

Home / In Focus / **Packaging secrets and sins: Q&A with Gwen Blake**

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Gwen Blake told Food magazine's Aoife Bootroyd what effective packaging looks like, and why it's so important to get it right.

1. What does good packaging say about a brand?

Great packaging can be the difference between success and failure. It is a fact that increased attention to packaging detail results in increased sales. Sadly, however good your product, if it is packaged badly, it is doomed to fail.

Brand image was developed by designers in the 1960s as a way of differentiating brands from their competitors. Packaging was then and still is now, the perfect way to showcase your brand and make it stand out from its competitors.

Consider some of the biggest consumer brands we know today: Coca-Cola, with its unique bottle shape, logo-embellished can and particular shade of red. It's a stand-out in the attention to detail and the zealous way the marketing people at Coca-Cola protect every iteration of the brand.

Think about Heinz with its easily recognisable key-stone shape that appears on every can of product without fail. Then there's Vegemite with its bright yellow and red pack and a strong and unmistakable logo shape.

These brands have spent years and years and millions of dollars showing you imagery of their packaging again and again and again, so that once you're standing in front of a range of products to select from, you go for the products you are familiar with. The psychology is simple; when there's choice we reach for something we are familiar with, something we have a relationship with and something we trust.

2. What are the key mistakes that manufacturers make when designing packaging?

Manufacturers of products often don't understand all the roles that packaging has to play in order to sell your product.

Great packaging has several functions:

- To protect your product during transit
- To prolong the life of your product
- To present your brand to your potential consumers
- To encourage sales

Without great packaging, your products could:

- Arrive at their destination broken and worthless
- Expire earlier than you had intended and be deemed worthless
- Fail to connect with consumers
- Sit on shelves without selling



Effective packaging can be the difference between a sold out product and a stagnant one. Image: newshopper.sulekha.com

3. What is the hardest thing to get right in terms of designing effective packaging?

Good packaging should make some sort of emotive connection with its viewer. You need to be offering your potential customers something new, something better, or show them that you understand them better than any other brand does by making an emotional connection.

Packaging designers use all kinds of different triggers in order to do this. They use illustrations that appeal to the target consumers' taste. They use aspirational photography that mentally takes the consumer off into a daydream of what life could be like. They use language that entices and engages and leads consumers to believe they have a new friend in the brand.

These are all triggers that take seconds to occur and consumers are often unaware of the process taking place. However, for a consumer to spend more money than is absolutely necessary, there has to be a level of emotion involved. Buying is not as rational a decision as consumers like to believe it is.

It's a highly emotional one and the brands that recognise and tap into that are the brands that consumers get to know, love and buy.

4. In your opinion, how realistic is it for an Australian brand to have their packaging designed and made in Australia, and within a reasonable budget?

I'm a huge advocate of staying on home turf for your packaging production. Moving overseas seems cheaper on the face of it, but there are so many hidden costs, language barriers and let-downs that I think getting your pack made in Australia is a legitimate option. Just shop around as production prices can vary hugely.

5. Are there any legal requirements that food manufacturers tend to overlook when designing packaging?

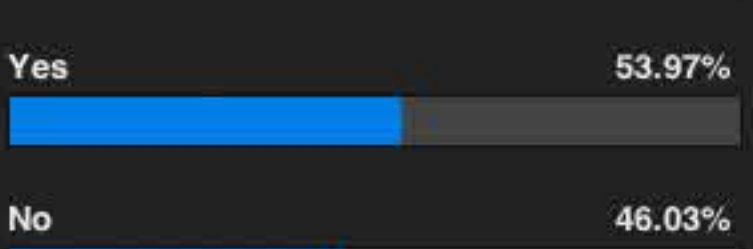
Yes! There are so many legalities, you need to take advice from a lawyer who specialises in packaging and make sure you have considered every legal requirement for your industry. Your competitors will be viewing your packaging like hawks and if they spot something uncompliant on it, they will be happy to report you and have your packaging recalled, which is hugely expensive and time consuming.

6. Which brands do you think are leading the way in packaging?

I think entrepreneurs are leading the way, which is why I enjoy working with them so much. As an entrepreneur with a new product to launch, you have an exciting journey ahead of you. In many ways, they are luckier than the brand managers of big established brands as they don't have years of history or baggage to consider. They have an absolutely blank canvas upon which to paint a product's picture and can choose whatever style they want to do this in. That's why I wrote my book *Packaging A Punch* – to help entrepreneurs to lead an Australian packaging revolution!

Gwen Blake will be a guest speaker at the AIP's upcoming Technical Dinner. [Click here for more details.](#)

Are you optimistic about the future of food manufacturing in Australia? (Poll Closed)



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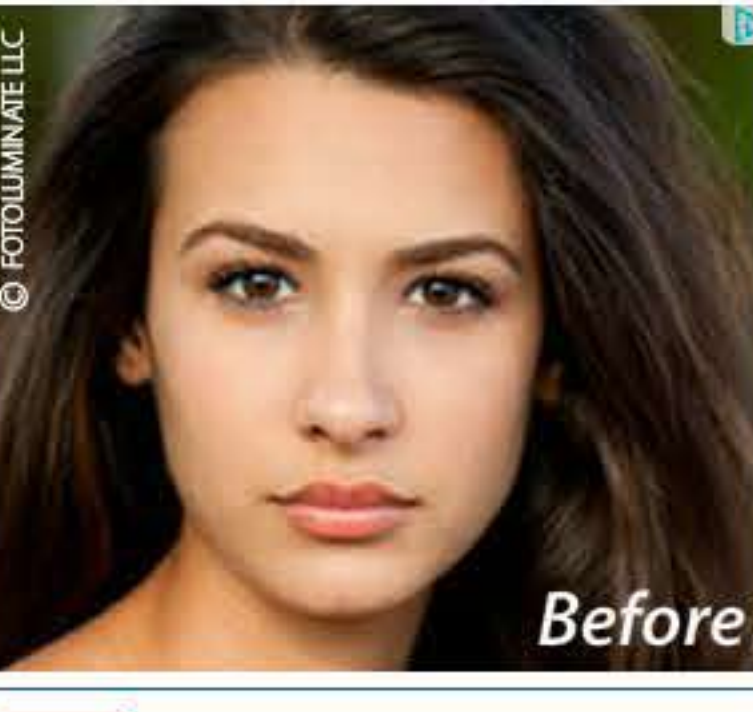
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