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Six product design trends affecting brands in 2006



Monday February 6, 2006

Brands continue to evolve in the mind of the consumer as emotional connections and brand preferences turn purchase decisions from simple product selection into "lifestyle choices", according to US-based design agency Hirst Pacific, which has identified six key trends in product design that will affect branding and product launches in 2006 and beyond.

According to Kenneth Hirst, president of Hirst Pacific, brands must look for new ways to grow, and more companies are splitting their core business into collections of new categories. For example, companies such as Ralph Lauren have championed the expansion from fashion and personal accessories to almost everything for the home. Now every marketer has the same idea: Coach, the leather goods company, offers a fashion collection; Mont Blanc (best known for its high quality pens) provides an array of personal and business leather accessories. And the list goes on.....

Designers are not only thinking about product functionality as the focus shifts to lifestyle enhancing solutions. Hirst observed: "Even Ferrari's mindset has changed from producing high-performance machines to 'we sell lifestyles'. The strength of a brand's image, style and quality gives us the desire to buy into a lifestyle that we want to make our own."

Six product design trends for 2006

Hirst's observations have highlighted six key trends that he believes will affect product and brand development during the coming year:

1. **Luxury is best**
Luxury is no longer exclusively the domain of the wealthy. Self-indulgence, paired with the consumer's desire to be socially branded by image, combine to cause an increasing demand for luxury products across several vertical markets. The idea of "desired luxury" is transforming the product offerings of many brands, such as Levi's (which has introduced a top-of-the-line pair of jeans that competes against haute couture prices). Aesthetic design is a luxury brand's vital edge and is necessary to compete with other category "bests".
2. **Hungry for design**
The structures, colours and unique functionalities of food packages are key in aiding consumer purchasing decisions. The design of a fragrance bottle has always been critical to a brand's success as it is a major differentiator of one brand to the next. Now packaged food companies are getting their wake-up calls and innovative packages will continue to pop up and off supermarket shelves.
3. **Getting technical**
Single function products are fading away. Activities such as retrieving email, checking sports scores, watching a video clip, taking photos, listening to music, and making a phone call, are converging in single portable devices (whether a phone, an MP3 player, or a PDA). The convergence of communication and entertainment has left electronics companies with the competitive challenge of designing the ultimate "user interface experience". Hirst feels that the next generation will be hybrid devices that are half land-based and half portable, expanding functionality and interface quality when at home, in the office or on the street.
4. **Tech-savvy kids**
Kids are now technology-savvy purchase drivers, and spending to keep them happy is on the rise. Internet and technological advancements have officially pushed traditional childrens' products like colouring books and action figures out of the picture. MP3 players, e-learning, and computer games are expensive necessities for today's youth. A child's desire to have the latest, coolest clothing, gadgets and toys, has challenged many companies with the quest to design the ultimate product experience for their youngest users.
5. **Design simplicity**
Today's consumer is moving, and doing so very quickly indeed. Convenient and portable products will have to be designed to match the fast pace of multi-tasking professionals, home keepers, and students. Compacted cosmetics, remote car ignitions, and multi-functional cell phones are all accommodating the new pace of life, and more quick convenience devices will surely follow. The design solution of the multi-purpose product is toward ever smaller, simpler and interactive, while design becomes more important to differentiate similar products from an ever more crowded market.
6. **Marketing to men**
The health and personal care consciousness of men is rising quickly. Once brands primarily catered to a man's shaving needs but, in 2006, we can expect to see unprecedented offerings in skincare as more men spend time at the spa. Aging baby boomer men care more about how they look and feel, making exercise a hot market. As men seek the "fountain of youth" we will probably find them

loyalty probe

Final results are available to everyone who joins in!

In your experience, how do consumers feel about these various marketing techniques? (Rate each technique: 1 = Enthusiastic/want more ... 4 = Hated/don't want)

Customer clubs / loyalty schemes	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
Hard discounting / cash rebates	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
E-mail / online ads & services	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
Coupons / traditional media ads	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>
Personalised direct mail	1 <input type="radio"/>	2 <input type="radio"/>	3 <input type="radio"/>	4 <input type="radio"/>

That's my view!

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