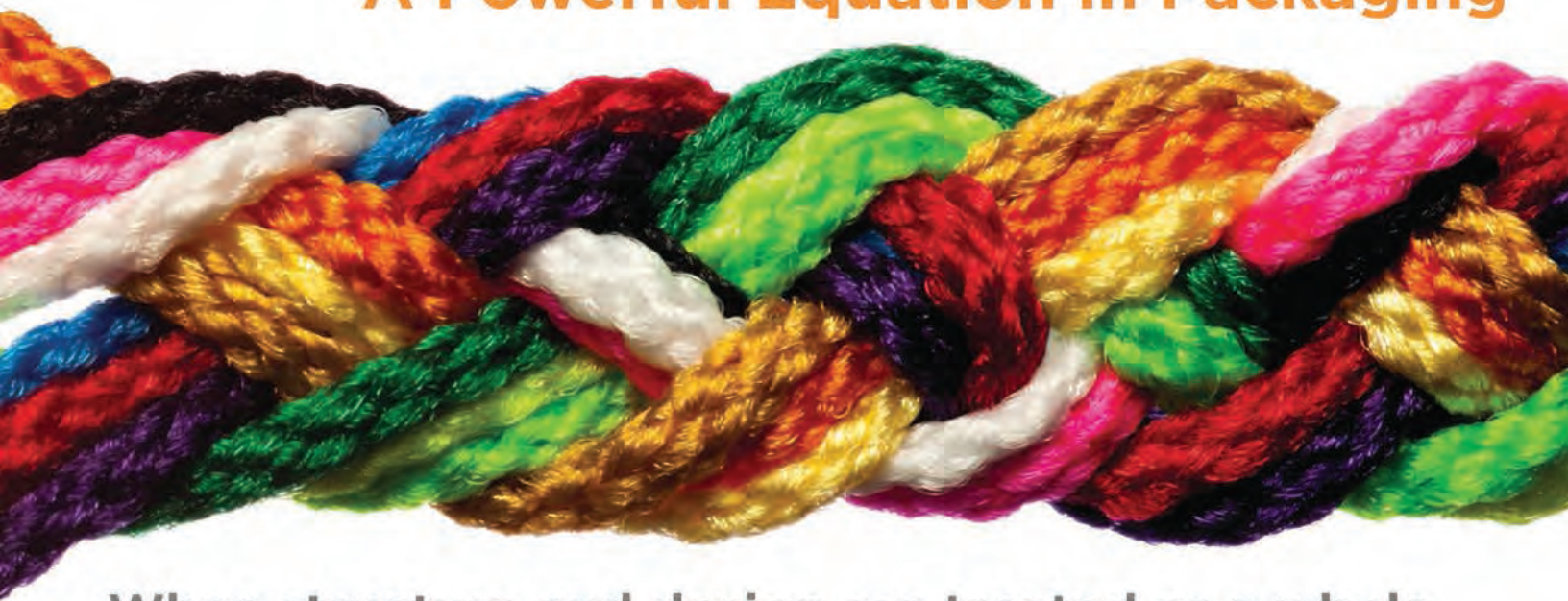


# INTEGRATED DESIGN

A Powerful Equation in Packaging



When structure and design are treated as a whole, one plus one equals three for brands.

**W**hen Rob Croft and Martin Short founded the branding agency Swerve in 2002, they were industrial designers desiring to offer a fresh, small-agency approach — at a time when post-Sept. 11 economics were challenging clients to get the best services for their dollar.

While building their firm, the pair discovered that an integrated (structural and graphic design) approach was liked by clients — and the process led to big results at shelf.

Thirteen years later, after registering over 80 design patents and seeing hundreds of designs reach fruition, Swerve is taking integrated CPG design to the next level by bringing its services into

the office space of Landor Associates, global brand consultants, in Manhattan, to expand design and prototyping capabilities.

Croft and Short share the following on why the integrated design process has been their favored approach for CPG design projects.

**MARTIN SHORT (MS):** Historically, integrated design has always existed. Look at the icons of timeless packaging design such as CHANEL N°5, Veuve Clicquot and Coca-Cola. The structure and the graphics on these are almost never mentioned; they become so interconnected that even the most dissecting of designers consider the packaging elements as one.

**ROB CROFT (RC):** The hallmark of truly integrated design is very often the elevated standard: Neither structural design nor graphics have to do it all on its own; blank space can exist

more freely; silhouettes can be cleaner and more dramatic; colors can become more dominating.

## > INTEGRATED DESIGN CAN BE UNCOMMON

Brand design is sometimes a business that is conducted with different agencies addressing structural design and graphics — orchestrated by a brand manager.

**RC:** That approach leads to a lot of coordination and calories burned. Our goal as an agency is to make the client's life easier and take the standard of the work higher. Brand design is a very relationship-based business; we will always have situations where we play in the sandbox with other agencies and vendors, but the results that we have had with our holistic approach are both fast and staggeringly effective.



**MS:** Also, the two disciplines have very different time and cost constraints. Structural changes often involve greater investment, a longer lead time and more complex testing (child-resistant closures, FDA testing, environmental considerations, etc.). Graphics very often have a cyclical or annual makeover pattern, and so, for the large part, the two become separated by necessity. But this shouldn't become an excuse to not consider the whole situation as the long-term advantages far outweigh the short-term gains.

