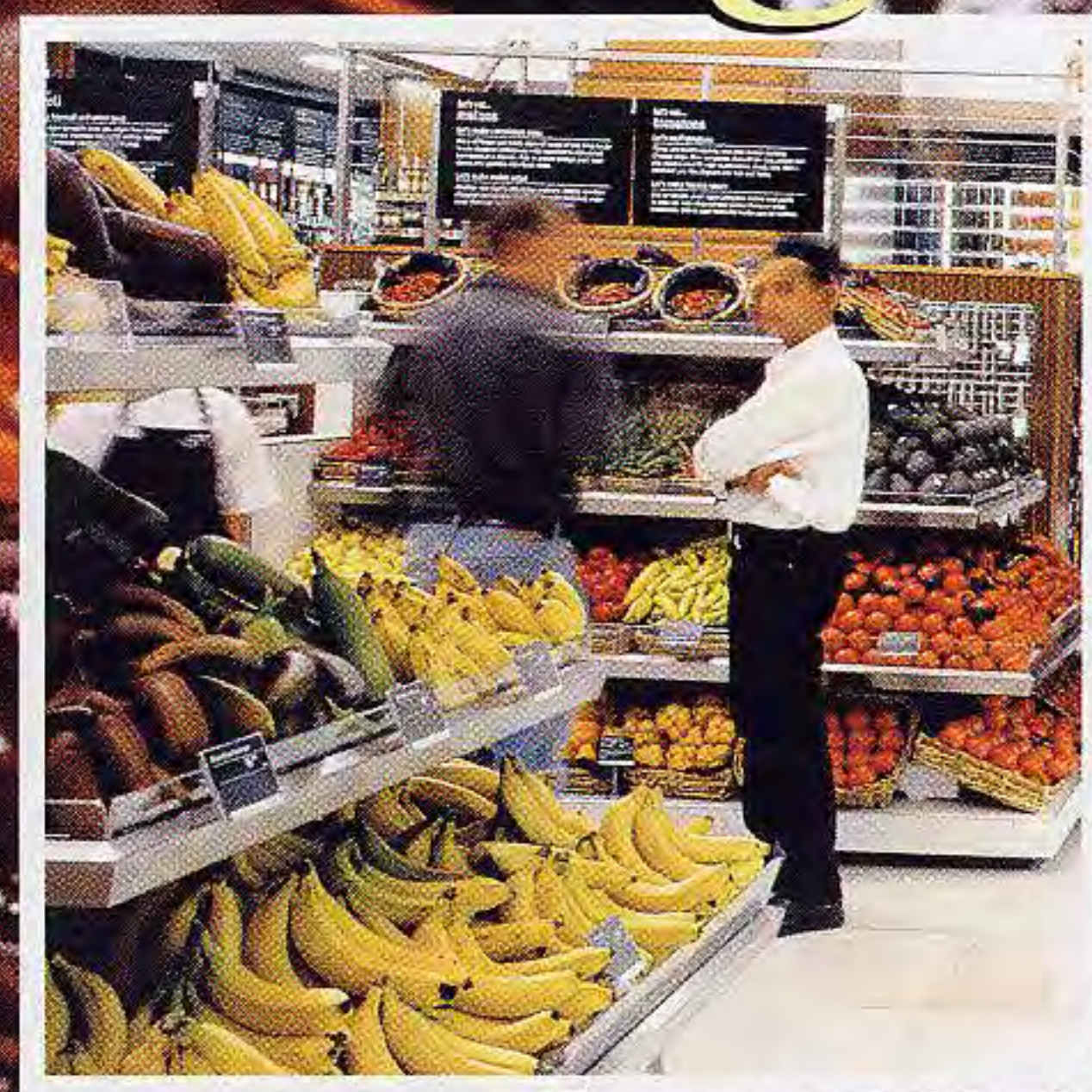
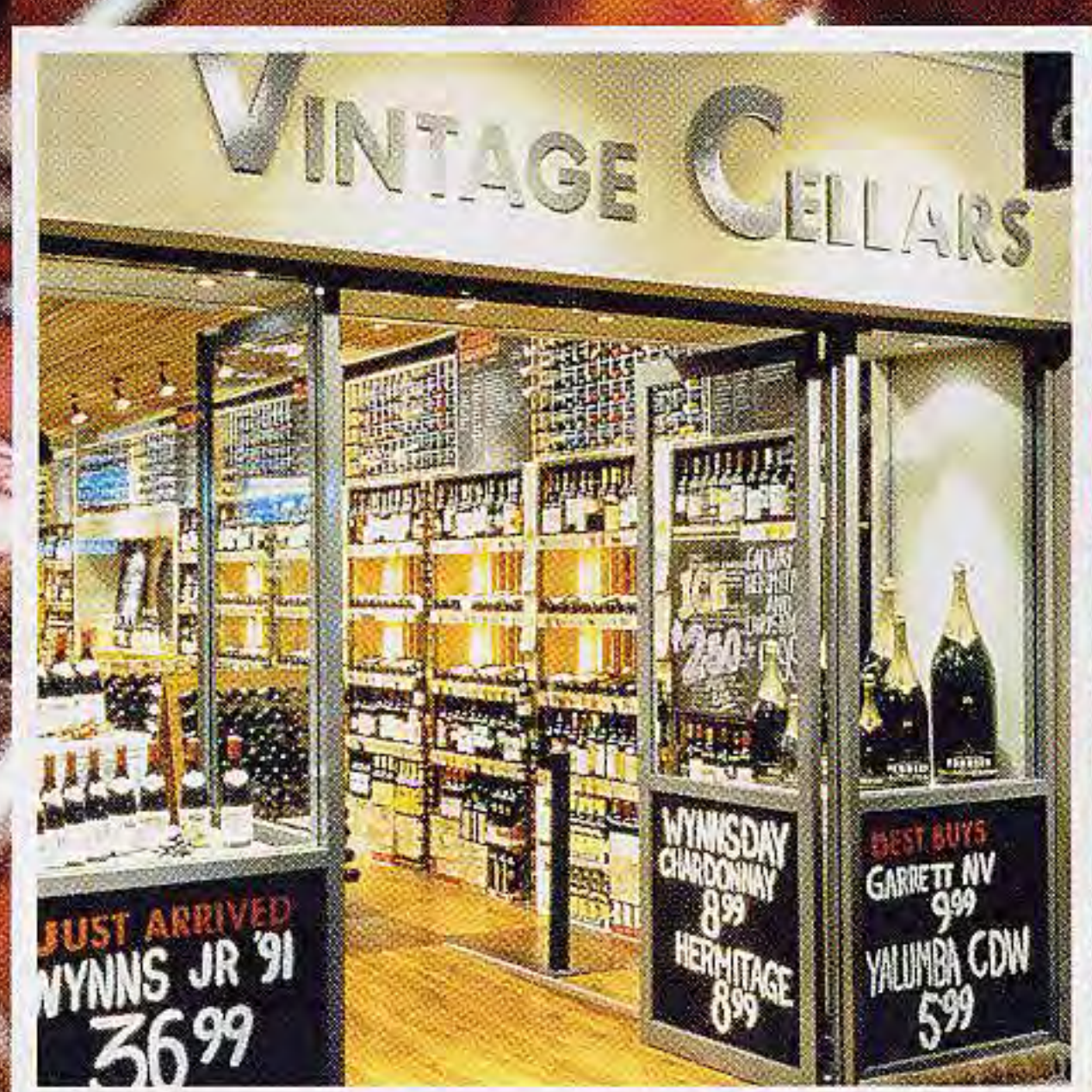


