



DRINKS PACKAGING STEPS INTO A WORLD OF AUGMENTED REALITY

Fiction often prefigures reality, as anyone who saw the film *Minority Report* will be starting to appreciate. It no longer seems alien to manipulate virtual objects by hand, to read a newspaper with sound and moving images, or to interact with billboards and packaging with our smartphones. It is now technically feasible and cost effective to incorporate a moving display onto a bottle, as vodka brand Medea recently showed. But just because you can doesn't mean that you should, at least not before asking: "How exactly is this adding value to my brand? Why should people care?"



In turning packaging into a multimedia experience, it's worth asking how this might change its role in the branding process. When many of the technological extensions to packaging are being created as entertaining promotions, dare I say "gimmicks", does this affect packaging's status as the core repository of the brand's values and beliefs?

As the original User Interface (UI), packaging has always been a gateway to the User Experience (UX), formerly limited to consuming the product inside. But by its very proximity to the product, packaging is also able to perform an almost magical trick known as "sensation transference", where the experience of looking at, holding and using the packaging becomes transferred to perception of the product itself. In other words, how smoothly your Scotch pours from the bottle will actively influence how smooth you think it tastes.

By adding emotional value to an often generic delivery, packaging is responsible

for creating what I term "user anticipation" (UA), and the drinks industry has not been slow to appreciate the potential for enhanced UA and UX that new technology offers.

Absolut recently launched a new augmented reality (AR) neckhanger that, when scanned

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with a smartphone, takes customers on a 3D journey through Åhus in Sweden, where Absolut is produced. Scan the reverse of the neckhanger and consumers can check out cocktail recipes.

A whole new experience

Likewise, Brancott Estate takes wine to whole new dimensions, offering everything from food-pairing suggestions to virtual tours of their estate. By simply scanning the QR code on the back label, consumers can explore the heritage and story of the wine they are holding. In doing so, consumers are no longer just buying a bottle of wine, they are buying into the whole New Zealand experience.

Smirnoff eschews a heritage story, preferring to engage consumers with a music and travel vibe. Holding a limited-edition bottle of Smirnoff in front of a webcam activates a virtual airport hangar party, intended to get consumers in the mood.

In the world of soft drinks, Ardaich water

has cleverly used augmented reality to illustrate its defining story of "the water that whisky drinkers choose", and the AR-enhanced print ad dives beautifully into this theme. Interestingly, it's the bottle that tells the story and then bottles it back up afterwards, so it truly does augment the impression of what is contained inside. For me this successfully extends the concept of sensation transference and opens the door to a new world of packaging-based UA.

As the early adopters of the technology are followed by everybody else, it's possible to imagine shopping actually getting slower, as dozens of smart shoppers hover their smartphones over smart packaging in a crowded supermarket aisle. Luckily, Google has thought of that, with its new AR glasses already being tested. In a story almost straight out of *Minority Report*, this technology "helps users explore and share their world; through the lens of the glasses, text messages, maps, weather information and locations can be streamed in realtime. The glasses also record videos, take pictures, and send and receive messages".

As Thomas Hine put it in his book, *The Total Package*: "Advertising leads you into temptation, but packaging is the temptation." With the possibilities afforded by new digital technologies, these two media could effectively become combined in "self-promoting" packaging. If (or rather, when) that happens, I just hope someone makes sure there's an off button on there somewhere, too.

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