

Targeting the Sweet Spot!

Finding a Balance Between Unbridled Creativity and Business Constraints

By Peter Clarke and Jeff George

Picture yourself in this package design worst-case scenario. You've burned through significant time and money and you've generated lots of brilliant ideas. Now you're in a focus group where consumers are telling you that they're not interested in any of the concepts. Or, manufacturing has just informed you that there's no way that any of these ideas can be executed on the current production line. Imagine that you're just first hearing this as late as the prototyping stage! Many of you have lived this nightmare.

So what's the key to survival? As quickly as possible and before a single dime or minute has been spent on design, you've got to define the sweet spot between what consumers want (and are willing to pay for) and what can be commercialized for a profit.

Upfront learning can help identify the sweet spot

For industrial designers facing a packaging challenge, defining the sweet spot means bringing together two opposing mindsets: marketing and manufacturing. Marketing is focused on the consumer and providing them the ultimate brand experience. Manufacturing wants to optimize existing equipment, ensuring production that's as cost effective as possible. It's Blue Sky vs. Bricks. Defining the sweet spot will bring these two contrary cultures together over a common goal.

To learn what consumers want and are willing to pay for, it's imperative to leverage ethnographic consumer research at the outset. With an objective to identify unmet consumer needs and compensatory behaviors, clients and designers observe end-users interacting with the package in the context of their daily life. Inspired by Frankenstein mock-ups, existing packaging or other stimuli, consumers are able to consider the package in all its stages of use. This helps define the packaging features that provide the greatest meaningful value.

With the Sweet Spot defined, the project team can focus efforts on consumer needs that fall within manufacturing guidelines and financial viability.

By honing in on the most fruitful areas to pursue, you increase the chance of your concept becoming the consumer's preferred choice over competitive offerings.

To learn what the company can manufacture, designers must engage the people in charge of delivery from the earliest stage. This should include all job functions, experience levels and talents of the cross-functional organization. Unfortunately, it has often been the conventional wisdom that technical requirement should not be shared at the outset with the design team for fear of hampering creativity. Once in the know, how can designers be both imaginative and realistic? But any designer worth their salt would argue that it's working under the tightest constraints that yields the greatest ingenuity. When "perceived" obstacles or constraints are presented, the team must challenge itself to ensure that all options have been explored through creative

problem solving. What supply chain, engineering and R&D solutions can be implemented? Can current equipment be modified? What about altering line speed? Do new technologies exist that can help grow manufacturing capability?

Maximizing your research, design and development efforts

The appropriate course of manufacturing action will be based on the initiative's timing, packaging price ramifications and company's risk tolerance. The question becomes: "Should you shoe-horn future packages into existing manufacturing capabilities, or should you build a factory around your idea?" This strategic approach presents an opportunity to create an even bigger sweet spot by expanding the company's manufacturing scope.

With a clear understanding of the consumer and business reality, the design team can focus their efforts on consumer needs that fall within manufacturing

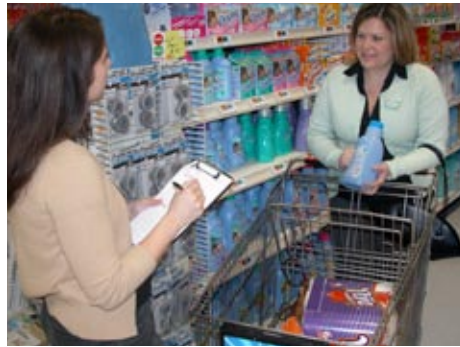
guidelines and financial viability. This is where the upfront learning pays off. The designers can then work from a hierarchical list of the most important packaging attributes and use real constraints to spark creative solutions.

By starting with viable designs and pre-thought on how to manufacture them, you have essentially compressed the path to rapid commercialization of consumer-focused solutions. Targeting the sweet spot is the most objective way of developing packaging innovations and ensuring that you deliver the right product to market fast.

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The project team must witness the environmental and ergonomic factors that impact successful product use.



Connecting with consumers within the shopping experience identifies opportunities for improved packaging communication and differentiation.



To learn what the client's business can manufacture, designers should be immersed in the knowledge of true constraints and potential opportunities.