

Is the campaign against product packaging a problem? Or an opportunity?

Would you change your attitude to product packaging if the contents became cheaper?

Would you change your perceptions of product packaging if it were substantially greener?

What if the packs became cheaper and greener? And you were able to satisfy yourself that they were a genuine contribution to environmental concerns?

The debates around the undoubted excesses of some modern packaging have tended to focus on a 'hair shirt' response - with 'you must not' messages from campaigners battling claims of loss of utility, loss of marketing potential, and loss of in-store practicality.

Retailers and brand owners have typically been on the back foot. In part because in the current mood it can be difficult to get their messages across in 'traditional' media.

But what if new packaging ideas can offer consumers better solutions as well as cleaner consciences?

And how does the web change the dynamics for radical and mould-breaking new packaging solutions? There is evidence that the internet is providing brand owners with an ideal

direct route to customers, neatly side-stepping previous communication problems.

Wine, and the burden of tradition.

There are few products where the 'language' of packaging is as well established as wine. It *has* to come in a 75cl bottle with a cork, doesn't it? (Or perhaps a magnum if it is the weekend.)



But wine bottles, even when recycled, have dubious economic and environmental credentials. It costs a great deal - in both £s and greenhouse gas emissions - to deliver wine in glass bottles from France, let alone New Zealand, Argentina, or California. A typical wine bottle weighs about 400 grams... it is eight times heavier than a plastic equivalent.

According to Des King in *Packaging News* talking about recycling glass bottles, the good news is that "more used glass is being recovered than ever before: about 1.56m tonnes last year. The bad news is that because it all tends to be lumped together irrespective of colour during the recycling process, more

than 40% of it is only fit for aggregate used to shore up the nation's road network."

However, despite its image of unchanging tradition, wine packaging has changed over time.

For example, you may now be reconciled to the artificial 'cork', or a screw cap, even if the wine box is still a step too far.

Now wine marketers are pushing the envelope - pun intended - further. With new packs that are sold as both cheaper and greener.

Unsurprisingly, the winemakers concerned tend to emphasise a youthful, iconoclastic image for the wines they are marketing. They offer new brands with fresh brand positioning, and they are coming to a retailer near you soon.

But the key observation is that the 'hair-shirt' attitude to more environmentally sustainable packaging espoused by campaigners may not be the only way of responding to modern concerns and reviewing marketing strategies.

These wine brand owners have turned more cost-effective and greener packaging into product benefits. They are using new packaging solutions as part of the positive positioning of their wines.

And they have the benefit of new communication opportunities. The internet allows them to position their products and packaging innovations effectively, talking directly to their potential customers.

Wine for the beach.

For example, in California, Francis Ford

Coppola's Rosso and Bianco Winery is now marketing sparkling wine packaged 'for the beach...'.
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Their Sofia Mini Blanc de Blancs is a single-serving pink can with a straw, and sold in a hexagonal four-pack.

Conventional it is not.



The single-serving and four-pack Sofia Mini Blanc de Blancs

Adjectives like 'cool', 'poetic', 'revolutionary' and 'petulant' give a flavour of the Sofia Mini Blanc de Blancs brand positioning.

Champagne producers (who are busy extending their Appellation Controllee region due to booming demand) may not be quaking in their boots just yet. But just a few decades ago they dismissed the emergence of Cava and New World sparkling wines too.

(http://www.rossobianco.com/#wines_sofia and click on 'Mini')

A pack you want to be seen with?

Also in the US, Boisset Family Estates, who import French wines, have launched French Rabbit, which is packed in octagonal, Tetra-Prisma containers that Boisset say "are state-of-the-art packaging that will revolutionise the wine industry."

Boisset say Tetra-Prisma containers are

100% recyclable, and reduce packaging by 90% in comparison to typical glass wine bottles.

Crucially, the web allows them to make their green arguments fully. Whether pre- or post-purchase, the wine drinker is able to review their atypical purchasing decision, and discover the full packaging story.

In the past, new packaging ideas could be derailed by unflattering journalistic comment, communication problems at point-of-sale, or ill-informed word-of-mouth - with only limited opportunities for the brand-owner to make their case.

The web changes all this. Anybody who is interested - i.e. an opinion former - can make up his or her own mind based on sufficient and unfiltered information from the brand. In this way, the web may just facilitate packaging innovations that would have failed in previous decades.

