

Product packaging takes center stage as beauty manufacturers compete to deliver the ultimate in looks, functionality, innovation and brand identity.

A pair of hands, belonging to a person wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, are gently holding a small, rectangular package wrapped in light green paper. The package is tied with a thin, light-colored ribbon. The background is a soft, out-of-focus white.

# power in a package

By Lisa M. Starr

BEAUTY PRODUCTS USED TO BE KNOWN AS THE “GENIE IN THE BOTTLE.” Today, the genie is the bottle! In the mind of your spa client, the package and the product are one and the same. Are your retail products packaged to attract, sell and satisfy? We spoke with some experts on beauty product packaging to gain perspective on how packaging drives sales of retail products, and what you should look for when selecting resources for your spa.

When consumer product packaging was in its infancy, most packages were designed with four basic functions in mind:

1. Protection of the contents
  2. Identification of the ingredients within
  3. Distribution of the product from the site of manufacture to various points of sale
  4. Merchandising of the product while it awaits its final stop: the home of a consumer
- Back then, packaging had to look appealing but the

emphasis was strictly on safely and efficiently delivering the product into someone’s home. Today, just as the look and quality of luggage are often considered primary to its contents, so beauty product packaging has moved front and center.

Couple the heightened role of product packaging with the increased number of consumers seeking appearance enhancement and stress relief, and you have a spa product market primed for greater sales. Many consumers look to these products to help them take a bit of the spa experience home, or to experience spa-quality products in lieu of an actual visit. These consumers are willing to pay more for products that come with a personal prescription. Female consumers are juggling more roles than ever and want products that enable them to feel confident and balanced, and more male consumers are using personal-care products—and purchasing the products for themselves. Both groups expect upscale packaging.

## Brand Equity

It's no accident that the proliferation of beauty products has coincided with the aging of harried, appearance- and health-conscious baby boomers. This growth has occurred in the volume of product usage and certainly in the variety of options. The emergence of new technologies in both product development and packaging has resulted in a huge expansion in the number of products in the personal-care industry. With so many choices on the shelves, and more and more products competing for attention, the appearance of the product while resting on the merchant's shelf has become key in the sales cycle.

As a spa owner retailing skin-, body- and haircare products, you need to be acutely aware that a product's package not only delivers the product—it delivers your brand message as well. Is your spa well-branded? If so, there'll be a look and feel to your marketing collateral and retail products that will resonate effortlessly with your clientele. Researchers say that 70% of the consumer purchasing decision is made at the point of sale—that is, after the consumer has arrived at the retailer—and this emphasizes the role that packaging plays in sales. Paco Underhill, president and founder of Envirosell ([www.envirosell.com](http://www.envirosell.com)), a behavioral marketing and research company headquartered in New York City, points to products with packages so recognizable that they're almost iconic, such as Johnson's Baby Powder. The shape, look and feel of the container remind purchasers of their childhoods. This "no need for introduction" quality cuts marketing costs for the brand. An effectively packaged skincare line will help your clients recognize what they're getting before they even open the bottle.

Even after a client purchases the product and takes it home, the role of packaging continues to be crucial. Beauty packaging remains with the product for its life, and therefore,

Product packaging needs to reflect your spa's brand to resonate with your clients.



says Underhill, "has to be designed in the context of having two lives: one at the point of sale and the other when the product gets home. These products are out on a shelf, by a sink, in the shower, in plain view all of the time and the packaging needs to continue to reinforce the value proposition of the product."

In other words, the branding effect of the product needs to continue throughout the life of the product's use. This happens in two ways: 1) Proven efficacy of the product, reminding the consumer of her successful visit to your spa, and 2)

Quality packaging, reinforcing that concept of value. Notes Dan Thompson, president of Westlake Packaging ([www.wlpac.com](http://www.wlpac.com)), Agoura Hills, California-based manufacturer representative for the cosmetic packaging industry, "Consumers who pay \$50 or \$60 for a personal-care product can sometimes have a sense of buyer's remorse afterward. But a quality product in a prestige package that functions well is a reinforcement of the brand's image and quality." This reinforcement minimizes any remorse and encourages repeat purchasing.

