

Musing about the muse

As they say, “its hard to please all of the people all of the time”.
Boy aint that the truth in this business.

by Margaret Smith
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As cosmetic designers/formulators/marketers we design dreams and hopes into something beautiful and with anticipation, useful and effective.

And the dreams and hopes are our fuel to design. and it makes me want to “muse” over the real muses of the industry, the Brand-owner...who has the passion, sometimes madness to create a brand.

It’s a darned hard gig here to do this and my hat gets tipped to anyone doing it, and my greatest respect to those that sustain their brand.

To help at the beginning, after selecting a couple of manufacturers or formulators, it all starts and ends with really good communication and the heart is the full product/range brief and plan.

Message – how to turn on your manufacturer to give you great products.

- *Manufacturers face challenges every day. Faster, cheaper, better, different etc.*
- *More than ever, brand owners no longer operate a vertically integrated business in which they also manufacture.*
- *Means brand owners have to communicate their brand’s requirements and aspirations*

very clearly to someone outside of their business. More importantly this lack of integration can mean that people have a poor understanding of all the stages and steps required – for example a simple choice in packaging can have major implications for manufacturing, stability, machines required for filling etc.

- *Often, process overlooks what formulator/manufacturer needs to see and feel in order to get excited.*
- *Clarity of thought when preparing a brief IS essential. Lack of clarity is just plain inefficient and a waste of people’s time.*
- *Be prepared to take advice – for example, manufacturers have limits to their resources to fill and pack and present every permutation and the manufacturer if consulted early on with the packaging concept can work on getting an excellent result with what they have.*
- *If you want to stand out be prepared to be innovative, so that customers will love you. If the only challenge is for the manufacturer to be cheaper, how is that a winning long term strategy for a brand?*

For a cheerful start, Brand-owners need to have their ducks lined up and

their head and heart really aligned with:

Let’s look at the 2 versions of what manufacturers get presented with by their customers.....and guess which version achieves that perfectly formed result. (Thanks to John Woodruff of UK based Creative Developments)

1. The Brief

A clear concise document produced by the marketing department after extensive market research with intended claims clearly defined.

Or

Woolly description full of pitfalls like “Natural” and “Organic” and claims changing as new ideas occur to originator made up of personal tastes and opinions?

The Packaging

Already identified and selected as the ideal pack form to contain and deliver the product.

Or

To be decided!

Usually after 2 months stability testing on a product with a quite unsuitable rheology for the final pack choice.

3. The Bench Mark

An exciting and innovative product with clear functional benefits and with a similar selling price to the product required.

Or

Two or three totally different products, all 3x the selling price of the product required.

Does the bench mark meet the product requirements? Claims, market niche, legislation

4. The Time Table

A program agreed between all concerned, allowing sufficient time for formulation, testing and proceeding to manufacture via pilot scale batches.

Or

Marketing has a slot promised by a major store 5 months ahead. That is plenty of time surely!

Remember formulations can fail at any Stage and the manufacturer or brandowner should explore the risks fully.

Gad what a massive difference, often

we are asked to just make to a shopping list of product category headings, with little philosophy or story behind it.

We are asked to develop some sort of story for the products as we go, and that's fine...to a point...we need first and foremost to be stimulated to be inspiring in our formulas.

The story of the brand or product is something that we can help with, however it is not our baby, and what turns us on is the amazing diversity in both visions and quality and products.

Their sometimes crazy, unreasonable briefs to develop what they want as a perfect product or range can be both such a buzz or just confusing like I have mentioned.

Everyone with a business wants to make money of course, sometimes recognition, and sometimes peace or all three . . . ah one can live in hope.

Brand-owners deal with marketing, a strange and mystical business that lures the punter into a devotion to the brand

and that dream. What the formulator really wants to do is match that expectation with what's in the bottle.

And it is such a partnership between formulator, brand owner and the end user. It can almost be a dance when it all works. When we are listening to one another's beat, all our ideas can fall into what feels like aligned perfection.

Ah I wax lyrically, and it all sounds really flaky yet quite honestly, it isn't all the time. Although it can be utterly brilliant.

And I admit, too that what can start off as a boring or dud brief, can push one into totally new places and work just as well, however I reckon that it is easier and happier to start off completely prepared and then have a wonderful experience with happy results.



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