

# THE TEN BIGGEST PITFALLS OF PACKAGE DESIGN

If part of your job is creating packaging, you know that it is both exciting and challenging. It's thrilling to see your work displayed in stores and in consumers' homes, but it is equally nerve-racking to know that any error comes with significant consequences – like hundreds of thousands of incorrect packages, for example.

Here at Anchor Marketing, we've been creating successful packaging for more than 20 years, and while a lot of things have changed during that time, many of the challenges that come with package design have stayed the same. This list is our way of passing on the knowledge we've gained during our time (so far) in the packaging business. When you work in packaging as long as we have, you are bound to find some pitfalls. By taking this list to heart, you can avoid some of the biggest traps that cost manufacturers time and money as they create and print packages for their products.

## **PITFALL ONE:**

### ***Not Looking At The Big Picture***

When you start to create packaging, it's critical to not only consider how it will look, but how it will be used. Will customers be able to read the label no matter which shelf it is placed on at the store? Will products be shipped in a container that also serves as a display? Will the package need special directions about how to use or store the product? How long will they last on the shelf? Designing the packaging shouldn't be a democracy (you will only end up with a watered down design if it is), but you must get input from the folks in production, distribution and sales as you put it together.

For example, stand-up bags will often contain less product than traditional lay-down versions. You will need to take things like the height of the sides into consideration. Will they have a clear window so that the product can be

easily viewed? Packages that contain a larger amount of product are almost always placed on the bottom shelf. As a result, their artwork should be positioned in such a way that it can effectively advertise from there. Taking these small aspects into consideration during the design process can make the difference between your bag being noticed or ignored.

Every package is a work of art that needs to work. Your design should be versatile. It needs to look great on the shelf but also be easy to open and use. A good package design keeps the entire distribution channel in mind, from the factory to the consumer's home.

### **PITFALL TWO:**

#### ***Packages That All Look The Same (Or Look Too Different)***

If the brand that you're designing packaging for has a variety of different product offerings, it's important to make them distinct. Ideally, you want to give each product type its own identity. This includes everything from colors and graphical elements, to logos and package style.

However, balance is important here as well. You don't want to completely give up any brand equity you've built with consumers. Think about your favorite brand of orange juice. The juice with pulp looks different than the juice without pulp, but you can still clearly see that they share a common brand. You want packaging to assist the consumer in choosing which product they prefer, but you don't ever want them to lose track of your brand.

### **PITFALL THREE:**

#### ***Skipping The Hard Copy Proof***

Once your design is sent to the vendor, don't forget to request a hard-copy proof. This will either be a paper proof or, ideally, a proof of your artwork on the actual substrate (the material the package will be made from). It will also include information about the overall scale and dimensions.

A hard-copy proof is always valuable, but even more-so when the package will include transparent "windows"

that show the product (poly bags, plastic or glass bottles, etc). Your proof should indicate which areas are opaque and which are covered with ink. While this may seem like a simple design element, it is also hard for everyone to keep track of (since it is literally invisible). Best practices for packaging tell us that we need to double check everything on a package – from color to clear areas – and a hard-copy proof is the single best way to do this.

Note that some packaging vendors will pressure you to forego this step. Don't be tempted. Anchor's clients have been saved significant amounts of money and time by our diligence with hard-copy proofs.

### **PITFALL FOUR:**

#### ***Ignoring How The Color Of The Product Affects The Color Of The Package***

This is related to the transparent nature of some substrates (as noted in pitfall three). When determining the color/overall design of your package, it's important to take into consideration what its contents will be. This is because the product going into a package will very often impact the color/shading of the package itself, especially with clear polyurethane bags or clear bottles. Think about it: You create the design with a white background, then proof your work on paper, another opaque white background. What happens when your clear bags show up with dark-colored product in them?

Pet food, for example, is often dark in color and when placed in a polyethylene bag, tends to make the outer colors/graphics appear darker overall. This is because while the printer uses a layer of white ink underneath your graphics, it can never be thick enough to be completely opaque. As a result, a color that was originally supposed to be light green can turn to dark, forest green. It can also make lettering throughout the design nearly impossible to read (when dark letters are used over dark product on clear surfaces). In order to ensure that this shading mix-up doesn't affect your next design, it's always a good idea to request a color sample on clear poly from your vendor during the initial design stages. Doing so will give you the

opportunity to hold the color sample against the product, consequently, giving you a glimpse of how the color will appear beforehand.

## **PITFALL FIVE:**

### ***Getting Too Far Into The Weeds With Color***

While it is important to maintain consistent color on packaging in order to sustain brand equity, getting too focused on the minutiae of color can drive you crazy if you're not careful. As you may be aware, color is created in many ways. Ink on paper uses CMYK inks. Color on your computer or phone uses RGB light. Color on packaging is often an entirely different process that is proprietary to the vendor.

Here's how to approach color with packaging: work for consistency, but be prepared for slight variations.

There are simply too many variables involved to allow you to get the exact same brown on every single candy bar: not only does the artwork look different on screen than in real life, it looks different on paper than it does on the actual substrate, and different on the first package off the line than the fifty thousandth package off the line when the ink is starting to run low.

Insist on hard-copy proofs. Check finished packages. Compare finished packages from different vendors and different print runs. Hold your printers accountable. Then find a happy place where you can accept minor variations in color for your packaging. It will help your overall mental health, and it will save the relationships you build with vendors and coworkers.

