

Where is PR?

By [Bonnie Ramaila](#)

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During the December holidays I noticed, without any preoccupation, that many a brands have undergone facelifts or nip-and-tucks, if you like.

I have been noticing this over the past few months though, especially with my favourite brands that I usually buy. As a seasoned marketer, I always notice light changes, even in product taste, whether there is more or less of something. Luckily, products are incorrigible, I think.

I have noted that various fast moving consumer goods food categories have changed their product packs to look fresher and more appealing. I have seen these in the food, drink, home-care and personal-care categories of the various big houses like your Unilever, Pioneer Foods, Tiger Brands, to name a few. Even some alcoholic brands have followed suit. One common thing all these companies have done to their brands is to embrace a cleaner, clearer and less images or colour, with a flat colour background (most of them opting for white to make the pack more appealing), while others stuck to their trademark colours, but with variation here and there, to keep to their tradition.



To name a few, Brookes: Oros has undergone a facelift and fortunately, my favourite chubby Oros man has not gone under the knife or forced onto some silly diet! He's still chubby, bubbly and cute.

I was recently struck by the new Liqui-Fruit pack when shopping for drinks.



The picture on the packs is enticing, the fruits are cleanly cut and clearer, and they have opted for a cleaner, bright look-and-feel, with a white background that gives the fruits on the pack a more appealing "yummy" look. Thanks goodness for high resolution.



Some new products in the market like Sir Juice have also decided to spruce up its product pack, to give it a classier look-and-feel. I like the new look because it's clean, crisp and uncluttered. Even the bottle has been changed to tie in with the look. I guess it wanted to move away from the old and tired look-and-feel that somehow made its products get lost on the shelves, especially when placed together with some supermarket house brands. It's a good thing that it had the facelift, it knows that the juice blends do not have to blend in with the rest of other house-brand juices.



Even wines like Chateau Libertas have had a good facelift, giving the brand a more sophisticated and classier look, but still keeping the traditional font.



Simba Nik Naks is one of the few brands that have undergone tremendous change. The man on the pack - I'll call him Nik for the purposes of this article - has changed from being a clown to become white, black, Indian, Rastafarian and a young dude in less than 10 years. Talk about transmogrification at its best! Okay, we get the point that the product caters for all races, but changing poor Nik to depict that, is gratuitous. Why this perpetual change?

I know that some products change packaging or colour after a while or when they're introducing a special-edition pack, anniversary product or brand extension (added vitamins, etc), but changing Nik on the pack - modifying him from a clown

to a delirious, psychedelic icon - hugely diminishes the brand essence.



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Talk about plastic surgery gone wrong in a product pack. If Nik was a living being, he would have made cat-woman Jocelyn Wildenstein look decent. Just saying.

Now this brings me to my point of public relations. If proper PR was done to communicate all this transformation of Nik and the reasoning behind the change, I guess it would have made a difference.

Where is the PR?

Now, the question I ask myself is, with most of these brands undergoing facelifts, why haven't we seen any visible PR on the change of the brand or product pack? Or is the idea to surprise the consumer when they notice that the packaging has changed for the better (sometimes worse). This is when Lauterbon's four Cs - Consumer, Cost, Communication and Convenience - comes into effect. It's imperative that sellers (clients in this case) communicate with their consumers in a cost-effective way for their convenience.

Communicating a new product pack or change thereof shouldn't be seen as a mammoth task. It should instead be treated as an essential tool which should precede advertising on TV, radio and/or outdoor so that consumers can make the connection when they make contact with the brand or product. I have been reiterating that it's time that clients start using the 'outside-looking in' approach, as opposed to the 'inside-looking out'. In short, communicate from a consumer or buyer's point of view. And this is when PR comes in. Or is PR still treated as a by-the-way part of an advertising campaign, as opposed to it being a key supporting element to an overall campaign? I still wonder.

PR is an effective, quick and cost-effective way of creating awareness of a brand or product's new or improved offering. In as much as PR relies on the good relationship built with the specialist media, it's still an effective tool which clients and agencies use to measure and show results. It's sad that clients still continue treating it as a non-essential element of a campaign or not necessary (or even treated as a luxury by some corporate clients).

All or nothing

It's about time that clients (those who know the value of PR) start thinking about investing in PR, especially when they appoint an agency to do their full marketing campaign. Actually, PR should be part of a pitch and agencies must insist on it - it must be all or nothing. The pitch presentation should demonstrate which phases of the PR campaign would be used throughout the entire duration of the account with the agency. It should also demonstrate to clients how the bang-for-buck and the return on investment will be achieved through the promotional (marketing) mix.

PR should always support an advertising campaign for a brand or product. Lately, very little is being done by most fast-moving consumer goods brands. They are opting for the other 'P' - promotions, like in-store promotions, sampling in magazines (I love those freebies!) or competitions to communicate whatever product or brand is being offered, but I feel it's not enough. Articles or editorials in print media are still as effective, especially when one needs to explain the benefit of the product or how the process (if it was exciting) of changing the logo came about.

I have had enough of the 'budget constraints' stories from clients. Communicating with consumers when a product has changed or something new is done is as important as an awareness campaign for a brand. If we are going to see more of product/brand logo facelifts, please have the courtesy to inform consumers!

And with the advent of social media, it makes traditional PR look outdated. Maybe the question we should be asking ourselves is: Is social media killing the effectiveness of good old traditional PR? Hmm... something to ponder on.

ABOUT BONNIE RAMAILA

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