratuitous embellishment and a focus on key ideas. It is a luxurious plainness.

Today, consumers have come to look for simple pleasures in everything they buy. We desire a simpler life, and we are therefore attracted to products and brands that help us slow down. Too often, product packaging tries too hard to sell you by listing every feature and benefit. Consumers can be left confused by all the information.

The “Less is More” trend focuses on the product itself and not the brand (the brand is there, but not in your face). For example: iPod, Kraft Salad Dressings.





“Less is More” has led to the reduction in packaging, an environmental concern that has motivated manufacturers to reduce the size of the overall physical package. As with Wal-Mart’s 7Rs, this new awareness of the impact of large bulky packaging on the environment has led to smaller-sized packages that are easy to carry and recycle. [www.stepindesign.com](http://www.stepindesign.com)

Tetley’s green teas are a good example of “Less is More” packaging: the small canister holds just as many teabags as a larger carton but takes up less space in your cupboard.

### HEALTH and WELLNESS

On one hand, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of potentially harmful chemicals in food, cosmetics, toiletries etc. On the other hand, packaging focuses on natural ingredient formulations, compostable packaging, full label clarity and content disclosure.

### ON THE GO

With today’s busy schedules, consumers are demanding single serve, on-the-fly, convenient and easy-to-use products. The more you can simplify consumers’ lives, the more you will connect. Think of all the packaging categories that have developed around this concept. HMR-Home Meal Replacement, Grab and Go, and RTE (ready-to-eat) categories will all continue to improve products and increase sales. In addition, packaging is being designed to increase options for usage situations for the brand; for example, on-the-go packaging is being designed for consumption in the car.

Supplement Facts	
Serving Size 1 Caplet Servings Per Container: 30	
Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Calcium.....	74 mg..... 7%
(as Calcium Carbonate/Di-Calcium Phosphate)	
Proprietary Blend.....	675 mg.....*
Milk Thistle Extract (Silybum marianum) (seed).....	*
Bacopa Extract (Bacopa monnieri) (aerial part).....	*
Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) (root).....	*
Green Tea Extract (Camellia sinensis) (leaf).....	*
Turmeric Extract (Curcuma longa) (rhizome).....	*

\* Daily Value not established

**Other Ingredients:** Croscarmellose Sodium, Magnesium Stearate, Microcrystalline Cellulose, Modified Cellulose, Silica, Stearic Acid  
 Protandim™ is formulated utilizing high quality, potent herbal extracts processed under proprietary extraction technologies.

Smaller sized packaging takes up less space and options include no-mess applicators and/or one-dose applicators, as well as dispensers and refillable containers. Cheerios single serve cereal in a bowl is a good example of convenient, portable packaging.



### SIMPLE, CLEAN DESIGN

Consumers increasingly prefer goods to be real, to appear unpretentious, unadorned, natural and authentic. Complex and overly detailed brand messages get lost. In today's information-overload clutter, where brands have proliferated, buyers are overwhelmed by all of the messaging thrown at them on labels. Most successful brands are able to connect with their core enthusiasts using effective "visual shorthand." Colour, symbols and icons can help brands cut through the visual noise.

A key strategy shared by successful brands is that their messages, their identities and their entire communication architectures are simple. It is important to find a balance between simplicity and complexity - "improved" does not always mean adding more; in many cases it means less. With such complexity in the marketplace, the simpler packaging stands out. For example, Method's line of products has clean, simple packaging that clearly stands out on shelf.

### HALO ASSOCIATION

Companies are seeking the council of environmental and social activists in order to appease consumers and quickly build or adopt brand platforms. Many companies have chosen to endorse or partner with an affiliation to promote their brand through positive association. Partners include CBCF, Share the Care, RED, etc.





### STORYTELLING

Leading research has shown the importance of narrative in branding and packaging. The reason is simple: stories are often what compel us to act. Understanding the origin of a product gives it more credibility. Stories are very powerful as a means of establishing a relationship with a brand and its product. The history of a brand can become the story. This trend can be either visual or narrative, the shape of the package can be used to tell the story or the story can be incorporated into the design. A good example of the narrative is Miss Vickie's kettle chips and a good example of the structural packaging is Vivitas Woman Prenatal vitamins.



