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How Peel Research Partners Helped an Office Product Company to Revitalize Their Packaging

Changing Perspectives

Packaging redesigns are common for brands looking to update their image and invigorate product sales even though this can be a risky move if there's not clear direction. An office product company was looking to launch a long overdue redesign of product packaging, but Peel Research Partners uncovered some surprising insights in consumer research—findings that not only made the packaging redesign more successful, but also helped the company to understand and address underlying challenges with its branding strategy.

Packaging Losing Relevance

Focus groups had already provided some insight about perceptions of their products, and it was clear that "boring" and "dated" blighted the company.

Flagging Sales and Dated Packaging

After years of being outpaced by bigger brands with deeper pockets, an office product company knew that *it was time for a change*. Specifically, as part of a larger project to improve their products, they were **looking to update the look of their packaging**, which had been *untouched for over ten years*.

Overall, the competition regularly outshone and outperformed the company's products in almost every respect. Knowing that, it seemed clear that the best course of action was to give their products a new look. Their hope was that with redesigned packaging, it would help the company to shed consumer perceptions that the line was "dated," "corporate," and even "generic." Ultimately, the goal was to get consumers to see the brand as more of a creative, expressive, and contemporary line of products.

As the Senior Manager of Consumer Insights for the company, said,

> *The results were disappointing because we thought we had some good concepts that were informed from prior research and our own intuition. But when we went to testing, the packaging fell flat. At this point in this process, we felt down and out and weren't sure what we were going to do.*

Unexpected Outcomes in Initial Tests

Peel led a *two-staged quantitative research* engagement which spanned **four product categories** – first, to **test new designs for the four product categories brand marks**, and second to **test new packaging designs in each category**.

STAGE 1 test new brand marks **+** **STAGE 2** test new packaging

The brand mark research helped identify new and improved designs for each of the four product categories. Results in the second phase, **testing the new package designs**, were much less clear. *While the new packaging look seemed to be a step in the right direction* to the team, the results **surprised both Peel and the designers**— *the new designs weren't showing any improvement* over the current packaging. *In fact*, the respondents' answers still had the line of products *pegged as dated, boring, and generic, especially in relation to the competition*.

Visually Vital—Unique Category Brand Marks

Peel had a hunch that *packaging wasn't the only problem* in play with these results. **The real breakthrough** came during Peel's in-depth analysis of the data when *they discovered some interesting insights* in the results details:

- **People were having a hard time identifying the brand name for the products**. For some of the products, the manufacturer's brand name was very small, in the corner of the package, and for others it didn't exist at all. **To make matters worse**, the product brands have very generic sounding names that describe what the product is in the name, but are not unique or differentiated— **so people thought the brand name was just stating the type of product**—a common practice in generic products. This had a huge impact in giving the perception of the products as unbranded and generic.

- A drastic **diminishing of the manufacturer's name** on one of the products' new package designs **proved disastrous**.

- *Competitive products consistently outscored the company's products on desirable attributes such as being high quality, innovative, and creative, despite having very simple, basic package designs. What they did have however, were well known brand names that were prominently displayed on their packages.*

Brand Recognition

Elevate Product Name
or Parent Brand?

Branding Solution

Promote the Parent Brand
for better Consumer
Recognition

A New Focus and Better Results

These in-depth findings led to an important discovery—dated packaging wasn't the key issue. Thus, no matter how hard the company tried, **it would never be able to overcome the perception of being generic** with package design elements alone.

Instead, the crux of **the issue was brand recognition**. Because respondents' feedback indicated the importance of brand trust, even for office products, the poor performance of the redesigned product packaging suddenly made sense. Without a **clear, identifiable, and trusted brand** on all products, the product lines were perceived as generic and consistently lost out to competitors who did a better job featuring their brand.

The question at this point was what to do about it. **To elevate the existing product brands**, the company would have to **invest heavily to build their recognition and equities**. Not only would this require a huge investment, it **would probably be fruitless** due to the inherently generic sounding names of the existing brands.

Peel however came up with a very simple solution to this challenging problem – **leverage the company's name** as the parent brand of each of the four products categories. **Historical research had shown the company's name**, which is **a well-regarded leader** in office products, **was not important** and didn't associate well with these specific product categories, so this was never even considered an option for the team. However, **what the prior research didn't show**, and something Peel's research discovered, **was that it could!**

PRIORITY 1 Parent Brand	PACKAGE EMPHASIS	PRIORITY 2 Product Title

With that insight, Peel's recommendations centered on *making the company name the prominent and recognizable parent brand* on all packaging. While taking the research at face value would have indicated that a packaging redesign wasn't working, Peel used the findings to **dramatically shift their client's thinking** about brand recognition. *Now, their products could gain instant recognition* and trust by consistently featuring the parent company brand on the packaging. *These results were validated in a subsequent phase of research*.

Peel's out-of-the-box thinking yielded some powerful results for their client; as the Senior Consumer Insights Manager stated,

> *"Prior to the research, we weren't considering making the parent company brand as the focal point brand for our line of products. But Peel's research showed us that the parent company brand is really strong, and we weren't leveraging that as much as we should have. Once our packaging redesigns started featuring the parent company brand front and center, consumer feedback in focus groups showed that the designs were really strong on multiple levels. The brand was held in high regard—something we never would have known prior to Peel's insight for this project. We're excited about our prospects moving forward."*

Tactical Design Recommendations

Peel's research led to other tactical design recommendations as well. Examples included orienting the brand name horizontally rather than vertically to make it easier to identify and recognize, making sure benefits and key features were prominent on every package which the research showed was critical, prioritizing the most effective iconography, and clearly emphasizing the brand, rather than the product-type itself.

Competitive Edge and Brand Power

With a clear understanding of the problem, Peel's findings offered the company greater leverage and perspective for their product redesigns. The company is excited about the findings of this research, and is currently in the process of making packaging and product improvements.

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