

Teaching Guide

Packaging
The Science of Temptation

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Contents

Packaging: The Science of Temptation contains a 20 minute program and this study guide. Owners of the program may reproduce this guide for classroom use. Catalog number LS-1251-01.

Summary

We are so surrounded by packages we are not aware of their immense impact. Use **Packaging: The Science of Temptation** to explore:

- ⇒ Words are subject to countless regulations. Learn the powerful package languages that escape regulation.
- ⇒ An egg might be the perfect container, but it's not a package. Every package is a container, but not every container is a package.
- ⇒ Packaging doesn't merely contain products – it creates them. Consumers often fail to distinguish between package and content.
- ⇒ A package shapes how users judge the product. In one famous study, a mere change in packaging sent some volunteers to the doctor.
- ⇒ Color blocking. How are grocery shelves a bit like walking into a high school basketball game?
- ⇒ Size: What does laundry detergent have in common with cough syrup?
- ⇒ Think of shopping centers as packages for a stores. Some packages you carry , others you walk into.
- ⇒ Can people be packaged just like soap and cookies? Consider political campaigns.

This up-to-date and fast paced video is essential for marketing classes and consumer education. It will change how you view packages – and marketing.

STUDY GUIDE

*Note: The script for **Packaging: The Science of Temptation** is rich with ideas. The video lends itself to multiple viewings and discussion. Key portions of the script are printed here as a study guide. Text in italics is commentary and suggestions for discussion.*

Packages Replace People

In the traditional marketplace, Sellers and buyers bargain over prices. Selling is done by people. In modern stores, prices are fixed. There is no room to bargain. Packages do the selling. Before packaging, consumers would buy from a specific person they trusted. Today they buy a package because it has a brand name they trust.

No one used “to package” as a verb until about a hundred years ago. Packing came first. Packing is designed to protect during transport, but packaging is designed to sell without a salesperson.

Packaging has claimed a piece of your consciousness. You probably don't notice packages much — there are probably several within sight right now.

Packaging helps give products a “personality.” For example, breakfast cereals go so far as to develop characters that embody the product's personality: Rice Krispies has its Snap, Crackle & Pop critters. Add Cap'n Crunch, Tony the Tiger, and the Quaker Oats man. Brand personality and attitude is part of the objectives in designing packages that sell.

What Is a Package?

Is an egg shell a package? It certainly protects the fragile contents of the egg. But packaging has four tasks: to contain, protect, identify, and SELL.

An egg shell is one of nature's most perfect containers, but it is not a package. A shell makes all eggs look alike. A package makes a product stand out from the crowd. The egg shell does not sell the egg. So an egg shell is a container, but not a package.

Every package is a container, but not every container is a package.

“Packages ...transform ordinary things—like soap or hair spray or baby powder or muffin mix—into objects of desire. In the eight seconds or so it takes to choose a laundry detergent or frozen pizza, the package must scream or whine or purr or whisper its message of good taste or cheapness or strength or luxury loud and clear enough to grab interest. No wonder designing, producing and marketing packages has grown into...a business of equal parts art and artifice, science and deception.”
—*“Package Design: The Art of Selling, All Wrapped Up,”* from **Smithsonian**, April, 1996.

Packages Do More Than Contain — They Create

As recently as 1920, few grocery store purchases were packaged. Back then sugar was scooped into bags in the grocery store – only 10% of household sugar was packaged. Paper bags were not common before 1870. So even a grocery bag with bottles is a modern idea.

Packaging not only contains products, it creates them. For example, in 1916 every homemaker made salad dressing from scratch. Ten years later, they spent twenty million dollars on bottled salad dressings.

Modern packaging goes back to the end of the 19th century. In 1886, the “Quaker Man” appeared on an oatmeal box. Henry Parsons Crowell owned a mill that could produce more oatmeal than Americans would eat. His genius was to realize he could sell more oatmeal by packaging it in small quantities and giving it an identity. His oatmeal was not only for horses and Scots, but “a delicacy for the epicure...a delight to the children.”

Good packaging can create companies. The video uses Morton salt as such an example, Campbell soup might be another. The familiar red and white label (based on the colors of the Cornell University football team) was adopted over ninety years ago. Before that Campbell had various colored cans with a brand name for each soup.

