

Senior citizens: Counting them out can cost brands big

As senior citizens' buying power increases, brands must consider the whole package

I was on an overnight flight back home after a long week of meetings on the West Coast of the United States, and as I settled into my cramped coach seat, I noticed the lady next to me – probably in her mid-sixties – struggling to open a potato chip bag. We chatted briefly before I opened up my laptop to review some notes. Yet, I could not stop thinking about how food packaging, like potato chip bags, are often very difficult to open for ageing consumers.

Often, brand owners do not address the packaging needs of this powerful demographic. The numbers are certainly compelling: According to the United States Census Bureau, seniors will be the largest age demographic in the US by 2030. However, this growth will not only be limited to North America. According to a 2008 report from the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Ageing, people aged 65 and over will compose almost 15% of the world's population by 2050, up from about seven per cent today. Senior citizens are not just growing in number; they are growing in spending power as well. Often free of the financial burdens it once had with raising a family, this demographic is flexing its spending muscles all over the world.

As consumer product companies look for ways to market to this growing segment of the population, they should consider what makes a product an attractive purchase for today's senior citizens. As the age-old industry adage says, "The package is the first experience a consumer will have with the product inside". While packaging influences all consumers at the point of purchase, it is becoming an even bigger consideration for senior citizens scouring the shelves for a desired product. A major priority of senior consumers is the ease of opening and closing a package.

Enter resealable flexible packaging

New packaging solutions can help brand managers and engineers develop packaging that is easy for senior consumers to use and integrates well into their everyday lives. With these new solutions, resealable flexible packaging can be effective in building close brand relationships with ageing consumers.

Flexible packaging by itself offers many advantages to

consumer product goods companies, from weight reduction and space compression during shipment to increased shelf visibility in the store. With recent innovations from Zip-Pak, one of the world leaders in resealable packaging, closures have become a welcome solution to providing easy access and a secure seal for consumers and brand owners alike. In addition, added safety features such as a perforated tab above a zipper gives a visual clue that the package will be easy to access yet it is hermetically sealed until the first use. Tamper evident features reassure consumers that a product is fresh and sealed against contaminants. With resealable flexible packaging, ageing consumers get the right balance of security and ease of use in a simple format.

One innovation, the ZIP-PAK® SLIDER™, features an ergonomically designed clip that makes packages easier to open and close while ensuring a more effective and secure seal for people of all ages, especially those who are experiencing less hand mobility and strength. Other Zip-Pak innovations, such as the press-to-close family of products, help consumers easily open and close packages. These solutions include the traditional press-to-close as well as the ZIP-PAK® DoubleZip™. Both innovations feature flanged interlocking zipper profiles making it easy for the hand to slide across the zipper for reliable closing and are simple to pull apart when opening. The DoubleZip press-to-close zipper features two flanged zipper profiles, offering even more assurance that the package is completely closed.

Seeing is believing

These new solutions are easy-to-open and easy-to-close – and they look easy-to-open and easy-to-close. Ageing consumers know immediately how it works simply by looking at the package and require little, if any, instructions on how to operate it. This visual clue is vital, and can influence the purchasing decision of the senior demographic at the shelf.

As their families grow up and move out of the home, senior citizens often rely on single-serve portions in multi-packs which can save both time and money. Resealability can be a major benefit because it allows seniors to keep products contained and fresher longer in multi-packs and enables them to consume

products at their own pace without fear of spoilage.

Companies that produce products that are packaged without a resealable feature risk minimising the influence of a product's packaging. Without a slider or a press-to-close zipper, consumers throw away original packaging and turn to unbranded storage bags and containers, often rendering useless the time and money spent on a brand's package design. By incorporating a resealable closure, especially on a multi-serve package, brand managers ensure that the brand stays in front of the consumer throughout the last use of the product — a good opportunity for building brand equity.

Lifestyles and packaging, a smart consideration

The lifestyle trends of senior citizens should also be taken into account when marketing to them. As technology and medical care continue to advance, the quality of life for many senior citizens enables them to remain extremely active. As a result, brand managers must consider offering products that fit an active lifestyle. Packaging that lacks a resealable feature can limit product consumption to the home. Keeping in mind the way a product and its packaging will integrate into the lives of increasingly active senior consumers is a way to really make a lasting impression and build a strong relationship with the demographic.

Incorporating a resealable closure can build a strong relationship with ageing consumers by communicating that their needs were taken into consideration, encouraging brand-loyalty and repeat purchases. With the population of seniors projected to double in the next several decades, brand owners need to consider products and packaging to satisfy the needs of this powerful demographic. The lady on the plane with the potato chip bag will undoubtedly be thankful when they do. **FBA**

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