

Packaging Redefines Fresh Breath

Laura Lee Lentner

Undergraduate Student, Packaging

Key Words: packaging, small-scaled, advertising

There is a buzz around town that is putting packaging in high demand. The buzz comes from the unique -looking, handheld breath freshening packages that are setting new trends and growing in popularity every day. The success of these products is visible in the checkout lane of many retail stores throughout the country. From mint-holding tins to gum-suspending blister packs to snap-cap closures (measuring the size of a postage stamp), consumers get the urge to carrying around his or her favorite fad package. While this is occurring, companies are reaping the benefits of increasing sales.

Breath fresheners, which include an array of gums and mints, have experienced a rapid boost in sales. This is largely due to the new life and attitude that packaging has brought to an industry that was once considered substantial (but is considered to be unending in possibilities). Packaging has provided a new wave of product benefits. Aside from casing the product, packages are innovative and stylish, small scaled and portable, and hygienic with controlled product dispensing.

Along with improvements in packaging, new products such as breath strips and gel-mints, have also contributed to the surge in breath freshener popularity. Within one year, sales of breath strips went from \$33 million to \$225 million (Francella, 2004, p.4). Gel mints have also dominated the market, prompting new packaging designs and double-digit sales growths (Higgins, 2003, p.16).

As new product popularities have broken boundaries and exceeded expectations, overall sales of breath fresheners have skyrocketed. Sales have climbed an unexpected 41% since 1997 (Roberts, 2003, p.1). In 2003, breath fresheners hit a market high bringing in \$3.4 billion in sales (Francella, 2004, p.1). If product demands continue to flourish, the industry has expectations to reach sales of \$4.7 billion by 2007 (Roberts, 2003, p.2). As sales have risen, so have the number of packages that cause these high- demanding products. Breath fresheners are flooding the market. In the last 10 years, it has been apparent that packaging has made its mark in the breath freshener industry.

Consumers have been exposed to breath fresheners for more than a century. Aside from product line expansions, such as sugar-free gum and extra strength mints, the chemical make-up of breath fresheners has not changed drastically since their existence. To sell a product that has ultimately been the same for generations, companies are turning to packaging to promote their product. Packaging is used to appeal to target audiences and re-excite consumers into thinking they are being exposed to these products for the first time.

When breath fresheners were first produced, they appealed to young and middle-aged adults. This age group was to credit for the majority of sales. As new breath freshener brands have been created, the packaging has improved and has appealed to greater target audiences of all ages. – Unique plastic containers with hologram labels containing IceBreaker® liquid mints appeal to pre-teens. Whereas sophisticated tins, casing Altoids® (breath mints), appeal to adults. Consumers of all ages, pre-teens to the mature adults, are now to credit for the recent jump in breath freshener consumption and sales.

Mintel, a consumer research company in Chicago, has done extensive studies on breath freshener consumption. Its studies show that 95% of children, ages 6 to 17, and 89% of young

adults, ages 18 to 24, consume breath fresheners on a regular basis (Roberts, 2003, p.2). To captivate the interest of this age group that changes opinions frequently, packages need to be up-to-date and it must fit their lifestyle. Considering many teens wear jeans, packages need to be created small enough to fit into pockets of the tightest pants.

Looking at the rest of the population, 80% of adults and 68% of the older population, ages 65+, use gums and mints (Roberts, 2003, p.2). To meet the interest of this age group, packages are being made out of tin to bring an “older fashion appeal to demographic groups that grew up with tin band-aid holders and coffee cans.

There are hundreds of reasons why consumers use breath fresheners. According to Mintel research, the obvious and most popular reason is to freshen breath (Roberts, 2003, p.4). Users who fall into the need for fresh breath are smokers, coffee drinkers, and on-the-go eaters (Francella, 2004, p.4). For years, smokers have consumed mints to rid the smell of smoke from their breath, and have used gum to substitute for their addiction in non-smoking environments. In recent years, coffee shops have expanded to new areas, and the lifestyles of Americans have quickened, causing a greater need to rid coffee breath.

As audiences demanding fresh breath have grown, companies have tailored their packaging to meet consumers' needs. Smokers can fit a breath strip package easily into their pocket so others are not aware of their habit. Coffee drinkers can easily open a square-shaped tin and select the number of mints needed to cover-up their caffeine addiction. On-the-go eaters can pop a piece of gum out of a blister pack after eating a sandwich with onions, and not have to worry about throwing away a wrapper while they are walking back into the office. Packaging has made breath fresheners a convenient product to consume.

The packaging appeal that has increased the popularity of breath fresheners has influenced many companies to jump on the bandwagon. Individual entities like Kate Spade®, Donna Karan®, and Starbucks® are creating their own line of mints (Sullivan, 2003, p.60). Larger companies like Wrigley® Jr., Hershey® Foods, and Masterfoods USA® are taking action and adding line extensions to their existing product lines in order to capitalize on an industry that is booming in revenues.