Discussion: Make a case for this statement: “Advances in packaging helped ‘women’s liberation.’ “
Hint: As recently as the late 1970s, Americans (mostly housewives) spent three and a half hours each day preparing meals. Today the time is under thirty minutes.

Packaging Science

Today’s consumer packages require extensive design and research. One tool is a tachistoscope. A t-scope flashes a picture for a fraction of a second and measures how quickly consumers recognize the brand. In products where package display is key to the buying decision, a good t-scope score is critical. A strong package can catch the eye in less than a sixth of a second.

Another technique uses lasers to track eye movement as the consumer scans the package or shelf display. They also measure “capture rate” – that means how often a product attraction actually leads to a sale.

Package designers even take pictures of consumer’s medicine cabinets and pantry shelves to learn how products are actually stored and used.

Tide detergent was among the first with a scientifically designed package in 1947. Take the face of a Tide box, cut it into sixteen squares, and randomly re-arrange them. You will still recognize that it is a Tide box—that’s a clear message. The basic design was so successful that, although updated, it was still in use over five decades later.

*In **The Marketing Game**, Eric Schulz proposes this simple rule of thumb for effective packages: “If a consumer cannot walk up to the shelf and locate your product in three seconds, your packaging is failing to communicate.”*

You’ve heard stories about government agencies that spend \$50,000 for toilet seats or \$20,000 for a pair

of pliers? The story supposedly illustrates government waste. But what about that \$100,000 corn flake box or the \$250,000 waffle bag? Developing the perfect package is expensive because it takes a lot of research and testing, and a slew of wrong turns. The actual package costs pennies, but its development is a costly process.

Read That Label — Not

Most packages contain a lot of printed information that appeals to the mind. Drug products include an extensive list of things that could go wrong in a leaflet or on the package. Have you ever read the list?

Researchers know that print plays only a small role in buying decisions. In fact, some package designers believe the more information on a label, the less likely consumers will read it. Most consumers make up their mind in a second or two, with very little reading. *Consumers do read labels, but their words often play little or no role in the buying decision. The lengthy warning labels inside prescription drug packages are an extreme example of this verbal overkill.*

Consumers Buy the Package

For many product categories, consumers make little distinction between packages and their contents. This fact of consumer psychology was discovered in the 1930s by Louis Cheskin, a pioneer of packaging psychology. He experimented with identical products, one in a package marked with circles, the other with triangles. He found 80% of consumer preferred the product with the circles. They claimed it was higher quality.

Cheskin didn't believe the results at first, but repeated experiments showed the package changed how people say the crackers taste, how well soaps clean, how rich and satisfying an ice cream feels to the eater. His findings are confirmed daily in the marketplace. Quaker Oats revised the package for Rice-a-Roni without making any other changes and sales increased 44% in a year."

Cheskin suggested that Betty Crocker add the symbol of a spoon to its packages in the 1950s and saw sales nearly double in less than a year.

Louis Cheskin coined the term “Sensation Transference” to explain that one’s perception of a product is directly related to packaging, presentation and color and how minor adjustments of these influence perception. In short, he realized that the package changes the product.

Cheskin suggested the torch and oval design and color scheme for Standard Oil’s logo, the oval spoon for Betty Crocker’s logo, the Roman Meal Man, Cheer’s blue flakes and many other products which still bear his stamp. In the 1940s he helped develop the first successful consumer margarine. Prior to Cheskin’s involvement, margarine was white and perceived as “cheap.” He suggested changing the color to yellow.

Note: we were unable to find actual pictures of the packages Cheskin used in his experiments . The packages we show in the video are our interpretation.

Davis Masen, a principal of Cheskin + Masten/ ImageNet, a California market research firm confirms, “I’ve been involved in many studies in which the product will actually taste different because of the motivating force of the package.”

*The Rice-a-Roni statistic is from the 4th edition of **Marketing** by Charles Lamb, Joseph Hair, and Carl McDaniel (South-Western College Publishing, 1998)*

Different Package = Different Product

Many packages cost more to make than the products they contain. That shouldn’t surprise, IF you understand that the package is part of the product, not merely a container for it.

