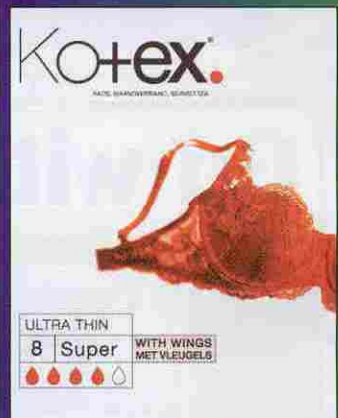


Pack designers who are savvy to the world of semiotics can revolutionise a category just by understanding and evolving these visual and tactile codes. **IZZY PUGH**, expert semiotician for strategic marketing consultancy, **Added Value**, explains the 'science' of semiotics.



Semiotic eye for a packaging guy



CONSUMERS recognise and evaluate packaging according to what they've seen in the past. For South Africans, potato crisps packed in blue and silver foil means fresh-packed salt and vinegar chips. This might seem obvious, but these visual identifiers are crucially important when designing a product and its packaging. Use that same packaging in the UK and consumers will assume they're buying cheese and onion 'crisps'; alternatively pack them in brown paper, with hand-printed label, and the message implies home-made product.

Today's sophisticated brand managers use semiotics as a science to understand how the visual language of a category operates and then, more importantly, how it can be evolved.

Firstly, it's important to understand the visual codes at play across all competitive products in a category, and then find innovative ways to differentiate a product. For instance, if femininity is a core value within a category, and pink flowers and feathers are consistently used to signify this value, then there's an opportunity to use passionate and feisty red to talk to a different kind of feminine consumer. One example of this is how Added Value helped Kotex to understand that red really could work in this way,

inspiring the launch of its groundbreaking redesigned pack in South Africa.

To inspire this fresh thinking, semioticians recommend looking way beyond any specific brand category. Once you know what you want to say about a particular brand, there's no limit to the sources from which visual codes can be gathered to use in delivering that message through packaging. Visual language and culture are constantly evolving. We believe in going beyond the supermarket shelf to find the visual codes of the future. Art, cinema, fashion design and photography are all breeding grounds for emergent visual cues.

Using these codes is about cross-referencing a brand message with visual cues in an instantly recognisable, if subconscious, way. If a product is all about technical expertise, how can action scenes in 'The Matrix' inspire the graphics? If a brand is about wellness how can we deconstruct what's happening in spas and recreate the sensory cues of a hot stone treatment or a mud-bath through packaging? The rise of the global wellness trend alone has seen brands turn more and more frequently to rough-edged paper, natural fibres and unrefined, opaque glass, all of which speaks volumes about the products they

contain. Likewise, ergonomic grips, industrial colours and streamlined shapes have all revolutionised the energy drink category from the Lucozade-as-medicine brands of the past to the power sports tonics of today.

Ultimately, semiotics help to create demand-led brand growth. The innovative use of decoding identifies new ways for a brand to communicate more clearly with consumers by 'speaking' their language; and can, by learning where a product category or market is evolving, assist in the search for new positioning territories or even product development. Semiotics brings an analytical eye to the visual language of a brand category and the culture beyond it, replacing the 'luck' factor with coherent and thorough visual decoding and the power to leverage that insight for growth. ■

About Added Value

Added Value is a strategic marketing consultancy providing innovative solutions that deliver demand-led business growth. Added Value is intent on being the marketing inspiration behind the next wave of business success stories.

Acquired by the WPP Group in 2002, and with offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, London, New York, Paris, Athens, Madrid, Barcelona, Tokyo, Sydney and Melbourne, the company has helped build many top brands.

South African clients include Coca-Cola, Kfm, Kimberly-Clark, Nestlé, Old Mutual, Prudential, SABMiller, Standard Bank, Tiger Brands, Volkswagen and Unilever (Unilever Bestfoods Robertson and LeverPonds).

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