Shelf Sight Sequence™

LEVERAGING THE "SEQUENCE OF COGNITION" TO WIN AT SHELF

brand strategy & brand design by
the Goldstein Group llc

HOW THE MIND RETAINS VISUAL INFORMATION WHILE SHOPPING

Today's retail environment is unlike any we have seen in history. A complexity of SKUs and POP materials bombard the shopper like never before, creating an almost impossible task for products to stand out and be visible on shelf. Yet, the battleground for shopper's hearts and minds is no longer just on TV and on the internet, but in the aisle, where 70% of purchasing decisions are made, and where decisions are made in a span of less than 5 seconds. If marketing managers want to win in this era, they have to win at the shelf.

To make this situation even more challenging is the fact that 4 of the 5 senses are rendered useless within a store environment. Shoppers cannot always discover what a product has to offer via sound, smell, taste, or touch. Shoppers have only their sight to rely on, and perhaps a sixth sense, their emotional radar.

Despite marketers' intuitive belief that the words on the package are what's most important to drive shopper purchase intent, studies in neuroscience reveal that in fact, they are the least important. "The sequence of cognition" tell us that visual images (colors, shapes, symbols) can be remembered and recognized directly, while words must be decoded into meaning (remember, you only have 5 seconds). Processing language is the last interpretation the brain makes, because it requires the most effort cognitively.

So, if you are responsible for the stewardship of your brand's identity, and it's time to work on package design, studies suggest that you should build your design in a priority sequence of color, then shapes, then symbols and lastly words.

"Colors, shapes, symbols, and then words, in that sequence, are what drive purchase intent."

1 COLOR

2 SHAPE

3 SYMBOL

4 WORD

100 CALORIES

20% MORE

100% NATURAL

NEW!

50 years ago, capturing shopper attention and driving brand purchase within the retail environment was a far simpler task for marketers and their brands. Small shops catered to local neighborhood shoppers and carried a fewer number of competitive products placed neatly on the shelves. These products featured iconic design elements, combined with functional structures and single-minded messaging.

The realties of today's retail environment however, are daunting to marketers and the success of their brands. We all know the statistic, that on average 70% of purchase decisions are made in-store. Yet, the retail environment presents any number of variables that can undermine the success of a brand. More than 350,000 SKUs present in the typical retail grocery outlet coupled with 450 units of point-of-purchase, signage and in-store media[1], bombard shopper senses and create an almost impossible task of navigating the store aisles and shelves (not to mention out of stocks, competitive pricing, plan-o-gram changes). Research shows that shoppers can visually miss as much as 1/3 of products across a category[2], affecting even those products with high brand equity. New products typically have a failure rate of over 75%, due in part because they are often merchandised on top or bottom shelves where visibility has been shown to be as much as 30% less than eye level shelves. Today, having a brand identity and design that is visible at shelf is an imperative.

[1] POPAI Shopper Buying Habits

[2] Perception Research Services

1 COLOR

Figure 1

Shopper's typically "ground themselves" within a 3-6 foot sub-section of the aisle in which their product's category is shelved. Once "grounded", studies show that on average a shopper takes only five seconds to locate and pick-up a product! This can only occur when a product is "visible", which is defined as the relative ability to be seen under given conditions of distance, in other words "contrast". The physiological response driver that creates contrast is color.

According to Angela Wright, color psychologist, "color is noticed by the brain before shapes or wording". Color is one of the brain's three visual pathways and since people cannot process every object within view at one time, color becomes the mechanism to emphasize and/or de-emphasize areas of the shelf. **Figure 1** demonstrates the shelf visibility of the Allegra® brand relative to its competitive set. Other well-known uses of color include the Blue in Claritin® against the Green of Zyrtec®.

In addition to shelf visibility, color can increase brand recognition by 80%[3] and serving as an important brand identifier, a physical characteristic that becomes inextricably linked to the "Brand". Think UPS® use of brown and its classic advertising campaign, "what can brown do for you?" Or the "purple pill" that is Nexium®. In fact, color has become such as an important brand asset to companies like Cadbury and Heinz that they have managed to trademark them!

"Color is noticed by the brain before shapes or wording."

[3] Source: University of Loyola

2 SHAPE

Figure 2

While color can activate on a visceral level, it is not the only element on the path to cognitive awareness and product consideration. Rudolph Arnheim of the University of California Press suggests that while color engages an innate response that triggers affective reactions in the brain, the stimuli of shape (as in the physical structure of a package or a designed iconic shape) may begin a cognitive process of product discrimination, evaluation and preference upon a shopper's initial encounter. Shape also determines shopper's first impressions of a product and can communicate product advantage[4]. So too will the design generate shopper inferences regarding product attributes[5]. Indeed, a 2009 shopper perception study conducted by M-real concluded that distinctive shapes increase product value by as much as 30%.