You might expect a poor corn crop in the summer would lead to an increase in breakfast corn flakes in the fall or winter. It might, but a change in the paper market is more likely to influence the price. Corn is a surprisingly small percentage of the price of corn flakes, often the package costs more.

Many products in bottles, and elaborate frozen food packages cost more than the food they contain.

Even aroma can be part of the package. The aroma of coffee beans is one of the most widely enjoyed aromas — even among people who don't drink coffee. Instant coffee lacks that burst of aroma from a freshly opened vacuum can or freshly ground beans. Some makers spray aroma oils into coffee powder that is released when the user opens the jar.

Wrapping goods in luxury packages to increase their value is not a new idea. In ancient Egypt, gold and jewel-encrusted perfume flacons were worth far more than the perfume. Perfume and cosmetic containers today continue this tradition.

Discussion: In what way is cosmetics itself a kind of packaging industry?

One maker of a pregnancy testing kit offered the same kit in two different packages. One with the picture of a cute smiling baby, obviously aimed at consumers who hoped the test would reveal they ARE pregnant. The other package was plain and more “medical looking” and aimed at those who hoped they were not pregnant.

The kit with the smiling baby sold for a higher price because people are willing to pay more for hope than for assurance. The different packages created different products in the consumer's mind.

Packages communicate largely without words – reading words is one of the LAST things consumers do. We have learned to listen to the non-verbal language of packages; to their silent vocabulary of color, shape, and size.

*The pregnancy testing kit example is based on a real example as reported in a **Forbes** magazine article.*

“Conceive” brand testing kit featured a smiling baby on the package and retailed for more than RapidVue, the same product with simpler packaging. According to the CEO of maker Quidel, “The market definitely divides between the women who want babies and those who don’t.” He explains why “Conceive” sells for a higher price by observing: “It’s like what Charles Revson said about cosmetics: People buy hope. In our case, they pay more for hope than for possible relief.” Note: this packaging is no longer used.

Another way a package is used in marketing is to hide a price increase. If the content of a package is reduced slightly but the package size left unchanged, few consumers will notice the reduction. Since many packages are much larger than need be to hold the product, price manipulation via package size changing is quite common.

Color

Studies of eye movement, heart rate, and nerve activity reveal package color gives the fastest and clearest response. Words and pictures are regulated by laws, but not color.

To illustrate the power of color, consider the experiment in which volunteers received three deodorants to judge and compare. Each deodorant was in a different color package, but unknown to the subjects all three were identical. People judged the deodorants differently. Some judged color scheme A just right and noted that B didn’t seem to work well at all while C was far too strong. Several volunteers developed skin rashes from using what they considered “the strong formula” and three even consulted dermatologists to treat their rash.

Within a product category brands sport “home colors” so consumers can identify them from a distance. It’s almost like the home team and visitors at a high school football game. The technique is called color blocking. In the soup category Campbell has its red and white section while healthy choice has its green and white section. Both stand out clearly.

Color clues also lead us to the right type of product. Consider the soft drink section. Red is most likely a cola,

green ginger ale, yellow is tonic water, and blue is seltzer water. These are not laws of color, yet marketing ginger ale with a red label would be risky. So a store brand cola might use both Coca-Cola's red and Pepsi's blue to suggest it too is "just like the big guys."

Colors often flock together. Blue seems required for bottled water. Items for kids are often packaged in primary colors. The primary colors are a "kid signal."

Today, the color black is often used to show high quality in a package. Consumers have learned to associate black with more expensive products.

We expect the food package color to relate to the food inside. You won't find baked beans in a pink can, but you will find rich, dark colors on coffee packages. You won't find diapers wrapped in brown. Pleasant colors rule.

The color for soft drinks suggest their fruit flavor. Putting Orange Crush in a green can would only confuse shoppers. Years ago green was seldom used for foods. Today it signifies healthy or reduced calorie food. Green is a signal for health claims.

