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# Mature skin – immature packaging

In order to offer packaging that takes account of the needs of older consumers when it comes to convenience there are a number of factors to consider. Changes in the demographic profile have changed the rules of the game, including those that apply to the cosmetics industry. Dr. Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel points out the most important errors to be avoided if manufacturers want their packaging to successfully appeal to the older consumer.



*Own-label products (right) often pay more attention to the needs of older consumers than do branded products*

photos: Meyer-Hentschel Institut

The increasing number of older people in our society has changed the rules of the game in many market sectors. For marketing departments to take account of older consumers and their special needs is becoming more and more a key part of the strategy for success – starting with the product concept and going through the selection of ingredients right up to the development and design of suitable packaging.

The cosmetics sector has, for some years, been very active with regard to their product development and so have now firmly established products designed especially for more mature skin. On the other hand, however, the packaging used for these “best-ager” products is often not particularly well-designed for its purpose. A great deal of retail product packaging so far tends to largely neglect the special needs and wishes of older consumers, such as shelf-impact, legibility of product information, convenience of opening and closing, and dispensing of the product. Manufacturers who have recognised this, and taken appropriate steps in this direction, will always have a head start on their competitors in the market.

## Packaging as a factor in success

Older consumers, unlike other consumer types, have, on average, more money to spend, a greater experience of life and a different way of assessing products, as well as higher demands and finely honed critical faculties. Around one third of such consumers

will buy a different product if they are not satisfied with the packaging of the one they have.

Because their demands are different from those of younger consumer types it is important to specifically target these special demands – and understand the reasons for their existence. More and more companies are

## The SilverPack packaging award

In association with the German Feierabend Online radio and Internet service for older people, the Meyer-Hentschel Institute established the SilverPack packaging award in 2008 in order to tackle the issue of the demands of older consumers and demographic change for brand owners, distributors and the packaging industry. This competition recognises packaging solutions that approach the needs and wishes of older consumers in a specific way. So far no cosmetics products have been amongst the winners. The details and entry forms for SilverPack can be requested by e-mail at [silverpack@mhmc.de](mailto:silverpack@mhmc.de). The SilverPack entries are assessed based on the PackungsCheckup test, using a check-list developed by our institute. This list was created with the help of product retailers and distributors to evaluate, and measure, based on the Age Explorer\*, to what extent a packaging design is suitable for older consumers. Using the PackungsCheckup it is possible to obtain a diagnostic understanding that will contribute to the cost-effective optimisation of a specific packaging design.

The Meyer-Hentschel Institute has been involved since 1985 with the behaviour patterns of older people and regards itself as the originator of specific marketing to senior citizens in Europe. In the field of consumer goods the institute advises brand owners, packaging manufacturers and retailers.



\* The Age Explorer is an “ageing outfit” which allows the testers to take account, in a controlled manner, of various age-related physical changes, including visual ability, changes in the perception of colour, reduced perception of contrasts, reduction in the sensitivity of the skin, reduced dexterity and loss of strength.

*Using the Age Explorer outfit it is possible to feel just how difficult it can be to handle certain types of packaging*



*How easy is it to distinguish between daytime and night-time cream?*

realising this and are evaluating and optimising their packaging from the point of view of the older consumer. Whilst the food industry already has plenty of experience in this respect we have noticed that in the cosmetics industry the concept is still in its infancy.

**Polite packaging**

Growing old brings with it certain physical changes that make older consumers more sensitive to the practicalities of life – to convenience! The eyesight becomes weaker, especially at short distances, manual dexterity is reduced and the hands and fingers also become less strong. Perception of colours can change, and if the sense of smell also becomes less acute the handling and use of toiletries can become more difficult.

With an increased number of physical limitations many older people are looking for more convenience and their need for respect, help and politeness

increases. But it is not only people that can be polite – products and their packaging can be classified as polite too. Polite packaging refers to those that older people can use without difficulty, i.e. packaging that competently helps the older consumer in the following ways:

- Clearly legible text on the packaging, making the choice of product less complicated
- Easy-to-open outer and inner packaging
- Easy dispensing and application of the product
- Easy to reseal and re-open
- Pack that can be totally emptied
- Packaging that can be easily and conveniently disposed of
- Good differentiation of brands and product variants to avoid the chance of buying the wrong product and to facilitate identification when it comes to making a repeat purchase

A problem that exists with many products is recognition and legibility of product information. Where this problem exists it immediately says to the consumer: "You are old". The product and its packaging that convey this message have no long-term future in the market. Some retailers try to solve this problem by making a magnifying glass available to their customers, which is anchored to the display shelf or the shopping trolley. The negative side of this is that if the text is illegible

without a magnifying glass it sheds a bad light on the manufacturer. The positive aspect is that the manufacturer will think carefully about his competitors, and ask himself: "Am I one of those manufacturers or brands for whose products a magnifying glass is needed? Or is my packaging consumer-friendly, and is the important information recognisable without reading glasses or a magnifying glass?"