It is also worth noting the importance of not divorcing shape from the influence of color for it must be consistently matched or product perceptions may be negatively impacted. Color and shape combinations are considered extrinsic attributes used as signals of quality and when applied consistently, enhance perception[6]. Symmetrical shapes pair well with passive colors whereas triangular and diamond shapes pair well with active colors. Combinations can also communicate personality. So like color, the use of shape in brand identity and design goes beyond shelf visibility. **Figure 2** demonstrates the power of color and shape.

"Distinctive shapes increase product value by as much as 30%."

[4] Creusen & Schoormans, 2005

[5] Berkowitz, 1987; Bloch, 1995

[6] Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona

3 SYMBOL

Figure 3

We define "symbol" as an arbitrary sign that has acquired conventional meaning and significance over time. Symbols can become an almost instantaneous form of communication and meaning. Examples of symbols include the Nike® swish, the CBS® eye, the Starbucks siren and, Ben & Jerry's® cow. The proof of their ability to communicate without words is demonstrated in **Figure 3**. Can you name every brand in this image? Of course you can! Can you describe in some detail, the features and benefits of this brand without reading the label? Of course you can! Would this be important to a marketer knowing that a shopper will spend less than five seconds before deciding to purchase? We think so.

Furthermore, the associations derived from a symbol become imprinted in a consumer's brain as they are repeatedly exposed to the symbol and neural connections are made in the brain's pathways. Shopper's intuitively gravitate to these symbols and use them to navigate the shelf; they serve as recognizable beacons in a vast sea. A company's brand name and trademark can also be designed in such a way as to take on the characteristics of a symbol.

"The associations derived from a symbol become imprinted in a consumer's brain as they are repeatedly exposed."

4WORD

It's probably fair to say that shoppers would find it difficult to read the words on a package from a 3-6 foot distance, and without picking up the package. Yet, research shows that once a product is picked-up in store it is purchased 90% of the time![7] So how much importance do words have in brand identity and package design?

According to Perception Research Services, less is more when it comes to claims and labeling (although labeling for many categories is a regulatory requirement with little to no flexibility). Research has shown that a package cluttered with claims, fights for attention and creates shopper conflict. Best practice is to communicate a single competitive point of difference, and/or to distinguish among a brand's own product line.

As previously discussed, colors, shapes and symbols create the on-shelf visibility, the visceral reaction, the discrimination and the trust inherent in purchase-intent. It stands to reason then, that the more words you add to the design, the less opportunity you have to use color, shapes and symbols.

"So how much importance do words have in brand identity and package design?"

[7] Perception Research Services

"On average, a brand only has 5 seconds to be seen, felt and understood while shopping."

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Despite today's retail realities and the critical need to win at shelf, the art and science of brand identity and package design remain largely undervalued and misunderstood. In a time where so much of a product's success is out of a marketer's hands (shelf placement, breadth and depth of distribution, out of stocks, retail pricing, POP displays, store brands and manufacturer brands), package design is one of the few remaining options marketers control. Strategic and informed package design is a must-do, accomplished via a carefully engineered sequence of color, shapes, symbols and then words. This is consumers' sequence of cognition at retail and our guiding principal; **Shelf Sight Sequence™**.

The Goldstein Group is a brand identity & design firm that incorporates strategic and analytical technique into its design process to create designs that achieve bottom line results. From strategic planning, to naming, logotype & brandmark design, package graphics and structural design, TGG makes brand connections happen because the hierarchy of visual information (colors, shapes, symbols, and words) reflected in its work is recognized in the same sequence the brain processes it.

Based in New York City and led by industry veteran Terri Goldstein, the TGG team is comprised of a high-caliber group of strategic planners, graphic designers, industrial designers, copywriters, name developers, production managers, and Intellectual Property experts.

TGG's pioneering branding approach, Shelf Sight Sequence™ has inspired award-winning work and significant return on investment for clients. They include Sanofi-Aventis, Chattem, Bayer, Heinz, Merck, Panasonic, Foster Grant, Moon Pie, Massimo Zanetti, and USP Zdrowie.

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Throughout her 25-year career, executives in the FMCG and Pharmaceutical industry have turned to Terri for her expertise in brand identity and design. Terri co-founded I.Q. Design Group in 1995 and implemented a proprietary strategic design process that led to the re-birth of over 200 consumer products and services. In 2005, she founded The Goldstein Group and has since helped strengthen the brand identity and business health of some of the world's most enduring brands including Heinz, Bayer Aspirin, Luden's, Panasonic, Aqua Net, Moon Pie, Icy Hot, One-A-Day, Rolaids, Nasacort, Carmex, and Foster Grant. Terri was recently profiled in Advertising Age ("Packaging Guru Proves What's On Outside Counts – And Sells", Dec. 2012), INTERPAK's Person of the Month, April 2014, and was named by GDUSA as one of 2013's People to Watch. Terri is a guest lecturer at the Marketing Institute, FIT, and many industry conferences including CHPA. She contributes regularly to such publications as Adweek and Graphic Design USA, and is the author of breakthrough research on consumer behavior, recall, and sensory motivation in the retail environment.