Microsoft Corporation changed the color of its software packaging from green to red and blue when consultants found the green was not eye-catching and resembled frozen veggies or gum instead of software. Canada Dry changed the color of its sugar-free ginger ale from red to green and white when consultants suggested the red sent a "cola message" to consumers

*Tests done by Berni corporation showed that when they changed the background color on Barrelhead sugar-free root beer cans from blue to beige, consumers reported the soda tasted more like old-fashioned root beer—even though no change was made to the beverage. Another study found consumers reported orange drinks were sweeter when a darker shade of orange was used on the can or bottle. (from **Consumer Behavior and Marketing Strategy** by Peter and Olson)*

Shape

Shape is part of the language of packages. Consider how many items you can identify by shape alone. You know this is a candy bar, and this package holds ice cream, not dishwashing soap. You know aspirin will look something like this, and this bag is probably flour or sugar. You even know some brands by shape alone (Coca-Cola, Chanel No. 5, Heinz Ketchup, Mrs. Buttersworth, Log Cabin syrup).

The contoured Coca-Cola bottle was created 1915 and today is probably the world's most recognized package. Its shape is used on cans and other packaging.

Note how Coca-Cola often shows the shape of its famous and familiar bottle on cans, boxes, and trucks. It keeps the shape alive as part of its identity even when the classic bottle is rarely used. Effective package design incorporates memory value. Designer J. Gordon Lippincott observes "Americans are picture and cartoon conscious." Packaging that draws a mental association between the product being sold and a potent visual symbol "will aid memory value" and stimulate sales.

Discussion: Package designers often incorporate some remembered detail from past packages into the design for a new product. This "survival form" helps consumers accept something new because they see in it something familiar. Designers know that the familiar is more likely to be accepted than what is strange and alien. Find current examples of this "survival form" in packages. Idea: consider professional baseball parks as a "package."

Size

Size also affects how consumers judge a product, especially in a society where "bigger is better." What does laundry detergent have in common with cough syrup? Both are shaped by packaging.

Marketers know that changing color or flavor will cause people to report a change in how well the cough syrup works.

Detergent boxes also contain fragrances and fillers in addition to detergent. A much smaller box could hold the detergent, but a large box sends the message of a “lot of cleaning power” for the dollar. As detergent makers responded to environmental pressures, boxes became smaller. Makers removed some of the filler and announced, “now reformulated for greater cleaning power.” The real change was packaging.

Large boxes rule the shelves in breakfast cereals as well. The grain content of most boxes could easily fit a box of a half or a third the size.

The actual food in many frozen meals could be held by a box the size of a paperback. But consumers would not accept a box that small for something called a meal. Package size is part packing and part marketing.

Discussion: What if you invented a liquid detergent that could clean a whole load of clothes with three drops of environmentally friendly liquid? How would this wonderful invention fare on the supermarket shelf surrounded by large, colorful packages?

Liquid laundry detergent was a hard sell at first because consumers perceived it to be simply watered down powder. But people now perceive the detergent as having “added value”—it seems to lighten the drudgery of laundry a bit.

Tide, always aware of the power of packaging, developed a bottle top that would pour cleanly (liquid overspill is channeled back into the bottle) and protected it with no fewer than thirteen patents.

A creative package can work wonders, but if it's too oddball it could flop. Marketers use the term “stable data” to describe what we accept about our world – the givens. A package that doesn't fit our “stable data” won't sell.

For example, some countries sell milk in sterilized boxes that keep milk fresh without refrigeration. Europeans accept this packaging, but Americans believe milk can stay fresh only in a refrigerator.

In Japan, ketchup and mayonnaise are sold in cellophane-wrapped plastic bladders that leave Americans puzzled. In Europe tomato paste is available in tubes like toothpaste. In the U.S., the idea flopped because these packages do not fit the North American “stable data” system even though they are practical.

Starkist (which first sold tuna in cans in 1920) introduced tuna fish in foil pouches in 2000. If they will overcome the “stable data bias” remains to be seen.

Packaging Experience

Packaging means more than containers. The store itself is a package designed to encourage buying. Think of a shopping center as a package for a store. Some packages you carry, others you walk into.

A package doesn't have to be a bag or a box. For example, Starbuck's package is more than a green and white coffee cup—it's the environment of the store. In effect, you walk into the package. The interior design of each Starbuck's store is part of the package. The same is true for many successful national brands. Wal-Mart IS a package that holds packages.