**Packaged or locked in?**

Over 90 percent of the over-60s find it difficult to open certain packages. And the older the consumer the more often problems arise when opening the pack. In the 70 to 79 age group more than half of the consumers have, several times in a week (or even every day) difficulty in opening a product package.

Management decisions are not just a matter of knowing how frequently such problems arise, but also being able to analyse which specific problems and difficulties confront the older consumer. This knowledge can make an important contribution to the process of optimising the product's convenience.

Many over-60s want to be able to open a package without using any special tools and without the risk of hurting themselves. Almost nobody follows the "How to open" details on the pack, either because they can't find them or because they don't understand the instructions.

Concrete criticisms include tamper-proof closures in the form of almost invisible adhesive strips, sealing film that calls for too much strength in the fingers to peel it off, or too much manual dexterity. Manufacturers should also take note of the fact that older consumers at times even have problems opening a conventional retail carton.

The manager responsible for packaging may also be well advised to study the following statistic: about 15 to 20 percent of older consumers find it difficult to identify the product that they



*Older people do not always have the dexterity to open a retail carton*



*A product for consumers over the age of 40 with a text that is almost illegible for younger people*

are seeking when faced with numerous similarly packaged products. This effectively means that 2 to 3 million consumers in Germany have difficulty in immediately locating on the store shelf the brand and type of product that they wish to buy.

When it comes, for example, to distinguishing between daytime and night-time creams many manufacturers rely on the consumer having the motivation and time to compare the packs at the point of sale. Other suppliers have made a point of greatly simplifying this process.



*Far from ideal – a complex packaging layout and difficulty in reading because of the type-face used and the shiny film*

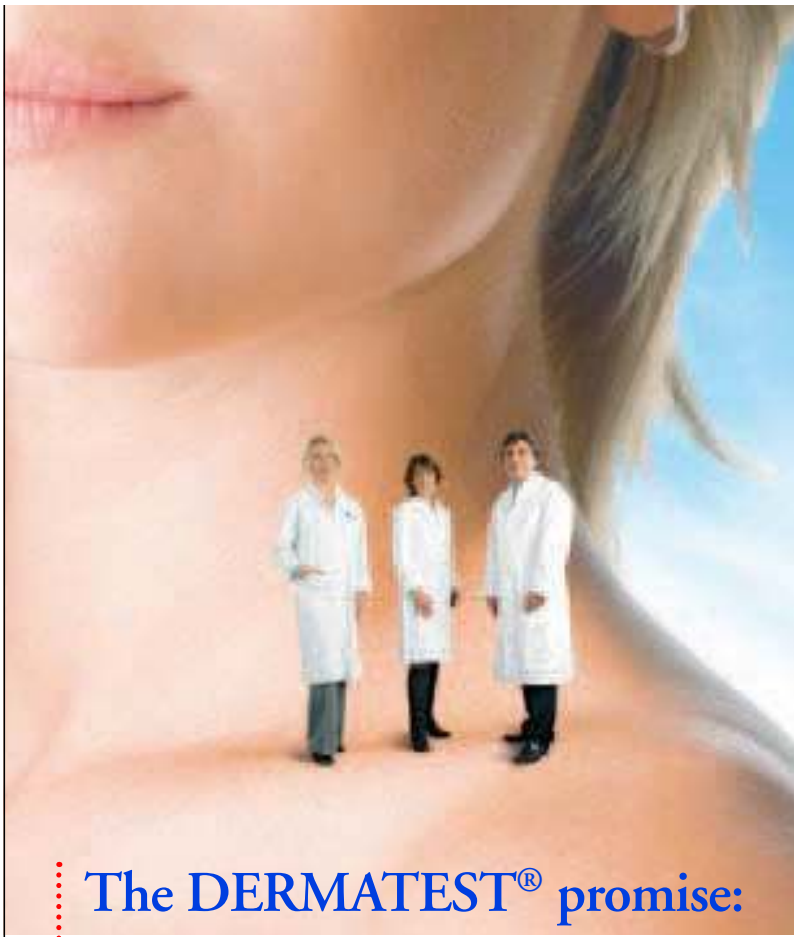
**Own-label retailers more active than brand owners**

When looking out for innovative packaging ideas designed for the convenience of the older consumer own-label retailers seem more responsive and more pragmatic than established brands. Do these retailers have a better understanding of the consumer's needs? Or have they simply recognised more quickly that this is the way to increase market share?

In short: When it comes to optimising the packaging for older clients there is a lot still to do. Let's get on with it!



**Dr. Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel,**  
founder and owner of the Meyer-Hentschel  
Institute, Saarbrücken, Germany



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