

Bottles with real bottle

Gaining cut-through in the branding clutter is proving more difficult each day. In essence no one can afford to be ordinary if they want their brand to survive. By Annie Gray.

Dow Design's release last year of its study *The seven big themes of marketing in Australasia* highlighted one thing very clearly – that distinct brands break through category clutter.

While this is hardly news to most marketers what is new is that many marketers weren't afraid to admit how difficult it is to ensure their brand stands out amid the proliferation of products crowding the market.

The survey, of senior marketing people from a range of industries, was conducted in May last year. It found that sometimes only a little difference is everything.

As Dow Design sees it – no one can afford to be ordinary and distinction is essential to a brand's survival today.

That very point is something that Maureen and Wayne Startup, the founders of Hawke's Bay's The Village Press, have used to their best advantage.

The company's distinctive and elegant design and packaging (a slim black bottle and black boxing with clean white labelling) has sent their premium quality extra virgin olive oil into the top spots in Europe and helped the company grow spectacularly in the past four years.

The couple started the company in 1998 and what began as a hobby now has both working full-time. The business has grown from the original 1000 olive trees on their property in Havelock North to the point where this year they will have 30,000 trees. Production this year is likely to reach around 50,000 litres, up from 9000 litres last year. The company is also planning a substantial buy-in of olives from Marlborough.

Maureen Startup says it is now the largest olive oil producer in New Zealand.

When the couple first started up they bought a traditional press from a village in Italy and used an old shed at Lombardi Wines (now known as Black Barn Vineyards) for the processing. Hence the name Village Press.

They've outgrown the original shed and the business is moving its processing to nearby Sileni Estate where it is building a new processing factory.

A near neighbour is Kim Thorpe of Saatchi & Saatchi where the distinctive black and white labelling and boxing was designed.

The cardboard boxing (highly unusual for oil olive) is costly but it does protect the oil and again provides a distinctive point of difference.

The dark bottles, produced by Endeavor Glass, were initially screen-printed but because of volume the company has now moved to paper labels.

And the emphasis on design and packaging has paid off.

Two years ago the couple went to London to find a distributor. "No one," says Startup, "wanted to know us."

On the off chance they went to Fortnum and Mason where they saw the food hall buyer who told them he loved the packaging and if the oil was as good as the packaging... they were in.

The volumes being sold from Fortnum and Mason are not huge but Startup says the company has also found entry into 180 Sainsbury stores.

Another coup for the company came about when Air NZ approached them about supplying olive oil for its business class passengers asking if they could they design a suitable bottle for passenger use.

Toby White at Healthpak came up with the stylish 15ml bottle which ensures no spillage. From this Wayne Startup is now in discussion with two other airlines, which again like the packaging.

Maureen Startup says the design and packaging has probably been one of their main focuses.

"There are a myriad of oils out there and if you don't have something different, there is nothing to make you stand out. Our oil is really good but [the design] certainly has helped in our branding."

