

packaging sampling

Can there be many, if any, beauty product manufacturers that haven't engaged in some form of sampling to source new customers or build brand awareness? If so, they're either super premium priced and rooted rock solidly in the upper reaches of the market, or else they're no longer in business. To sample or not to sample has never really been in question for most brand owners and their customers. What is, however, is determining the optimal way in which to go about it.

"Sampling or 'try before you buy' is integral to the selling of cosmetics because the sensory profile is so important to the customer," explains The Red Tree Consultancy's Marketing Manager, Wren Holmes. "It's hard-wired into the marketing mindset, but whatever strategy you opt for it has got to contribute to the sale of the product. The more targeted or appropriately positioned it is the better will be the results."

According to Holmes, the three main criteria on which the consumer judges a product are how it looks; how it feels; and how it smells. There are umpteen ways that consumers can try out goods prior to purchase, not least by browsing the myriad counters in any beauty hall. But an excessive willingness to assist can be quite intimidating. Samples handed out via pop-up events in the same store or shopping mall come with less pressure attached, while the gift of a new product sample to try out along with the purchase made can come as a pleasant surprise. The same is true for a magazine cover-mounted

mini-tube or sachet of cream or gel – increasingly poly-bagged as multiple giveaways.

The conversion from sampling to sales improves immeasurably when something comes highly recommended. Despite the absence of direct sensory perception, attracting the admiration of a much-followed influencer or celebrity can easily fast-track the process. A case in point is the enthusiasm of Kim Kardashian's make-up artist Mario Dedivanovic for Graphers' UTan & Tone Coconut Tanning Water.

Even so, such endorsements may be greeted with cynicism, cautions the brand's Sales & Marketing Manager, Sophie Maxwell. "Mario approached us because he liked the product and is genuinely interested in coconut extract as a skin care ingredient. And for us it's a huge sign of authenticity. However, you do need to be careful about who you're working with. There is a common misconception that the influencer is in the pocket of the brand owner. Not so: they can receive hundreds of free products every day with no obligation to say anything about them. But it's a suspicion that's grown as the number of bloggers out there has proliferated."

PACKED FULL OF PROMISE

Accuracy of aim will inevitably have budgetary implications, not least when ensuring that the quality of sample distributed is of a commensurate standard to that of the retail product itself, notes Sampling Innovations Europe Commercial Director Mark Lockyer. "You wouldn't want to spend a lot of money on sampling a pretty average product merely to have it confirmed as being no more than that. But by the same token, with a viable product that's going to create a positive impression when people try it you'll need to design a sample that will be equally attractive to the end-consumer.

"We see lots of examples where brands have tried to contain or cut costs and end up producing something that just looks cheap and nasty."

Trying times

When inviting new customers to sample the goods, it's the way that you do it that gets results, reports **Des King**



sampling packaging



From magazine cover mounts to in store pop-ups via beauty boxes, there are many ways for consumers to trial beauty goods

Samples, however, can and (most would concur) should adhere to sensible, cost-effective size limits, not just to control expenditure, but so as not to detract from sales. It's a stricture that some beauty boxes are starting to ignore. In the meantime, apart from those products that can't be dished out as mini-mes (a face mask, for example), any format that allows for between a single application to what's sufficient to sensibly inform a purchasing decision is acceptable.

As these are freebies it is not surprising that there is no great appetite for innovation. A recent exception to the rule, though, is Italian flexible packaging specialist Easysnap's low-density polyethylene (LDPE)/polystyrene (PS) and aluminium multi-layer sachet. Through the incorporation of a barely visible lateral notch the sachet can be folded open using just one hand, and without incurring the gooeey after mess often associated with this format. An early adopter of the Easysnap 1.5ml sachet was Clarin, which used the dual compartment concept as a full-colour flexo printed sample for its anti-ageing Double Serum product.

"Sachet marketing is the perfect example of using something small to promote something really big," the UK's leading sachet and wet wipe supplier Guardpack's Director Hana Freedman tells **SPC**. "However, in addition to its obvious suitability for cover-mounts and magazine inserts, and in-store and exhibition

giveaways, there is a wider commercial use of individual sachets outside of sampling; for example, boxed up in quantities of 30 or more within a secondary packaging carton."

That blurring of the lines between free of charge and commercial packs is equally pronounced when it comes to the use of LDPE or high-density PE tubes and PET bottles, and of course glass used for fragrances. Any rigid plastic container from 10-25ml would serve as an acceptable travel size for retail sale or a free sample. This duality explains why the UK's largest manufacturer, M&H Plastics, offers a standard range of over 400 containers with screw-cap or flip-top closures below the 100ml travel limit.

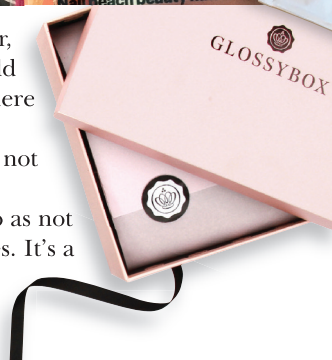
The German family-owned Heinz Glas' Pocket Collection of premium quality blow moulded miniature glass bottles likewise ranges from 7.5-10ml and they are aimed not only at the travel retail sector, but also as a sample for inclusion within a monthly beauty box.

