HOW TO MEET THE PACKAGING NEEDS OF THE GROWING AGEING POPULATION

It's difficult – and perhaps foolhardy – to ignore the United Nations statement that "population ageing is unprecedented, without parallel in human history —and the twenty-first century will witness even more rapid ageing than did the century just past".

In Australia we will see a growth in our 65+ population from 3.7 million to a predicted 8.7 million in 50 years time. On a global scale UN data reveals this will result in the 60+ population more than double, from 841 million in 2013 to more than 2 billion in 2050. Our neighbours in Asia will be experiencing the majority of this growth, which will undoubtedly also impact Australia.

Companies wishing to meet the challenge of designing packaging for this significant market need to approach product design with a greater understanding of the abilities and limitations of this group.

The recently developed SPC ProVital™ Easy Open Certified cup, is a great example of a company understanding the struggles consumers had with the tub packaging format and then using this knowledge to re-think their design.

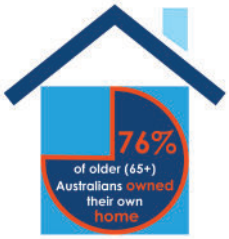
For example SPC identified with Arthritis Australia's Accessible Design Division, that two common elements consumers with reduced dexterity struggled with, were separating the small tab from the lip of the cup, and then trying to grip the smooth film tab. What some might consider a simple task presented a significant barrier, so SPC decided to resolve these two issues by firstly creating a large tab that sits over the edge of the cup, as well as providing a textured pattern to the film tab that makes it significantly easier to grip.

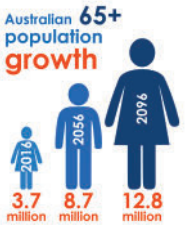
They also addressed aspects such as visibility by making the tab a bright red colour, as well as using large fonts for best before dates, all factors that make the user experience easier.

The other benefits of these improvements are that it isn't just easy to open for the ageing population, but the whole market place.

It would also be foolhardy for businesses and marketers to continue to blindly focus on the perception that younger generations have the majority of the disposable income, when the reality is that Baby Boomers also hold a significant share of Australia's wealth. According to a 2014 report by McCrindle Research, Baby Boomers hold more than half of the nation's wealth.

The Government's Australian Institute of Health also identified that 76% of the 65+ population own their own home. With 56% living in a private dwelling with a husband, wife or partner, while 25% lived alone in a private dwelling. Meaning the majority of this demographic is living independently in their home and needs packaging to meet their needs. Currently this is not occurring considering past research has identified that 65% of consumers have had to wait for someone to open packaging for them. This struggle with packaging is likely to increase further, as there is an increase in functional limitations including a reduction in strength, dexterity and vision, associated with ageing. This means packaging becomes a barrier to the independence of the ageing population if their needs and abilities are not considered.





A 2015 UK study by Dr Nicholas Ford which explored the impact of packaging interactions on quality of life among older consumers, found that fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) made older consumers feel powerless and vulnerable. The study also found that the daily struggle that consumers experienced with FMCGs damaged the consumers' sense of self-worth. This type of long-term negative emotional association can hardly be an experience any brand would want there packaging conveying to the marketplace.

Going forward brands will need to ask themselves if they are willing to lose such a significant market or are they going to consider the ageing populations needs in the development process of future products. An easy first step might be to download Arthritis Australia's 'Food Packaging Accessibility Guidelines' to begin to understand what barriers their current packaging might pose.

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