



Ernest  Packaging Solutions™

AISLE 9

WHITE PAPER

No More Brown Box

*by Tim Wilson, Ernest Packaging Solutions
& Greg Feinberg, Aisle 9*



**Ernest
To The
Rescue**

Branding your B2B packaging to define your customer experience.

A missed opportunity.



Tim Wilson
President
Ernest Packaging
Solutions

TIM: There is an issue in the packaging industry that keeps me up at night, and that question is: “Why are so many B2B operations failing to use their packaging as a marketing tool?” Why aren’t companies utilizing a key customer-facing point of their business as the perfect marketing and branding opportunity that it is?

As the President of Ernest Packaging Solutions, it’s my job to find the answers. Are businesses really taking for granted the potential value of their boxes due to a lack of knowledge?

Ernest Packaging Solutions eats, breathes and lives packaging, so we are on the leading edge of technology and design improvements. Every day we provide answers for clients who think there isn’t a solution to their challenges. Some are afraid to tackle packaging upgrades because they think there is too high of a cost in doing so. That isn’t always the case. The brown box may be cheapest, but it could be costing you money if the wrong box is used. Maybe you shouldn’t be using the box at all.

This thinking dates back to Depression-era packaging, when many of our industry foundations were taking shape. These roots took hold in a world motivated by cost – and cost alone – and were limited by the technology of the period. Fast forward 80 years: While all other industries have changed how they do business, packaging is still handled like it was generations ago.

The entire world runs on packaging, and the whole catalogue of materials is available to B2Bs, yet branding is seen by many as a B2C enterprise. What this thinking fails to recognize is how much the market has changed in the last few years. Decision-makers aren’t driven by fastidiousness and frugality in their daily lives or while in the office. B2B and B2C are becoming blends. We all buy laptops, whether we buy for business or home. Just because someone is buying during their 9-to-5, it doesn’t mean they turn off their 5-to-9 buying habits. Consumers have changed. When’s the last time you updated your packaging to reflect this?

This new breed of B2B is being driven by Gen-X and Gen-Y entrepreneurs whose work lives are inseparably tied to their personal lives.

This new breed of B2B is being driven by Gen-X and Gen-Y entrepreneurs whose work lives are inseparably tied to their personal lives. But these trends are moving up the generational ladder and are increasingly employed by older generations as well.

B2B, B2C: it's all one now. There are no business hours anymore. They are who they are 24/7, and that impacts their business as well as yours. B2B branding and package branding isn't the wave of the future; it's happening right now.

People must see the value of branding their message now more than ever. This is especially key for distributors and redistributors when considering the significant investment they are putting into packaging and the ROI-crippling effects of skipping over putting their message on their boxes.



Greg Feinberg
President
Aisle 9

GREG: When I walk into a meeting where we are going to discuss branding with a new customer, I have a single question that helps them understand the value branding provides. I simply ask, "Is anyone in this room dressed head to toe in clothes and shoes from Walmart?" I've never seen a hand go up, so naturally, my response is always, "So you are all paying more than you need to for fundamental products, and cost isn't the only factor you consider when choosing how to package yourself."

This question is an effective way to explain that the people in that room make decisions every day that are based on branding more than function – and their customers do, too. Your brand is what defines the function. How do you want to define your product or service, and how do you do it?

At Aisle 9 we specialize in branding, positioning and designing products that will attract consumer attention and differentiate products. We also employ an exclusive sales force that establishes nationwide distribution for our clients in grocery, mass retail, mass drug and club stores. I have learned what influences decision-making and understand consumer behavior. Based on my experience, there is no question that effective branding and packaging leads to brand loyalty, the key element in repeated consumer behavior.

Your story and ability to communicate that story will influence consumer behavior, positively or negatively; it depends on how well you can tell it. And if you think investing in brand is more important to B2C than B2B, you'll need to reconsider. Every company needs to align its message with its audience, no matter what audience you're speaking to. That's where good branding becomes invaluable.