### PACKAGE SECURITY

Security in packaging is becoming increasingly important. This priority will continue to grow as more people become concerned about product integrity. One major security scare, like the Listeria scare in Maple Leafs Foods lunch meats, could force everyone to change their packaging methods immediately. Anti-tamper measures are becoming even more important. The "Do not use if seal is broken" label is everywhere now, on food, pharmaceuticals, and make-up. And cost efficiencies are now making many of these safety devices more affordable and therefore more mainstream and wide-spread in their use.

Immune system assaults from SARS, AIDS and H1N1 have increased the demand for product safety reassurance, especially for products that are made outside of the country. Transparent packages and clear descriptions of products have become popular, allowing full disclosure and a reassurance that the product/company has nothing to hide.

The best before date appears on all food products, prominently, and has become a bible for many. We trust it completely and often dispose of items that are only one day past their suggested date of expiry.

After the 9-11 scare, commonly used items, especially travel products, became available in smaller sizes in order to conform to new air travel restrictions such as the 3 oz limitation imposed on all carry-on liquids. For example, we saw an explosion of tiny bottles of shampoo, hairspray, hand sanitizer, and Scope mouthwash, common items for people to carry in their purses or briefcases at all times.

### AGING POPULATION

As the consumer population ages in North America there are a number of things to look at in packaging. Easy-to-open packages such as pop-tops (as opposed to the cumbersome can opener) and Ziploc seals are emerging as growing concerns for the aging population. Large print on labels is also on the rise, ensuring easy visibility for older consumers. With age, appetite decreases so there is no need to super size everything and with the empty nesters there are fewer mouths to feed in the household so smaller packages or portion sizes are necessary.

Lastly, seniors enjoy shopping but are not able to carry heavy bags. Smaller packaging units mean less weight. Less weight means being able to carry more products.





### CONSUMER GENERATED ADVERTISING

The newest tactics for increasing a brand's publicity and recognition are contests that involve the buyer in the process. These contests allow everyday people to participate in the campaign and the packaging through promotions like Doritos' "Guru contest," in which Doritos opened the naming of their new flavour to everyone. This promotion encouraged people to try the new, nameless flavour, and it increased their profits because of the \$25,000 prize for the best name submitted.

Scotties launched a similar idea with their "Design Challenge"; participants who submitted their design ideas for a Scotties tissue box could win a \$25,000 room makeover. This put the Scotties brand into people's minds, and the next time they went to buy facial tissues, they remembered the Scotties' name and possibly chose it over other leading brands like Puffs and Kleenex.

### PACKAGING EFFECTIVENESS

As stated previously, knowing about and watching trends is not enough to bring success; brands need to understand how to use a visual trend wisely to maximize its impact on the package design. Therefore, when designing packaging, the following factors should be considered in evaluating the packaging effectiveness:

1. Does the package have the "Blink Factor"?
  - Does the package have colour recognition?
  - Does the package leverage a memorable image?
2. Does the package stand out at shelf-level?
  - How quickly is the product seen?
  - How long is it viewed?
  - Is the package viewed a second time?
3. Does the package increase shop-ability?
  - Does it have the right hierarchy of communication?

- Is there a clear consumer benefit?
- Is there differentiation within the category?
- Is the design simple?

4. Does the package convey a meaningful and relevant point of difference?

- Does the overall package communicate an emotional and rational need state?
- Is the key benefit clearly communicated visually?

## CONCLUSION

When trends are incorporated successfully, they help sell products. However, package design is where the adoption of a trend can get tricky. If you are too early, you can miss your target consumer. Too late, and it is “old news”. Therefore, visual trends need to be applied with careful consideration of the product’s brand and its promise. Does the trend fit the brand, and will it attract the right buyer?

Package design should start with the realization that “clutter” is the universal reality of the shopping experience. It is necessary to break through the clutter to generate shopper’s interest so clean, simple designs are best. Physical packaging that extends usage and stands out will also help keep your brand top of mind.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to communicate product messages through advertising due to the amount of channels and publications available, so many brands are already looking to use their packaging to work harder than simply acting as a mark of recall.

As retailers continue to work at growing their share of own brand at the expense of rival brands, manufacturers will need to find a reason beyond price to remain listed by retailers. This means that brands will have to use their package designs to entertain and 'jolt' consumers out of their existing repertoires at point of purchase, and become far more engaging to grab consumers’ attention.

Consumers are becoming increasingly aware and want to feel good about what they are buying. Designing for the buyer and keeping in mind the trends that impact purchase will help keep your brand successful.

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