SURPRISING DISCOVERIES

Since they first emerged around eight years ago, beauty or discovery boxes have eliminated much of the randomness associated with sampling. Distributed exclusively to subscribers, their appeal to recipients is the anticipation of what will be in that monthly box – not least products that hitherto could be completely fresh to them. There's post-delivery word of mouth to enjoy via social media, with subscribers effectively serving as brand ambassadors – and even a brisk trade in swapping unwanted products.

Brands can benefit from getting their products in front of a demographic whose profile and preferences have been exhaustively researched and for whom opening the box provides a far greater incentive to try and buy than a cover-mounted sachet would. "It's putting the product into the hands of the most receptive audience," the co-founder of The Perfume Society, Jo Fairley, tells **SPC**. "Rather than just a gift with purchase you're explaining to the customer why it might work for them. You're unpicking that product for them before they even try it."

Driving the sector are 'the big three': Birchbox; Latest in Fashion; and Glossybox, the latter now distributing to 250,000 women worldwide, says Glossybox's UK & Ireland



The criteria on which consumers judge cosmetics



LOOK

FEEL



SMELL



packaging sampling

Marketing Manager, Lucy Gould. “We guarantee to include a minimum of five products per box: a mix of niche, high end, mass market and cult classics. We also aim to nurture new brands wherever possible. We’re very fortunate in that the beauty industry works so quickly; you’re always looking for the new, improved, advanced and latest.”

According to Gould, subscriptions are currently maintained for an average of seven months. Among the tactics used to extend that are the inclusion of bonus products, premium limited edition collections (a recent one with NARS sold out within 27 minutes of being announced online) and a host of advice and beauty tips via the website. Glossybox is also considering the inclusion of a ‘pause button’ to allow for temporary breaks in subscription.

One reason that might become attractive is the mounting value and volume of a box’s contents. Glossybox aims for the £10 monthly subscription to accrue a minimum of £30 worth of goods; indeed, a travel size 111 Skin eye gel recently included cost more than that alone; enough to last for six weeks, says Gould.

The proliferation of boxes out there is definitely skewing the original object of the exercise, suggests Graphters’ Maxwell. “Some beauty boxes are already a selection of products on the cheap; more focused on their value than facilitating the discovery of new brands. With the market having become so competitive they need to include well-known brands and products to draw people in. Once they do then subscribers will expect something even more exciting next time.”

UK skin care brand Merumaya’s founder Maleka Dattu agrees that beauty boxes are changing their focus. “When they first came on the scene it was a really interesting way of sampling products; they were genuine samples too. Nowadays, they’re demanding quite large or even full-size products, so subscribers can end up with enough products to last them from the receipt of one box to the next. That’s hardly consistent with try before you buy.

“Chances are that a fair few subscribers are signed up for more than one box, too. I don’t know that we get enough value as suppliers from putting products in there anymore.”

Tellingly, when extending the Merumaya range Dattu is most likely to either trial with existing customers, or else benefit from the support of an influencer who has discovered the product and wants to share it with their readers.

Using a full-size product as a sample is not the only way of adding value. Roccabox, the newest entrant into the sector, is inviting a different beauty influencer to be its guest curator each month, its founder Tia Roqaa tells SPC: “Brands are assured of getting a genuine endorsement, and subscribers have greater confidence in knowing that they’re receiving

products that have been tried, tested and approved by a qualified third party.”

Underpinning the success of The Perfume Society’s discovery box has been its holistic approach to a specific type of product. In addition to an average of ten products, categorised by fragrance family and guest curated, subscribers receive a set of highly collectible ‘smelling notes’ containing a wealth of useful information and advice. A sample to purchase conversion rate of 70% confirms just what a winning formula it is, says Fairley. “We’re narrow-casting; unlike other beauty boxes, our subscribers are self-identifying as being specifically interested in perfume.

“Trying out a new scent via a discovery box is a far better way of sampling than an over the counter gift with purchase, which will never be explained by the sales staff in as much depth as we’re able to do.”

WHAT NEXT?

With beauty boxes set to remain as the most targeted sampling technique, expect to see more exclusive tie-ins with brands or individual retailers (Glossybox with Crème de la Mer and Harvey Nichols) or the media (Latest in Beauty with *You* magazine), and also more opportunities for subscribers to self-select. Conversely, niche category boxes are better positioned to push the boundaries on behalf of new brands. Meanwhile, according to The Red Tree’s Holmes, a similar refinement of focus could be applied less generically: “With the increasing interest in wellness and lifestyle, we could be seeing more beauty boxes that span different categories, such as sleep, wellness and nutrition.”

For those who avoid commission-hungry sales assistants, an innovative interactive technology from Sampling Innovations Europe could be a godsend. Simply press a button on the free-standing unit and a ticket sample of a particular fragrance is dispensed. It can even be re-sealed to share later with family and friends. In an ever more technology-dependent culture, this automated way of providing a personal service could itself be a sample of the shape of things to come ●

RATHER THAN JUST A GIFT WITH PURCHASE YOU’RE EXPLAINING TO THE CUSTOMER WHY IT MIGHT WORK FOR THEM; YOU’RE UNPICKING THAT PRODUCT FOR THEM BEFORE THEY EVEN TRY IT

Jo Fairley,
The Perfume Society

Discovery boxes have eliminated the randomness associated with sampling, but some brands, like Merumaya, prefer to trial full-sized launches with existing fans

