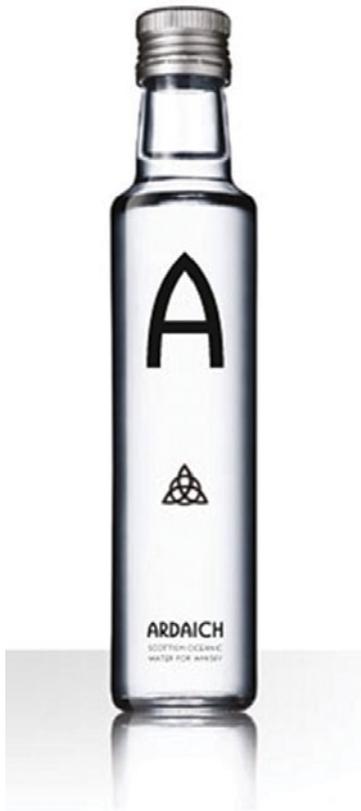# ENHANCING BRAND EXPERIENCE

Steve Osborne, managing partner of Osborne Pike, a branding agency which specialises in telling brand stories through packaging and other user interfaces, shares his insights into smart packaging.

AS digital technology transforms the ways in which we interact with brands, seamlessly meshing the real world with an overlay of virtual information, the new design buzz is all about users and how to improve their 'user experience' (UX).

As the original 'user interface' (UI) for brands, packaging has always been a gateway to the user experience, formerly limited to consuming the product inside. Now, thanks to digital enhancements, packaging is no longer the 'silent salesman': A quick swipe of the smartphone can take you into a branded game, offer you a discount on the spot, play the advertising or a hundred other miniexperiences that marketers and designers are busy dreaming up.

Packaging already has a long history of 'bigging up' the UX by using 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 single malt pours from the bottle will actively influence how smooth you believe it tastes.

However, before turning packaging into a multi-media 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? Not to mention the slight inconvenience of dozens of shoppers hovering their smartphones above packs, slowing down the process of actually buying quite considerably - hardly the desired intention.

I believe that careful consideration of the consumption moment (of the digital 'infotainment') is the answer. When Lego pioneered augmented reality (AR) technology to allow shoppers to see the fully-constructed toy as a 3D image outside the packaging at the point of sale, this was a shining example of turbocharging what I call 'user anticipation' (UA).

Similarly Heinz's, delightfully designed virtual recipe book for tomato ketchup chefs ticks all the right boxes, when read in the kitchen on a smart tablet not on your smartphone in Asda.

We all seem to collect shoe boxes (or is it just my wife?), so Tsubo, in collaboration with the New York shoe designer Timo Weiland, have made theirs worth collecting. Hovering a smartphone (in store or maybe in the taxi home) triggers a video of the shoes inside being worn on the catwalk.

German company Qkies has given digital technology the edible treatment, with consumers literally baking a QR code printed on edible paper into the cookies, which then links to a personalised message for

the recipient. A similar nice warm feeling is created by Heinz soup's 'Get Well' promotion a clever combination of old-fashioned (soup) values with a contemporary, social media-powered brand experience.

Ardaich water used an AR-enhanced print ad to bring to life their defining story of 'the water that whisky drinkers choose'. Sitting in a favourite chair browsing a glossy magazine might well be the best time to ask consumers to volunteer some extra attention on your brand's digital enhancements. What I like about this treatment is that it is still the packaging that tells the tale, and even 'bottles' it up afterwards, so for me it does truly augment the reality of what's inside.

In another great example of appropriacy, Suremen transformed their deodorant cans into game controllers which, when pointed at a webcam, let 'freshly deodorised' players face a range of adventurous challenges from mountainbiking to water-skiing, all in a bid to win cash prizes or sports gear. Now that's truly experiential, and clever - aligning (or possibly contrasting) the brand's performance with your own.

Red bull developed 'augmented racing', an app in which the design of the circuit has to be created by photographing (on a smartphone) a line-up of real cans; the more cans, the more complex and fun the race track design, so perhaps this one appealed mainly to heavy users.

In the short term many brands will bolt-on some digitally-enabled extra UX simply to compete. But once the dust has settled, I expect to see a host of onpack campaigns which genuinely build engagement, dialogue, extra value and loyalty between consumers and brands.

Getting back to the issue raised earlier of creating a bottle-neck of smartphone users in the supermarket aisle, never fear. Google has thought of that with its new AR glasses already in test. With a story that only a few years ago would have sounded like science fiction, 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 real-time. The glasses also record videos, take pictures, send and receive messages, and make video calls - all of which can be done through voice commands'.

The likes of Google, Aurasma and Layar are clearly working hard to provide new, interactive experiences. It's up to brands and their agencies to use it to make these interactions meaningful in the context of the brand's values and purpose.

We shouldn't forget that great packaging already delivers great 'UI' and 'UA'. Adding a lot more 'UX" must be about enhancing what the brand already stands for, not replacing it with a short-term technology hit. □