A well-designed beauty product package will also be consistent



**"Beauty products are becoming objets d'art in themselves, which people use to enhance their surroundings."**

—Rexam consumer packaging group

with the personality of the brand it represents. “You have your unashamedly Plain Jane products like Kiehls, and its simple black-and-white packaging reflects that aesthetic,” points out Underhill. “And you have the Martha Stewart effect, where we recognize that the packaging has to look nice in our home and fit in.” The packaging should always reflect the aesthetic of its brand. For instance, if you want to retail a clinical product line you wouldn’t want it packaged in stylized, pink bottles printed with fancy, cursive script fonts. Likewise, a spa with a menu full of pampering services and an ornate or Victorian decor probably wouldn’t do well to offer home-care products packaged in plain white bottles.

Appearance takes a front seat when it comes to beauty product packaging. “Cosmetics is such a highly competitive area that it has really forced marketers to develop brands with a stronger image, a visual point of distinction,” explains Thompson.

“Differentiation of a brand increasingly relies on package design, which may include a particular finish or color. Packaging tells the brand story.” This is certainly true of department store brands such as Chanel or Clinique, which are instantly recognizable even without the name on the product. This same approach can be mirrored with salon or spa brands and private-label offerings.

### Functionality

Of course, we can’t forget about functionality, one of the original intents of packaging. According to JoAnn Hines, founder of Women in Packaging ([www.womeninpackaging.org](http://www.womeninpackaging.org)), a Kennesaw, Georgia-based nonprofit, professional organization supporting the packaging industry, the utilitarian aspects of packaging are still extremely important to consumers. “When someone tries a new product and the packaging doesn’t work, it’s an immediate turnoff, especially in a new brand,”



## a compelling package

What makes a consumer reach for one product but not another? According to [packworld.com](http://packworld.com), the website for *Packaging World Magazine*, it all starts with package designs that use a “consumer-focused mind-set rather than a product-oriented one.” The publication cites these key elements of consumer-focused packaging:

- The package has a strong “brand block” that **stops the consumer** in her tracks. This may be in the form of an eye-catching banner on the package or appealing photography.
- The package **engages the consumer** by playing on her emotions. Pictures, even colors and fonts that trigger feelings can have a strong effect, as can a connection with a well-known icon or brand.
- The package **persuades the consumer** in a rational manner with clear information as to the product’s benefits and attributes.



“Rigid plastic, mainly HDPE bottles and squeezable plastic tubes, is the leading packaging material for cosmetics and toiletries worldwide.”

—Rexam consumer packaging group

says Hines. “Sometimes designers get caught up in the unique shape of the bottle or how the package looks, and overlook its ultimate functionality. The aesthetic perspective, while a factor in the sales cycle, isn’t the most crucial component to a nonpackaging professional.” And that’s exactly what most spa clients are.

Thompson agrees. “Nothing turns off consumers more quickly than packages that don’t work properly,” he remarks. “It may be the greatest product in the world, but if you can’t get it out of the bottle, or you can’t understand the directions, it won’t do you any good.” He recommends that manufacturers invest in functional testing, where samples are provided of both the product and the package and these are used together by a test group of consumers in real-life situations.

Testing on live consumers often reveals that manufacturers tend to complicate packaging with overblown verbiage, especially in the beauty industry. This stems from an effort to differentiate their products from

others on the market. While it’s true that spa clients tend to be more savvy than the average consumer when it comes to skin care, terms like “free radicals,” “antioxidant” and “pH balance” are best used sparingly. As with live sales scripting, packaging text should focus on benefits rather than features. Every consumer wants to know the bottom-line answer to this question: “What will the product do for me?”

Spa owners can engage in their own unofficial package testing as well. Take home one each of the products you’re considering using/retailing and use them, and/or have staff members do the same. Ask the following questions:

- How does the product look on your shelf, countertop or dresser?
- Does the container remain stable, or does it knock over easily?
- Is the product easy to access from its container, and in the proper amount?
- Is the package clearly labeled and worded so that you can easily

identify its name and understand its purpose, directions for use, ingredients and warnings?

