

# From silent salesman

## to multi-media experience

The soft drinks sector was an early adopter of digital technology, and is ideally placed to lead the way to a refreshingly experiential future, according to Steve Osborne.

Imagine sitting at a bar overseas drinking an exotic new beverage. You are intrigued and want to know about the ingredients and perhaps find out whether you can buy this brand back in your own country.

Simply point your smartphone at the pack (no need for one of those QR codes, that's so 2008), and you are instantly transported to a website with information on the provenance, the ingredients and a link to an e-commerce site where you can order said drink at the tap of a button.

Perhaps you'd like an alert if in a few weeks time you were to walk past a store that stocked the drink? This might not be possible just yet, but image recognition, augmented reality (AR) and SoLoMo (Social Local Mobile) technologies are working hard to make it happen.

### Emerging digital technology

Not all markets have yet responded to the new opportunities being created by emerging digital technology, but with its young, tech-savvy consumer profile and thirst for innovation it's no surprise that soft drinks is one of the most active.

Back in 2008, Pepsi was already putting QR codes on some 400 million products, linking to an internet site with games, ringtones and competitions, which in the words of then Marketing Director Bruno Gruwez, "transformed the can into a gateway between the consumer and their digital world".

A year later Coke Zero made the most of the popularity of the film 'Avatar', with a special edition bottle that controlled a virtual helicopter



on your computer screen via its webcam – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbUeviTpU3o>

Coke was clearly well ahead of the curve, because Suremen deodorant recently created a very similar campaign, in which cans become game controllers to help players face a range of adventurous challenges from mountain-biking to water-skiing, all in a bid to win cash prizes or sports gear [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LDQyncN\\_PY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LDQyncN_PY)

Packaging as a sophisticated marketing tool is nothing new of course. The subtle interplay of form, materials, colour and graphic design is how packaging speaks to our very sense of self, without uttering a word. This led James Pilditch to coin the famous phrase 'The Silent Salesman', in his seminal book about packaging.

### Multi-media opportunities

But now digital technology is changing the game, souping-up our experience of the real world with an overlay of virtual infotainment.

Turning packaging into a multi-media experience is an almost inevitable outcome, but 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?

For me the opportunities far outweigh the risks. The best campaigns out there have intuitively understood that digital is just an extension to packaging's secret weapon: sensation transference.

This describes an almost magical trick that packs perform every day without even trying. The attributes of the packaging (for example elegance, clarity, naturalness, slimness and so on) become transferred to the experience of the product, and the brand.

First identified by Louis Cheskin in the 1940s, this is the principle behind the blind-versus-branded-taste test, which shows conclusively that we taste the brand just as much as the product. And packaging is part of both.

### Augmented reality

Back in the digital present, packaging-based AR campaigns have the unique opportunity to connect consumers to brand values through the most concrete of all media – the product itself.

This is several levels up from using the pack or brand iconography in the communication. This is the packaging being the communication.

The added depth this provides was well demonstrated by Lucozade's recent special edition bottle designs. Not only created by well-known recording artists, they also gave access to a lot of exclusive content when triggered by a smartphone with the special AR app on board. For me this truly 'augments' the energy and buzz of the brand that the pack design already communicates, so it's a seamless extension of brand values, not just entertainment.

Famous for sponsoring (and inventing) adrenaline-fuelled sports, Red Bull has used AR in a highly relevant way, asking drinkers to collect cans and line them up to create a racing track. Using an iPhone to photograph the front of the cans for calibration, the app generates a virtual version of the track, which can then be raced with a virtual car. The more cans, the more fun the track, so this is probably one of the clearest incentives to consume more product I have yet encountered.

Critical to the success of packaging-based AR is consideration of not just the brand's values but also the best moment for consumption (of the communication). This isn't always alongside consumption of the product.

Nor would I imagine is the point-of-sale: The thought of a Friday evening in Asda, with dozens of smart shoppers hovering their smartphones over smart packaging doesn't feel much like an 'augmented' reality, just a rather inconvenient one.

But sit me down in a comfy chair with a glossy magazine and it's another matter. Ardaich water



has cleverly used Augmented Reality to illustrate its defining story of 'the water that whisky drinkers choose'. The AR enhanced print ad dives into this theme, playing an epic film about the 'cold, mineral rich waters of the raging North Atlantic' on your smartphone or tablet.

This could literally be described as immersive, but better still the movie gets 'bottled' at the end, so it truly does augment the impression of what is contained inside.

Now if the real bottle could suddenly trigger this story again from the shelf as I walk past, we might just be in business, and of course this kind of interactivity is surely where we're heading.

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## Meet with Soft Drinks International

– we'd love to see you at one of these upcoming trade events...

Fi Innovations in Beverages, London, UK • PPMA Show, Birmingham, UK  
InterBev, Las Vegas, USA • SIAL, Paris, France • IPA, Paris, France  
PackExpo, Chicago, USA • Hi Europe, Ni & NuW, Frankfurt, Germany  
PETnology, Nuremberg, Germany  
Brau Beviale, Nuremberg, Germany • Emballage, Paris, France  
Dubai Drink Technology Expo, Dubai, UAE

To schedule a meeting

email: [publishing@softdrinksinternational.com](mailto:publishing@softdrinksinternational.com) or call +44 (0)1202 842222