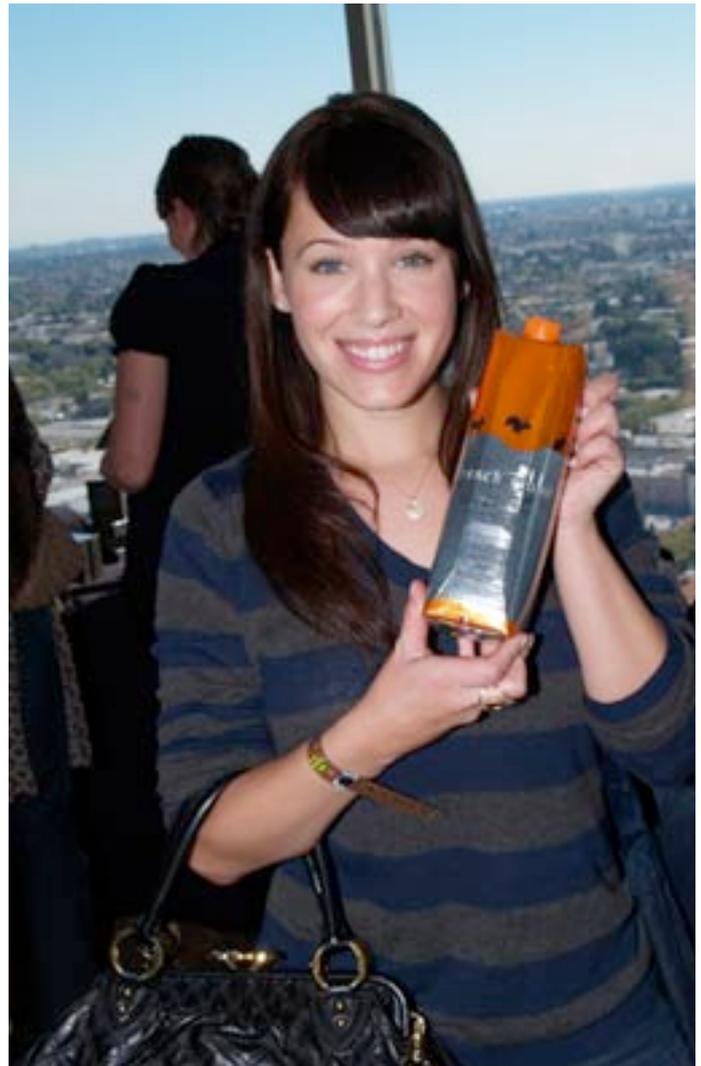
To make their point, on their website French Rabbit crowns that Tetra-Prisma containers have less packaging than an egg. The lightweight containers apparently weigh only 3% of the total weight of the wine, while an eggshell weighs 7% of the total weight of an egg. So now you know.

The green credentials are further reinforced by the promise that for every 4 French Rabbit wines sold, one tree is planted.

The French Rabbit marketing strategy is heavily focussed on the packs, and they describe the new brand as 'the French (r)evolution'.

(See <http://www.frenchrabbit.com/>)

Indeed, the French Rabbit website invites customers to photograph themselves with the French Rabbit pack and post their picture on the site.



French Rabbit Tetra-Prisma - containers to be seen with

The customer is invited to associate her or himself not just with the brand, but with the brand packaging specifically.

From papsaks to pouches.

In South Africa, Arniston Bay has challenged the national aversion to papsaks (bags of cheap wine that were banned due to a claimed link to alcoholism and other social problems) in launching it's wine pouches.

The new pouches have about 5% of the weight of a conventional bottle, and are claimed to produce just 20% of the

emissions.

A Tesco manager said "Arniston Bay has shown that it is possible for a (wine) brand to impact positively on global issues."



The Arniston Bay pouch

And it does so primarily through packaging decisions and innovation. The pack is at the core of the brand's development and extension.

Distinctive brand positioning and enhanced visibility - a perfect result?

This is surely the lesson of all these three pioneering approaches. The innovative - greener - packaging is central to the positioning of new wines targeting a new type of drinker. The pack enhances both visibility and the financials.

Crusty gentlemen who know their Cru Classe from their Cru Exceptionnel will certainly not be impressed. But then, they are not the market that these products are aimed at... and the more youthful drinker is, self-evidently, the future of the wine business.

The established glass packs for wine are under two-pronged pressure; due to cost and environmental concern.

Some marketing people are looking at new packaging solutions, albeit for brands that are marginal at present.

Whereas, in the past, their cost-cutting objectives would have been too overt and unpalatable for most wine buyers, the opportunity for environmental kudos and progressive brand positioning now makes disruptive thinking and radical solutions both relevant and potentially profitable.

The million dollar question is: if it can work in wine, what other markets could benefit from some imaginative and green packaging ideas? Particularly given today's ability to put your case to your customers directly, via the web.

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WILDDUCK
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PS: **'Not-many-people-know-that' 1:** The UK imports large quantities of green glass, in the form of wine bottles, and exports clear glass in the form of spirits and premium beverages. Therefore much recycled glass is the wrong colour for UK users.

PS: **'Not-many-people-know-that' 2:** The appropriately named Smash & Grab Glass Recycling Company has come up with a practical disposal system for food service outlets. Slightly smaller than a domestic dishwasher, the 'Little Smasher' will reduce up to 20 bottles to cullet (recyclable glass) in just six seconds and, says managing director Geoffrey Galitzine, can slash onwards waste collection requirements by over 75%.

PS: **'Not-many-people-know-that' 3:** Waitrose was forced to pack a rosé wine in green rather than clear glass bottles in March.

The rosé was part of the multiple's Vin a Deux range of 500ml bottles. It's too early to say whether the green glass has impacted negatively on sales. While Waitrose didn't consider any other packaging format due to reasons of brand conformity, they say that consumer research is in train and certain launches are being looked at in PET.

PS: **'Not-many-people-know-that' 4:** Holsten are currently testing a PET bottle too.