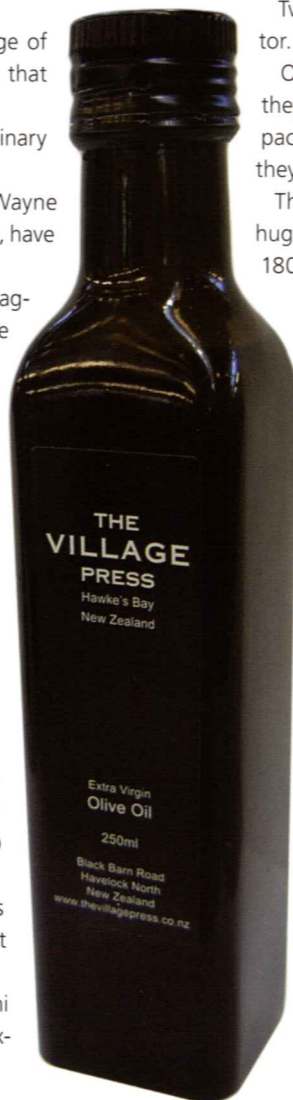
A heritage brand

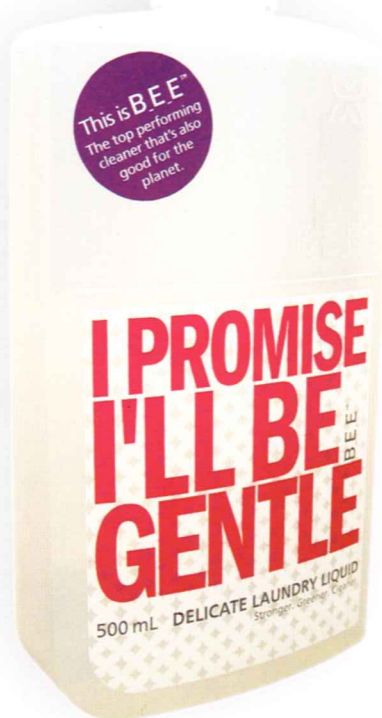
A far more traditional brand that has recently revamped its look is Smirnoff Vodka, which unveiled a "bold" new packaging design in New Zealand during March.

The design and packaging was developed through the global resources of Diageo, which owns the brand.

For the New Zealand and Australian markets all the packaging is undertaken in Australia by ACI Glass.

Scott Fairbairn, Lion Nathan's brand manager for Smirnoff, says Australian research found that consumers





associated the new packaging with “a stylish brand” and a “great quality vodka”.

Fairbairn says the research also indicated that more than a quarter of consumers surveyed indicated they would buy Smirnoff more often as a result of the new design “with a 30 percent increase in the ‘definitely would buy’ response”.

While research here has been less definitive Fairbairn says the key thing the new packaging demonstrates is the product’s credentials.

The new Smirnoff look incorporates a tapered, embossed glass bottle “and sharp, clean red and silver logo reflective of both the brand’s Russian heritage and of modern success”, according to the press material.

Smirnoff has more than 55 percent of the vodka market in New Zealand.

Making a splash

Another smaller company that is making a real splash (so to speak) with its funky and very targeted packaging is the B_E_E range – short for Beauty Engineered for Ever.

B_E_E’s packaging for its range of environmentally-friendly New Zealand household cleaning products has just won a major international design award for its “understated translucent plastic bottles with bold graphics and irreverent pick-up lines”.

The B_E_E packaging designs won the Branded Packaging award in the UK’s Design Week awards in March in London.

B_E_E general manager Brigid Hardy says

the company’s packaging reflects B_E_E’s big goal “to make environmentally-sound products so desirable that people simply can’t resist them”.

“We knew we were taking on a big challenge – so we put design at the centre of our business right from the start,” she says. B_E_E worked with design partner Designworks Enterprise IG and local packaging company Vertex Pacific.

As Hardy sees it creating an irresistible green product can be difficult – especially when it’s a household cleaner on a supermarket shelf up against more traditional brands.

And the Design Week international judging panel noted that “the sheer

honesty of Beauty Engineered for Ever packaging ... is its great appeal.

“... the packs ... [give] the products personality and [create] a good feeling and sense of confidence in the consumer.”

B_E_E products include dishwash liquid, surface cleaner, whitener and delicate laundry liquid. They are perfumed with essential oils and use natural ingredients such as coconut, palm oil, sugar, kawakawa and orange oil.

Hardy says the products are the only cleaning products on the New Zealand market with Environmental Choice accreditation, a global eco-standard which is endorsed by the New Zealand Government.



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ACI Glass Packaging New Zealand

ACI Glass Packaging New Zealand
752 Great South Road, Penrose
P.O.Box 12-345 Penrose
Auckland, New Zealand
Telephone: +64 9 976 7100
Facsimile: +64 9 976 7191
email: sales_nz@acipackaging.com
www.acipackaging.com