Branded franchises like fast food restaurants or hotel chains are packages. The reasons for packaging products, places, and experiences are the same. Consumers know that identical packages mean identical contents. A package of Oreo cookies in Boston will contain the same cookies as a package in San Francisco. A Big Mac or a Holiday Inn in Melbourne will be like their counterparts in Toronto

Internet shopping is popular only because consumers already trust packages. Why not simply click the package on screen and have it delivered? Packaging prepared consumers for e-commerce.

Life in a Packaged World

Marketers apply what they've learned about selling grocery goods and discount merchandise to almost every area of commerce. The shape and color of a Mac computer is as much a package as a box of soap. Even in technology, packaging influences buying.

Think of packaging as surrounding something (or someONE or some IDEA) with a shell designed to persuade. A political candidate can be "packaged" with a set of ideas and values designed to win voter approval. A skilled show business promoter can package a person or group. Packaging might be more important to than talent.

Travelers often book a "packaged tour" instead of planning their own trip. A packaged tour is like convenience food. The package buyer accepts what is in the package instead of creating its contents.

Tourists book one of several packages to see "Alpine Capitals" or "Romantic Italy," and buy the same package as other tourists. One can take a tour package to Japan, for example, and experience very little of the country or its people. Like Oreo cookies, the packages feature predictable contents.

We live in a packaged world. Packages are far more than mere boxes and bags. They create products and save time. Without packages we would spend hours more each day preparing food, and shopping for basic goods would be maddeningly complex. And you thought packages were just bags and boxes.

Discussion: Imagine a grocery store who would eliminate packaging that sells. Instead clear plastic bags and plain boxes and bottles (“packing” not “packaging”) would hold everything. A heap of brown powder would sit slumped on a shelf with the label, “Chocolate Cake Mix.” Breakfast cereal would sit in paper sacks, frozen meals in plastic shells, shampoo in plain bottles, and toothpaste in jars. The food in this store would be fine and prices perhaps lower than the competition. What chance would the “grocery without packaging” stand in the marketplace?

The Environment

The ultimate package would be one that no one throws out, but convenience rules and consumers demand packages that make products easy to use. Packaging is a very small percentage of total waste, but a visible one. Packaging accounts for about 30% of all refuse discarded. But surveys show that people believe most of their waste is packaging. Lawn clippings and yard waste plus bones and wasted food account for as much tonnage in landfills as packaging, but these do not “feel” as wasteful.

Note: Statistics on packaging waste are usually slanted toward the viewpoint of the writer. “Pro-environment” writers include shipping cartons and conclude each man woman and child personally discards tons of packaging each year. Packaging industry writers separate packing from packaging and point out that more than half of all shipping cartons are recycled.

One trend in packaging is “dematerialization” — meaning using less material to accomplish the same purpose. Plastic milk jugs weighed 95 grams in 1970, but only 60 grams by 1990. Frozen food in bags led to an 80% + reduction in packaging over the older waxed wrap cartons. Plastic grocery bags were 2.3 mils thick in 1976, twenty years later they were only .7 mils thick.

Discussion: Which is more “environmentally friendly,” reusable glass milk bottles or plastic bottles? Plastic is currently made of petroleum and is not biodegradable. But breakable glass bottles are more dangerous (they were involved in many lawsuits). They are heavy and the chemicals used to sterilize them (sodium hydroxide, for example) are caustic. The energy used to transport and wash refillable bottles rivals that required to make plastic ones.

The point of this discussion should be to see all the effects of packaging. Canned and frozen foods do create packaging waste, but they also prevent food waste. Much of the hunger in the world is caused by failures in getting food to people before it spoils. Yes, those cereal boxes are larger than need be, but they get oats and corn into the diet efficiently. Packaging is both part of the problem AND part of the solution.

RESOURCES

The Total Package: The Evolution and Secret Meanings of Boxes, Bottles, Cans, and Tubes by Thomas Hine (Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1995). This is almost the only book on contemporary packaging written for the general public.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The photo of Louis Cheskin used in the video compliments of Cheskin Research. Cheskin himself died in 1981, but the company he founded relocated to Silicon Valley and still thrives. Their website is fascinating, especially the Cheskin Research timeline which can be found at <http://www.cheskin.com/who/timeline/timeline.html>.