

The Basics of Packaging

Creating packaging for a client isn't always easy, especially if you are creating a package for a product that you're not familiar with or have never used. Below are some of evok's best practices for creating award-winning packaging, along with a few of my own personal tips for success.

TAKE A FIELD TRIP. Start with shopping around the competition to see what is out there. Check out your client's retail environment to see how other products are presented on the shelf. Make sure you take your handy-dandy camera with you to take pictures of the competitors' packaging. That way, you can go back and work on how you're going to differentiate your client's packaging from their competitors' packaging. To take your research a step farther, look at other packaging that's not within your client's realm. This approach can help you come up with an idea that could be a little more unconventional.

CONTACT YOUR PRINTER BEFORE YOU DESIGN. In addition to providing you with a die line for your job, your printer is a valuable resource for advice on paper or other material options. If you're unclear about the kind of printer or process that's appropriate for your packaging project, contact a printer with whom you have a working relationship. Remember to involve your printer at every stage of the design process to be sure that your concept is achievable.

KNOW THE QUALITY AND PRODUCTION BUDGET. Think about the quality of the paper, inks, spot varnish, emboss, metallic or a custom die. All those things will affect your client's overall budget. When money is the bottom line, you must be flexible with the elements of your design. Set realistic goals that stay on target with your client's budget.

MAKE THE PURCHASE. As a designer, your goal is to create a design that stimulates the consumer to make the purchase. Your design should increase product recognition, in other words, it should act as a "stand-in salesman". It needs to do this quickly and concisely.

CREATE MOCK-UPS. I'm a pretty visual person and I make mock-ups all the time. Sometimes when you design something flat that is going to end up being folded, you overlook certain things. You might experience something along the lines of, "Oooh, I didn't see that this color bar doesn't align with this one on the other panel," or "Yikes, this looks odd since the package lays on its side." Create several packages so you can see what the shelf presence will be like. Ask your printer if they will run a couple mock-ups for you so you can see how the design works on the shelf.

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BAR CODES 101

- Bar codes must be placed in a spot that is highly visible and easy to scan.
- A bar code must be printed at a scale between 85% and 120% of its original size.
- Bar codes must be printed in a dark color against a solid light colored background. The contrast between a bar code and its background must be high enough to allow the bar code to be scanned.
- Make sure your client provides you with their bar code number. A program like Bar Code Pro will enable you to generate an EPS file to place in your file.

INDESIGN TIP: HOW TO CREATE A “BOOK”.

I had a big project for a client that consisted of over 60 rack brochures. When I laid them out, I didn't lay them out in one Indesign file – they were all separate files. Although all the files were separate, if I needed to make a change, the last thing I wanted to do was open each file individually. Indesign has an option for you to create a “Book”. A Book creates an Indesign file that will house all my separate rack brochure files and combine them into one Book file. This is how it works:

File>new>book

A new palette will appear, and once it does, click the “plus” icon in the lower right hand corner of the palette.

Next, a window will appear asking you to locate your files. Once located, click Open. Note: The way you link graphics in your traditional Indesign files, applies the same way to the Book files.

Now that you have all you files selected into your Book, it's time to save your Book. You can open any of your linked Indesign files via the Book, just select the file from the Book palette and you're ready to go. You can print an individual file if needed and you can export individual PDFs from the book, just option click the files you want. If you want to print the selected files, click the print icon in the palette. If you want to export the files as a PDF, click the carrot icon in the upper left hand corner of the palette and select “Export selected documents to PDF”.

Creating packaging for clients can be challenging, but with sound research, clear objectives, a few mock-ups and using these organizational tips, you'll be on the path to success in no time.