

“Packaging Has to Be More Polite”

SENIOR CITIZEN-FRIENDLY PACKAGING // Since 1985, the Meyer-Hentschel Institute has been supporting businesses and social service providers in aligning their products and services with demographic change. The institute’s founders, Dr. Hanne Meyer-Hentschel and Dr. Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel, talked with us about the demands the target audience “60+” places on packaging and how print shops can support their customers in helping seniors.

Ms. Meyer-Hentschel, you advise companies to be more alert to the needs of older people when designing their products and packaging. Is the youth era over?

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: No, that’s quite far from the case. But it’s true that more and more companies are recognizing the relevance of the topic and becoming active. And they should, too. After all, there are now around 100 million people living in Europe who are 60 years or older. In seven years it will already be 115 million. This quickly growing target audience has an enormous purchasing power – we’re talking about over roughly 150 billion U.S. dollars (100 bn. euros) of available income in Germany alone. Enormous competition is currently growing around this highly interesting target audience and it will get dramatically tougher. That’s the one side and that leads me to your question. On the other hand, there’s still a lot left to do with marketing for senior citizens, also in packaging. We know today that more than 90 percent of all consumers older than 60 have problems opening packaging. That means that younger consumers are still the focus. The needs of older people, on the other hand, are only inadequately taken into consideration.

What does the target audience of 60+ particularly value in packaging?

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: The identifiability of products plays a very important role in a product’s point of sale. Older people want to recognize as quickly as possible if they have a shampoo or conditioner in their hands. Since these products usually look

very similar, the various differences can only be found in the product description. For this reason, good readability and easy to understand, factual information is important. After the purchase, other factors come to the forefront: Can the packaging be easily opened and closed again? Can the contents be removed or dosed without problem? As a whole, more functional aspects dominate which decide whether a consumer feels at ease with the product or not.

Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel: We like to sum things up by saying, “Packaging has to be more polite.” A box which is difficult to open confronts the generation 60+ with the limitations of becoming older. That’s impolite. It sends the message, “Something’s wrong with me.” Innovative businesses have enormous possibilities here. As long as all providers are the same and have labels which are hard to read, there’s naturally a stalemate in the competition. But as soon as someone comes along who makes the products distinguishable, who has easily readable labels, whose products are easy to open and close again, he or she will win these customers – simply because they feel more comfortable with these products both while shopping and afterwards.

Mr. Meyer-Hentschel, how can print shops support their customers in making packaging friendly to senior citizens?

Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel: There are a lot of possibilities. With the appropriate expertise, a print shop can strongly improve a label’s readability – without having to increase the text area. This goes well beyond simply increasing the type size. There are a total of roughly 20 parameters which have an enormous impact on readability. An incredible amount can be ▶



Painstaking field work at the supermarket: Hanne and Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel know exactly what’s important in senior-friendly packaging.

Feels Like 60+

This specially coated visor enables you to experience the yellowing, blurriness and increased sensitivity to light that occurs in old age. Matt-finished edges decrease the field of vision and make orientation more difficult. Between the ages of 20 and 80, visual accuracy reduces by up to 80 percent. Two thirds of the target audience 60+ suffer additionally from an increased sensitivity to light.

A sound absorber simulates the diminishing sensitivity to higher frequencies and dwindling hearing ability. Almost 50 percent of people between the ages of 45 and 64 have a hearing problem. In those over 65, it's 75 percent.

Special gloves enable the wearer to feel the reduced strength, decreasing dexterity and sensitivity to touch in his hands that is common in older age. In comparison to a 30 year old, a 75 year old has roughly 37 percent fewer nerve fibers. On average, he also has only about half as much muscle strength in his hands.

Weights on the arms and legs exemplify the general loss of strength. After the age of 50, a person loses 1 to 2 percent of his skeletal muscle mass per year.

Special bandages around the elbows and knees also limit mobility. A good 33 percent of seniors experience problems bending and stooping between the ages of 55 and 69.



► achieved with the right know-how in typography, color perception and contrasting effects. Relaying information as clearly as possible is also important. Older consumers react to complexity with increasing stress. Printers can tell their customers ways to “skim down” the packaging and significantly increase its shelf appeal. They can also pay attention to suitable choices for material. Packaging which audibly locks into place when closed is easier to handle than that which only sends a weak or no acoustic signal.

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: The sensitive use of finishing techniques is another point. A customer commissioned us to analyze a product which was positioned for an older target audience but which had been losing market share year after year. In tests with its buyers, we determined that a lot of customers had made a mistake in their selection of products. The product labels “Eau de Toilette” and “Eau de Parfum” were printed in high-gloss writing, which was also very small on the packaging. The manufacturer thought gloss symbolizes value. But he hadn't thought about the fact that gloss impairs readability. We were able to convince the manufacturer to do without the glossy text. The result was a much better readability, independent of shelf lighting. Today the product is selling well again. It looks as nice as before, but it now has a more functional aesthetic which eases product selection.