- Do the container and the dispenser help you to minimize the risk of contamination?
- Does the packaging enable you to use all of the contents, or do portions of the product get trapped in unreachable areas of the container?
- Is the opening of the container easy to keep clean, or does product collect under the rim, inside the cap or around the pump hole?
- Is the container easy to grip?

If you're interested in utilizing the product in the treatment room, you'll have some additional concerns. You'll be unlikely to select a skincare or bodycare line that's packaged only for consumers. For reasons of cost and convenience you'll want products that are offered in professional as well as retail sizes. Most beauty professionals prefer professional-size cleansers in 16-oz containers, and body products in 32- or 64-oz sizes. Your estheticians and therapists will likely prefer pumps

for cleansers and toners, squeezable bottles for creams and large containers with wide lids for body products.

### Packaging Trends

Recent innovations in packaging are partially reflections of design trends but largely reflections of new technologies. One new shape seen widely today is the "tottle," a container that mirrors the bottle but is configured so that the item rests on its cap. This shape is especially useful with thicker formulas such as heavy lotions, because it allows the product that rests at the bottom to be squeezed out easily; it's not necessary to turn the bottle upside down and shake it.

Other packaging trends include:

- More tamper-proof packages, and packages with dispensing closures to address increasing consumer concern about contamination.
- More home-environment-friendly packaging such as no-slip bottles for bath products.
- Large-type print to address the common complaint of over-50



## beauty packaging sources

For more information on beauty product packaging options and innovations, check out the following websites:

[www.beautypackaging.com](http://www.beautypackaging.com) (*Beauty Packaging* magazine)

[www.cosmeticsandtoiletries.com](http://www.cosmeticsandtoiletries.com) (*Cosmetics and Toiletries* magazine)

[www.cosmeticsdesign.com](http://www.cosmeticsdesign.com) (*Cosmetics Design* magazine)

[www.cpcpkg.com](http://www.cpcpkg.com) (Cosmetic/Personal Care [CPC] Packaging company)

[www.happi.com](http://www.happi.com) (*Happi* magazine)

[www.hbaexpo.com](http://www.hbaexpo.com) (Health & Beauty America conferences)

[www.rexam.com](http://www.rexam.com) (Rexam consumer packaging group)



“Men’s fragrance has developed very distinctive packaging that attempts to convey ideas of modernity and strength, and above all to be entirely unlike women’s fragrance packaging.”

—Rexam consumer packaging group

consumers that print on packaging is too small to see without glasses.

- Containers with caps that have a scent of their own, enabling the consumer to smell the product while the seal protects the product’s integrity and freshness.
- Secondary packaging (especially popular for skincare lines) in which jars or bottles are boxed for a more upscale look that consumers are used to seeing in department stores. (This allows the manufacturer to put less information on the product container itself, resulting in a cleaner, more design-oriented aesthetic.)

All of these trends point to one overall movement: that of packaging as its own selling point and the resulting need to raise the bar on ingenuity. “Even though many small companies are still purchasing standard stock packaging, the market for distinctive packaging has really expanded,” says Thompson. “In response, more and more packaging manufacturers are offering very upscale stock packaging options in smaller quantities than were previously available.”

Consumers continue to mold packaging trends as well, with greater demands than ever before. “Today’s

beauty product consumers are more educated and more eager to know what exactly they’re putting on and into their bodies,” says Hines. “They’re reading the packages to learn about contents, and they’re concerned about the products’ effects.”

Whether you’re purchasing raw materials and creating your own line or sourcing your products from existing manufacturers, the package is a crucial component of success. Underhill reminds that in skin care you’re not only selling products, you’re selling systems. Packaging can be color-coded by skin type that encourages consumers to build a collection of products for their type. Packaging bath and body products in individual scent families also increases sales. Thompson reports that Westlake was recently involved with the redesign of a haircare line; after the first month’s launch of the newly packaged product, sales had exceeded forecasts by \$1 million. The secret? Same product, different bottle. ●

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