

From Concept to Solution: Designing to Enhance the Multiple Roles of Pharma Packaging

When you walk into a store or pharmacy and see multiple similar products in the same competitive space, it is easy to understand the impact that packaging design and branding can have on consumer purchasing decisions. The initial interaction an end user has with a product – from seeing an eye-catching design and taking it off the shelf to touching the product and reading the information – matters greatly in building a lasting connection. It is important to recognise that this process does not just occur when looking at FMCG purchasing decisions, but in every market where packaging is concerned. Additionally, packaging design doesn't just contribute to that first moment of purchase, but throughout the whole customer journey. How a product is stored, presented and organised in its packaging affects its entire usage.

In the healthcare and pharmaceutical industry, packaging design is crucial as the customers are patients, who rely on the medication the pack contains. Healthcare packaging must therefore be simple to open, convenient to use and easily distinguishable. It also plays an important role in increasing patient adherence, which the World Health Organisation (WHO) defines as the extent to which a person's behaviour – for example taking medication, following a diet, or executing lifestyle changes – corresponds with agreed recommendations from a healthcare provider.

Patient adherence is currently one of the biggest challenges that the industry is facing, resulting in a growing number of pharmaceutical companies amending their packaging to try and help improve levels of adherence by patients. In addition to low patient adherence levels affecting healthcare efficacy, it is also extremely costly to the industry. In fact, research shows that patients not taking their medicines in line with agreed recommendations from the healthcare provider costs the

NHS £500 million annually which, in context, is equivalent to 30,000 kidney transplants or an extra 21,000 qualified nurses.

Breaking down all the roles that packaging plays in a patient's journey, a number of features that can encourage patient adherence at each stage can be identified. Packaging can be designed specifically to:

- Contain its contents
- Physically protect its contents
- Communicate information about its contents
- Provide security to its contents
- Aid in the transportation of its contents

It is essential to keep these five roles in mind when thinking about design, applying concepts such as semiotics, ergonomics, colour and trends to each one where appropriate. To explain this in more detail, this article will review examples based on in-home medical devices and over-the-counter drugs, to illustrate some of the ways that incorporating good design practices into packaging can benefit multiple stakeholders.

Containment and Accessibility

On a basic level, packaging is a means of containing and delivering a product to a user. Thinking carefully about accessibility is essential; something as simple as how a carton opens can make a considerable difference to the end user. Using the hypothetical situation of an in-home medical product that is delivered to the patient at a pharmacy, if the dispensing clinician cannot access the product inside, they will not be able to successfully provide an appropriate explanation to the patient. A pack that allows the medical professional to demonstrate the item, easily re-pack it and issue it to the patient helps ensure that the product and related information stay together. This gives the patient and caregiver confidence in their

home environment, that they are equipped with all the packaging and information required to support proper usage.

Communication and Information

Of the five roles listed above, arguably the most important in terms of improving patient adherence is the range and depth of information provided. In fact, in its 'Adherence to Long-Term Therapies: Evidence for Action' report, the WHO references "the resources, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and expectations of the patient" as key drivers of improving adherence. Packaging and literature must help to communicate all the information needed in order for patients to be able to successfully take their medicines, ranging from simple dosage instructions on over-the-counter drugs to comprehensive directions for carers or medical professionals. With the latter, communication is particularly important, as there are several layers of information exchange that must occur; from the prescription to the carer, and then from the carer to the patient. By understanding these potential barriers to communication, it becomes clear that the packaging serves as an integral part of the communication process, aiding the medical professional to quickly recall key information about the product and its usage to share with patients.

In order to ensure that information is as clear as possible, pharmaceuticals need to provide detailed literature that is available in multiple languages, catering for all audiences. Text should be printed in a legible font face and size, with colours used if appropriate. Information should be delivered in an easily-digestible format – including features such as images, graphs or infographics in addition to blocks of text – to help aid understanding and reassure patients. Images are particularly important for those who are illiterate. According to



the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, in 2013 the global illiteracy rate was 15.9%, or one in six people. In addition, for those suffering with sight loss, or who are partially or fully blind, braille should be used. According to the WHO, 285 million people are estimated to be visually impaired worldwide; 39 million are blind and 246 million have low vision.

If the packaging is too small and there is not enough space on the carton or bottle to supply the large volumes of information required, pharmaceutical manufacturers can employ features such as booklet or leaflet labels or booklet leaflets, allowing customers to simply flip and navigate through additional material.

Protection and Transportation

For the information communicated via packaging to be of use, patients and medical professionals must receive medicines in a complete and undamaged state. Packaging

therefore plays a vital role in the protection and transportation of medicines, ensuring that they are efficiently and safely delivered from the manufacturer through the entire supply chain. Simple factors, such as shape and structure, can help immensely when stacking and packing large amounts of content that need to be shipped, for example. On a more sophisticated level, more intricate structural elements can be installed. For fragile medical instruments, such as vials, packaging may need to include 'crumple zones' that are shaped to the contents' form, ensuring that they are protected and are not prone to move when in transit.

Protection does not just refer to transportation, however; it extends to the full journey of the medicine. Even when the drugs have been successfully delivered to the patient, consumers must be able to store the drugs safely when at home, often for a significant amount of time. For example, manufacturers can

use thermochromic inks that are activated by high or low temperatures to help patients monitor the storage conditions that may impact the efficacy of the drugs.

Summary

Every one of these basic elements has the ability to add value and increase patient adherence by utilising intelligent targeted design practices. Though these design tools may not completely solve the issue of patient adherence, employing these package design practices should not be overlooked. As pre-existing components in the delivery of drugs, the financial implications of the addition of information or protective structural elements to secondary packaging and literature is minimal. However, these adaptations are proven to substantially increase levels of patient adherence. Overall, developing a successful product should not end there, but should also enhance the delivery of that solution with effective and relevant packaging.



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With over 20 years of experience enhancing some of the world's top consumer brands both through agencies and in-house, Alan's most recent achievement prior to joining Essentra includes reinvigorating the UK's no. 1 boxed chocolate brand. Alan leads design within Essentra from the creation process to insights with a focus on helping customer's brands stand out and reducing complications at the point of manufacture. This pairs the best of design with the knowledge of how to manufacture efficiently, saving valuable time to market and simplifying the design to production process.