A functional design doesn't suit all products though...

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: That's true. Top priority for the manufacturer is the question of which target audience they have their sights set on and where they need to adjust the screws to be successful there. In this age of details, the smallest differences determine success or failure. In the senior citizen market, readability is a detail with central importance. You can't simply ignore that, espe-

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cially when the value which may be lost from omitting the glossy writing can be compensated for in other areas such as printing functional elements like the product description and pictures matte, and in contrast the logo in a precious gloss. Printers can give a lot of valuable suggestions here.

The suit you developed simulates the limitations of old age. What role does the so-called “Age Explorer” play in this respect?

Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel: With the Age Explorer, young product developers, market directors and brand directors can literally slip into the skin of a 60 or 70 year old. Weights, gloves and a special visor ensure that various age-related limitations are simulated as realistically as possible such as diminished muscular strength, decreased sight and hearing abilities, as well as increased sensitivity to light and a changed color perception. When they wear the suit, decision-makers experience their products from a whole new and interesting perspective. They experience first-hand what it means to open foil packaging when your fingers aren't as agile and the pull tab is hard to grasp. At the same time, the Age Explorer helps them to better interpret behavior patterns they observe in older people.

Tracking Old-Age

The Meyer-Hentschel Institute is considered to be the founder of market research for senior citizens in Europe. The organization has been supporting businesses from very diverse branches and social service providers in the age-appropriate design of their products and services since 1985. The diverse range of services stretches from market research and strategic communications consulting to cooperation on the development of consumer goods and packaging. Coaching designers and architects as well as in-patient and out-patient care providers is a further focus. Here, they also use the Age Explorer – a suit which simulates age-related limitations. The system's continuous further development is based on their own research results and interdisciplinary insights from the field of ergonomics, gerontology and physiology. In the meantime, around 10,000 customers have participated in the institute's Age Explorer workshops.

Could you give us an example of that?

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: Yes. There are color differences and contrasting effects that you perceive without problem as a young person. From the perspective of the older population, however, they are not at all present and their impact dies. The cause of this is so-called yellowing, in which the ocular lens becomes increasingly more yellow from incident solar radiation. Color nuances close to one another can therefore hardly or no longer be differentiated such as blue and green or white and yellow. So when certain products occasionally distinguish themselves through very minimal color differences, some senior citizens don't perceive these differences at all. They reach for the wrong product or leave it on the shelf because they're unsure. But sometimes a packaging loses its





► aesthetic effect because the yellow adjustment makes it look unattractive. The Age Explorer makes visible these and many other details – which you would otherwise miss and which also can't be clarified with surveys. No one sees, what they don't see. This is where the Age Explorer helps someone get a good step further because it makes the differences visible.

What are the reactions like when a younger person puts on the Age Explorer for the first time?

Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel: Up until now, around 10,000 employees from social organizations and businesses have tried out the Age Explorer, including print shops, by the way. The reactions are continuously positive. This is also because the Age Explorer allows participants a very practical entrance into older peoples' experience of life. They can talk a lot about old-age and the associated

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needs and sense a lot in a theoretical way. But the effect and degree of understanding are significantly higher when someone slips into the suit and within a few seconds is able to feel with their own senses what they normally only talk about.

At the beginning you spoke about the enormous purchasing power of the target audience 60+. Lately a lot of experts have been warning about increasing old-age poverty. Assuming these prognoses turn out to be true, do you think businesses will go in the other direction and confine their efforts in marketing for senior citizens?

Hanne Meyer-Hentschel: No, I don't think so. You can of course arrive at different results in terms of future purchasing power. That depends on whether only state pensions are taken into consideration or also private retirement provisions. Fact of

the matter is, however, that the target audience is growing fast and therefore also has an increasing impact on which products win out at the point of sale. Businesses which position themselves with products friendly to senior-citizens clearly have an advantage here. And not just with older target audiences, by the way, but also with young consumers. After all, the product improvement benefits everyone.

Gundolf Meyer-Hentschel: Furthermore, older target audiences are also increasingly willing to change and very open to new, practical solutions. The market share of individual products could shift quickly if a manufacturer caters to the wishes of the older generation. It also pays off in terms of customer faithfulness. Particularly a young product manager may think, “It's not worth it anymore” when it comes to a 60-year-old customer. But when you make it clear to him that this customer relationship will last another 24 years, statistically seen, then it becomes obvious: The possibility to bind a customer long-term is seldom in the youth or young family market. That's why we're convinced that businesses shouldn't limit their activities but rather expand them very quickly and massively. ■



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