## > ADVANTAGES OF AN INTEGRATED DESIGN APPROACH

1) Integrated design allows for IP and design protection: Competing only graphically is dangerous because it's always going to attract competitors who may try to echo your brand's visual communication (especially if it's a category leader). However, when graphics are supported by a



proprietary structure (guarded with design and utility patents), tangible intellectual property rights are staked out that can thwart the competitor and leave it facing a two to three year challenge to match your lead.

- 2) Consumer resonance through more considered operation and intuitive aesthetics: The extra banners and claims on packaging graphics are negative attributes and add clutter. They affect the crucial three-second decision-making window and are often only necessary because there is no other comparison for the consumer to make.
- 3) Effective communication of the graphic and physical brand DNA: By having graphic and industrial designers work together, design features are cross-pollinated from the structural design to the packaging graphics. The project becomes less of a heavy-lifting operation because all aspects of the package are developed in concert.
- 4) Efficiencies that save time and money: Holistic integrated design is more than just one-stop shopping; it's a design philosophy that allows you to do more with less. Very often, the opportunity of considering the supply chain and retail requirements at the genesis of the project means that the return on investment pays for the design project many times over.
- 5) Greater brand recognition, improved aesthetics, greater utility and justification of a higher price point: The package no longer has to compete two-dimensionally and can present a more concise and powerful message at shelf.

Structures can dose product, measure product and agitate stubborn product. Closures can be tuned to match the physical characteristics and viscosity of the contents — all of this tells the consumer, "I care about you!"

**RC:** I love brands that take the initiative before anyone else in the category realizes. "We could be doing this better." When Coffee-mate was invigorated with new packaging, it took almost two years for the competition to catch up with its "brand karaoke version." That took a lot of guts by some very forward-thinking people at Nestlé. It's still in production, and it's almost 18 years since we signed the patents!

**MS:** Imagine the efficiencies that can be gained if a package doesn't need a makeover every six months to stay ahead of the pack. Creating something so distinctive and putting some daylight

between you and the competition means not having to look over your shoulder and being able to focus on running your own race.

## > ACHIEVING AN INTEGRATED DESIGN

Consider the big picture from the onset of the program. A holistic approach considers the interconnected nature by setting up several design and industrial criteria for the designers to work within. Here's how we handle it at Swerve.

- 1) Our "Innovation Hub" design tool was instrumental in getting graphic and structural designers to collaborate together (on location) with brand managers, marketing, R&D, consumer research and engineers in an immersive six-hour session that takes the brand from a standing start — out to 100 concepts — and back down to a pipeline of six to 10 ideas that can be taken forward into conceptualization.
- 2) Graphic design and structural designers share ideas in the same workspace. The process creates a very democratic and collaborative environment, where all disciplines are able to contribute to the concept. Constant evaluation and mapping mean that the conceptual work can be very heavily focused.
- 3) Short- and long-term goals must be addressed, and a set of



objectives that consider all factors and attributes of the brand are laid out.

- 4) Collaborators are required to be brutally honest about what is really needed and sometimes go beyond the reaction iterative "test it/fix it" approach.
- 5) All parties work together and become invested in the program. This often means that certain groups need to put aside the short-term challenges and focus on the long-term advantages.
- 6) Manufacturing needs to fully understand the objectives of marketing, and marketing must be kept abreast of industrial challenges and opportunities.

# swerve

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- 7) The timeline is micromanaged in order to ensure decisions are not influenced or compromised by bad planning.
- 8) “Brand hyper vigilance” is practiced. Look for the opportunities to create a more robust and effective system for everyone.

## > INTEGRATED DESIGN PROCESS, IN SUMMARY

Integrated design goes beyond just structure and graphics at shelf. True integration considers many other factors: material sourcing, distribution, local manufacturing, shelf life, afterlife and recycling.

Many of these factors are considered by one or two areas of the design chain but are rarely considered as a whole and interconnected stream of factors. Bringing manufacturing into the equation early with environmental teams and sourcing partners allows for a far greater depth of design innovation to take shape, leading to a more successfully executed package.

## > USING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR DEVELOPING TRENDS

As the nature of CPG package design evolves and its role changes with more products sold via e-commerce than ever

before, the demand for the holistic integrated approach is set to increase. The consumer will expect brand touch points to be evident with a direct-ship package. There needs to be internal messaging, an intelligent reveal process and an out-of-box experience.

The factors to consider start to shift, but the fundamentals don't change. The establishment of a thorough design criteria and chain analysis remains important.

The traditional retail shelf is changing, but the same brand appeal, consumer experience, product protection and environmental considerations still remain, and the creation of iconic and meaningful design is just as important — in fact, even more so. As the consumer starts to receive a sea of brown cardboard boxes at his or her door, the need to reclaim the experience of reward and brand connection becomes even stronger. The future belongs to brands that realize this requirement and take action through an integrated design approach now. **BP**

*Rob Croft and Martin Short are partners at branding and design agency Swerve ([www.swerveinc.com](http://www.swerveinc.com)).*