A big shock to the breath freshener industry occurred when Wrigley Jr. Company launched its first non-chewing gum product after a 111-year history of providing consumers solely with chewing gum products (Hollingsworth, 2003, p.20). The breath strip product, Eclipse® Flash Strips™ in a small-sized container, was one of the most successful breath mint launches. It is now a common item among the array of breath fresheners in the checkout lane.

The craze of breath strips that attracted Wrigley Jr. to endeavor into a new breath freshener domain began in 2001. Pfizer® Consumer Healthcare launched the first ever breath strip known as Listerine® PocketPaks™, and was awarded The Most Innovative Product of the Year award in 2002. Since then, many companies have launched copycat products in attempt to reap the same benefits as Pfizer did in its \$112 million first year sales (Hollingsworth, 2003, p.20).

The packaging of breath strips is as impressive as the product. The small-scaled package, that is roughly the same size as the product, protects the delicate films from cracking or breaking during the careless storage in purses, pockets, and backpacks. It is easy for consumers to slip a breath strip package into the pocket of a carry-along while he or she is away from home. The resealable package allows the consumer to select as many strips as desired. Aside from size, durability, and convenience, the package also has a large enough billboard to advertise the product. Imagining breath strips in a paperboard box or tin could not compare after observing the success the product has had in the plastic flip-top package.

Breath strips are one of many new entries into the breath freshener category within recent years. Other new product lines are Cadbury's® Dentyne Ice™ and Wrigley's Jr.'s Orbit™ gum, which both exhibit characteristics of an enhanced Chic-let. These new oral-care products brought with them the introduction of blister packs into the breath freshener industry. Comparing the new

to the old, and looking at blister packs against the now deemed old fashion paper wrappers, makes one wonder how it could have been possible without them.

Blister packs, hosting 12 pieces of gum, are paper thin compared to the bulging 15-stick packet. As pieces are popped out of a blister pack, one at a time, the remaining stay stable in their individual compartments. When sticks of gum are pulled from the packet, the remaining pieces loosen and end up spilling out into purses and glove boxes. Who would have thought paper labels could be so messy.

Dentyne Ice and Orbit gum have a hard-shell coating that acts as double protection with their plastic packaging. Unless a consumer steps on the product or puts an extreme amount of pressure on the package, gums such as these will not lose their shape. On the opposite end of the spectrum, stick gum is easily susceptible to crushing. The slightest amount of pressure on a purse or backpack will squish the paper package and reshape the product, taking away its chewing appeal.

The combination of plastic packaging and the hard-shell coating of Dentyne Ice and Orbit gum make these products temperature resistant. This is a huge advantage over stick gum, which is not chewable in extreme temperature conditions. Many consumers can relate to the experience of stick gum in summer heat. When exposed to the sun, stick gum adheres to the wrapper making it a sticky mess and impossible to chew. Stick gum also loses its chewable texture in cool temperatures. With paper wrappers, a slight tear in the package exposes the product to the outside environment, causing it to lose freshness and become stale quicker.

It is no wonder why blister packed gum is doing so well. It has redefined the product and has made it more durable than ever imagined. Blister packs have clearly become the breath freshener package of today, leaving paper wrappers far behind. Gum is not the only breath freshener found in blister packs. Binaca[®] uses blister packs to case their Gel Burst[™] mints in order to avoid the risk of the beads sticking together in hot and humid temperatures. Product manager Standhart stated "The blister pack was needed in order to meet tough quality standards and may make for happier consumers this summer" (Berk, 2004, p.2)

Binaca is one of the many companies that have experimented with liquid mints. Hershey Food Corporation ventured into the breath freshener industry in 2000 when the company bought IceBreakers Liquid Ice mints from Nabisco[®] ("Hershey Annual Report," 2004). Liquid Ice mints are sold in an innovative, flip-top plastic container that is smaller than the palm of most people's hands. Whether it is the favoritism in their products or their packaging, Hershey's net sales rose to \$1.907 billion in the second quarter of 2004 from \$1.802 billion in the first half of 2003 ("Hershey Annual Report," 2004). The ramped craze of breath fresheners which have contributed to the impressive sales of Icebreaker brand products is partially to thank for Hershey's success.

Masterfoods USA is another company that took a bite into the soaring industry of liquid breath fresheners. They introduced hydrating mints known as AquaDrops[™] at the end of 2003 and claimed the product could quench thirst during dry mouth moments (Beirne, 2003, p.14). Though AquaDrops are different from other breath fresheners, it is packaged in the familiar blister pack. This is a prime example of one company using an innovative packaging concept that has caused other companies to follow suit.