Branding + execution = brand loyalty.

Brand is the headline of that story you're telling your customers.

Foundation is your name, the services you provide and who your target market is.

Stop chasing to zero.

TIM: In marketing, there is the famous quip: “I know I’m wasting half of my advertising dollars. The problem is, I can’t figure out which half it is.” I can say with certainty that the “wasted half” of their marketing is happening because they aren’t utilizing the built-in billboards they are sending to the doors of their customers every single day.

I understand that no one wants to spend more than they have to on packaging, but the largest investment has already been made. Depending on your volume, adding printing to your boxes can cost just a few pennies, and the ROI on that investment can be incredible. Only one company can be the cheapest, and do you really want to be them?

Additionally, if you haven’t revamped your packaging recently, you could be spending more money utilizing old materials and technology, as the industry is always creating new solutions. Advances in weight and source reduction have been revolutionizing process cost savings, so rethinking your packaging from the ground up with a focus on brand messaging and customer experience can save you money before it even hits the customer’s loading dock.

Using the most effective packaging is also speaking to your brand. How much do you like receiving a box filled with that annoying popcorn? What if your B2B partner is actually lowering your shipping costs by sending lighter weight and more efficient packages? Again, this defines your product or service.

Only one company can be the cheapest, and do you really want to be them? In the end, it’s not about spending money. It is about creating value.

In the end, it’s not about spending money; that’s not the business we are in. It is about creating value. Look at lists of the most valuable global brands, and you’ll see many B2Bs up there. The latest rankings have IBM, GE and Intel at 4, 6 and 9, respectively.¹ Having a strong and recognizable brand creates value in your company that translates into real-world dollars. Taking the opportunity to increase the value of your company without major strategic shifts or investments is a no-brainer.

GREG: Simply put, if you have competition in your industry, you need to have a unified brand message and branding strategy. B2B branding isn’t an option— it’s the cost of doing business if you want to stay in business. After all, B2B buyers are also B2C buyers in their daily lives. Why would you think they can turn off their learned consumer behavior when they walk into their office?

¹ Interbrand. Interbrand. Web. 2 June 2014. <http://www.interbrand.com/en/best-global-brands/2013/Best-Global-Brands-2013.aspx>

Every company, no matter what industry you are in, has a unique value proposition compared to its competition. This is called differentiation. If you cannot explain why your business is different and better than your competition, then you will ultimately fail. You must continually communicate why you are better. Branding is the key that allows your business to build and maintain customer loyalty. Through branding, you continually reinforce the reasons customers do business with you.

TIM: It's about having the right brand and executing that message across all opportunities, including your B2B packaging. This synergy between branding and implementation is what sticks with the customer: Establish a message, reinforce the message execute the brand promise.

For branding your packaging, you need a partner who knows not just a product line card, but one who can also tell you how to spend your money wisely. Depending on the size of product, the budget or what you want to say, you need someone who can give you packaging answers based on your end user.



“

Your boxes communicate with your client more than customer service reps, sales people or truck drivers.

First things first: material

- Your Message to Your Customer
- Package Structure & Materials
- Logo Placement
- Direct Print or Labels
- Number of Print Colors
- Sustainability Options
- Inserts

GREG: You brand your business cards, your website, your building, the uniforms of your warehouse staff, your customer appreciation gifts and everything else. So is a bland brown box really cutting it when it comes to creating a total customer experience around your brand?

Consider this fact: Your boxes communicate with your client more than customer service reps, sales people or truck drivers. What is it saying about you when you aren't there? Even if you ship bulk items to your customer – a thousand individual units in a box – that is 1,001 opportunities to share your message. Take advantage of the opportunity that is already there and ready to use.



To learn more about packaging design and engineering solutions from a proven industry leader with over 70 years of cutting-edge leadership, contact Ernest Packaging Solutions today.

800.233.7788
inquiry@ernestpkg.com