Remember, your customers never hold up two packages that were printed three years apart to compare the color on them. It's more about getting the color right on the run you are working on, and maintaining the overall integrity of the brand.

## **PITFALL SIX:**

### ***Getting Carried Away With Fonts***

When it comes to fonts, less is more. In other words, keep things simple, classic and readable. Wacky,

unrecognizable fonts may look cool to you, but they do nothing but make your text harder to read for potential customers. Ideally, your font should be large enough for everyone to read, including people with reading glasses. As a design norm, the font size should be no less than 8pt.

## **PITFALL SEVEN:**

### ***Taking Stock Photos For Granted***

This one can often catch people by surprise, especially if they haven't used stock photography before. Stock photography websites are a great place to find photos to incorporate into your package design. However, they include licensing agreements that need to be heeded. First of all, images from stock photo sites are certainly not free. You either pay per image or via a subscription.

Secondly – and this is where many manufacturers get bit – there is the matter of how many times that particular image will be used on individual packages. If you are repeatedly printing out large quantities of bags using a certain image, let's say half a million, for example, you will almost always be required to pay an extended licensing fee. These extended licenses can range in both price and designated usage amounts, but are a necessary purchase all the same. Failing to do so can result in a costly legal dispute. In fact, many stock photography companies have specialists whose job is to specifically be on the lookout for photography licensing issues, misguidance and misuse.

## **PITFALL EIGHT:**

### ***Ignoring The Importance Of Regulations And UPC Codes***

It goes without saying that there are some important rules and regulations to consider while completing your design. Depending on what you are selling and where you are selling it, one example might be The Fair Packaging and Labeling Act. Under this policy, you are required to include the identity of the commodity, net contents (weight statement) and the manufacturer's name/place of business. Each industry has its own governing bodies.

Make sure to study up on the rules relating to your product before you design the package. They can be arcane and they tend to vary by state or location.

You must also pay close attention to the UPC (Universal Product Code) on the product. The vendor is the one typically responsible for creating the code, but that doesn't mean that they get it right every time. If one mistake in the code makes its way through to the printing process, the entire order will be unusable (unless you overlay the bad UPC codes with stickers, a very costly process). With that being said, it's instrumental to the success of your package that you make sure the numbers are correct, the code is running in the right direction and the size is acceptable.

### **PITFALL NINE:**

#### ***Cutting Corners On Translations***

The rules for language translation on packaging will mainly depend on where your product is going to be sold. This includes retailers, specific regions and other countries. For example, if your product is going to be sold in Canada, you will need to include the French translation in certain areas of the package. According to Canada's Consumer Packaging and Labeling Act, these areas include the common name, net quantity, ingredients and nutrition facts (which can all vary depending on the type of product). This French translation will also need to be in the same-sized font as the English text.

The retail establishment in which your product will be sold is also a contributing factor in regards to translation. In fact, certain retail chains have their own rules for language translation all together. This is mainly due to the fact that they have a specific target demographic. For many retailers throughout the U.S., Spanish will be the most common language translation requirement that you will run into.

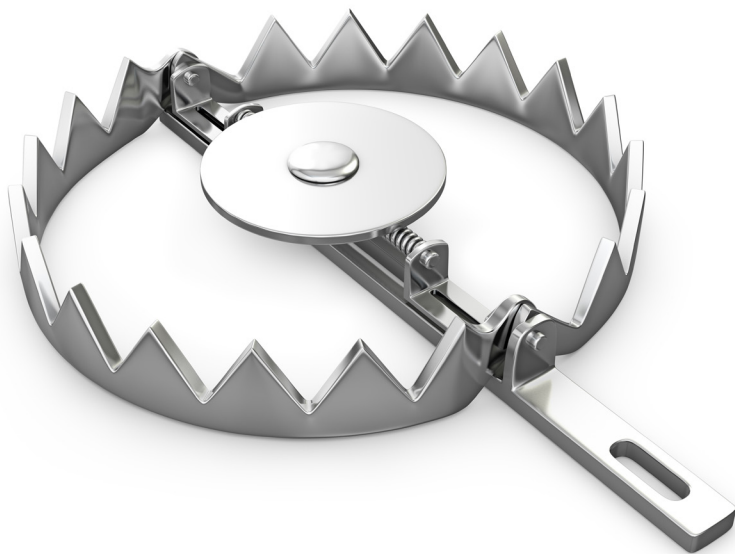
### **PITFALL TEN:**

#### ***Forgetting To Request Final Files***

Once your packages have been printed, it's always a good idea to request a final file/template from your vendor. This way you can be 100% sure that you have that exact final file on hand if you need to print additional orders or make edits. That's not to say that the vendor will misplace them, but things do happen, and it's always smart to be prepared.

It's also important to note that printing packages overseas requires more concentration and diligence than printing in the United States. Even though these off shore vendors can be cheaper, they also tend to have different standards and processes. There will also be a language barrier to contend with. This can become especially problematic when it comes to requesting changes or additions to your proof. Anchor works successfully with packaging vendors all over the world, but each of them have their own unique way of doing business. It helps to have a design partner with experience.

Of course these ten pitfalls aren't the only potential problems with a package design. Each package comes with its own challenges, and each vendor has its own unique way of doing business. Have further questions on how to make your next packaging design a success? Contact Anchor Marketing today!



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