Existing companies like Altoids have come out with new products, as well as new package designs. Altoids, which were once sold in a rectangular-shaped tin with a pop-off top, can now be bought in various tin sizes: the largest being the size of a VHS, the smallest being the size of a small notepad. The shapes of the tin package range from rectangles to triangles to hearts. Some container lids detach from the base while others remain attached by a hinge. The variability in tin sizes and shapes promotes the variability in products from mints to gums to breath strips. Altoids have also done promotional packages featuring tins with popular cartoon characters and classic Christmas characters like Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer and Santa Clause exhibited on the lid (Beirne, 2003, p.14).

The addition of new products, with improvements in packaging, has made advertising in breath freshener industry more critical than ever before. Breath fresheners are advertised more

heavily today than in the past. Companies are using multiple forms of advertising from trendy magazines such as Vogue and Cosmopolitan, to billboards in Times Square, to internet ads and online pop-up windows ("U.S. Market," n.d.). Hershey conducted a national television promotion to support the launch of their IceBreaker Liquid Ice mints, and handed out 10 million sample packs at Jessica Simpson's 2004 tour ("Jessica Simpson Now", 2004). Masterfoods USA introduced AquaDrops in the United Kingdom through television, the press, public relations, and outdoor sampling campaigns ("Masterfoods: Digesting," 2004). Binaca created a print campaign exposing their Gel Burst Liquid mints to readers of Fitness and Men's Health magazines (Berk, 2004, p.2).

With breath freshener competition becoming cutthroat, companies are putting no limitations on their advertising budgets. Pfizer dedicated a \$40 million budget to promote the world's number-one breath strip seller Listerine PocketPaks. Cadbury spent \$14 million of their \$20 million Dentyne marketing budget on TV ads to push their newest gum flavor release, Fire™. Trident® also turned to TV and spent \$20 million on their TV ad campaign to inform American households of their latest new Cool Rush™ flavor (Beirne, 2004, p.14). With the desire to push products on TV, companies like Hershey Foods take the extra expense and hire celebrities like Jessica Simpson to advertise their products on TV and during concert tours ("Jessica Simpson Now..." 2004).

The extreme extent of advertising expenses has increased venue exposure. Up until the late 1980s, breath fresheners were mostly found in the checkout lanes of supermarkets, convenience stores, and gas stations. Now they are everywhere; in hotels, restaurants, nightclubs, and coffee shops (Berk, 2004, p.2). They can even be found in the fitting rooms of retail stores like Victoria Secret and Barneys (Hollingsworth, 2003, p.11). Companies are also turning to high profile events to get their products favored by celebrities without paying the high price of advertising. Anthony Shurman, president of Yosha! Enterprises, was able to put his *Momints Liquid* mints in celebrity goodie bags at the Sundance Film Festival (Berk, 2004, p.1). With trendy avenues offering uniquely packaged breath fresheners, carrying around the package has become as trendy as consuming the product.

Though venues of breath fresheners have become unlimited, the most valuable location for retailers is still the checkout lane (Higgins, 2003 p.16). According to a 2003 Front-End Focus Study sponsored by Masterfoods USA, Time Distribution Services, and Wm. Wrigley Jr., in partnership with Dechert-Hampe & Co., gum, mints and candy are the number one items consumers want to see while standing in the checkout lane (Kruger, 2003, p.18). Here, consumers are attracted to the striking display of the latest products cased in flashy, colorful and innovative packages. Confectioner Magazine classifies these products as being "high penetration, high frequency, and high impulse" to gullible consumers that cannot say no temptation (Kruger, 2003, p.18).

Of the impulse sales occurring at checkout lanes, gum and mints lead the pack by 72% of sales based on 2003 sales figures (Kruger, 2003, p.18). With this advantage, more companies are focusing on innovative packaging to further promote their traditional mints and century-established gums. Higgins of Food Packaging (2003) stated, "Bold flavors are hot, particularly in the adult market, and the package is the cue that the product inside has punch" (§ 2).

The perception of an added punch is mandatory in an industry where spearmint and peppermint gum essentially taste the same, regardless of the brand. Product variety is limited in the breath freshener industry. Therefore, packaging is the added advantage companies can use to say their product is the best. The desire for companies to create the next best package that puts their product over the edge has turned breath fresheners into a fad business. Berk (2004) stated, "...some say Gel Bursts' packs aren't as hip as their competition, which could be a drawback in the trendy category" (p. 1)

Whether waiting in line at a checkout lane or for a fitting room in a department store, it is not hard to find a product that will freshen breath. From gum to mints to breath strips, there has been

a clear increase in the magnitude of breath fresheners. The increase in quantity of products has been followed by an increase in the quality of packaging. The high demand for innovative packaging in the breath freshener industry has influenced the popularity of the product, making companies wonder if consumers are purchasing the package for the product or the product for the package.

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