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secrets



of design

Long regarded as an add-on to the marketing mix, design is now being seen as a driver. **Mike Houghton** reports on the trends, brand building, global campaigns and lifestyle that are pushing image to the fore.

Pity the poor design consultant. It's all very well telling businesses that their IT could be handled better, or that manufacturing might be made more efficient. But criticising an organisation's much-loved logo or product packaging is like walking into someone's home and telling them you don't like their curtains – the only difference being that a set of curtains doesn't cost millions of dollars to replace.

Procter & Gamble recently awarded its \$75 million Vidal Sassoon account to Leo Burnett Connaghan & May on the basis of a pitch calling for "the complete redesign and reinvention of the brand, involving a new logo, new packaging, new advertising, even new distribution outlets (since where you find a product is just as important as looks in defining a brand)".

Yet Sassoon shot to international fame in the late 60s because his 'wash and wear' hairdos, made famous by Mia Farrow, liberated modern working women from costly and elaborate perms. His style connected with the tenor of the times.

"Over the years that social relevance has been lost," Nick Souter, Leo Burnett national creative director, admits. "But we feel we have the opportunity to reinvent the brand and regain some of those contemporary, stylish values."

Will it work? Can the ambience of a brand or retail location be successfully manufactured by design studios, ad agencies and researchers? If it's done well, the answer seems to be yes.

Take the instance of Liquorland, which, despite beefing up its wine selection, found itself lagging behind the nationwide trend towards increased wine consumption.

The solution, the company decided, was to bring in design consultant Landini Associates, which recommended the establishment of a completely new brand, Vintage Cellars.

"We designed the graphic identity of the interior and exterior of the stores, shop fittings, labels of the own-branded merchandise, staff uniforms, carry-out packaging, a wine club (which now has 100,000 members) and all point-of-sale material," says creative director Mark Landini. "It's one of the most complete pieces of design I've ever been involved in."

Five years on, there are 50 Vintage Cellars across Australia, most of them refurbished Liquorlands. Yet most customers believe Vintage Cellars to be a separate company to Liquorland.

"There's an inverted snobbery attached to wine retailing," says Landini. "The more expensive the wine you sell the more the customer wants to think that the store is owned by the operator, as opposed to a chain. For a

Strip away the design jargon and literal-minded marketers will be reassured to see a familiar marketing principle at work here. The underlying issue with Liquorland was segmentation. Rather than try to be all things to all drinkers, Liquorland recognised that its customers could be grouped into three categories.



Mark Landini, creative director, Landini Associates.

“We’re seeing the beginning of the development of a new language in which advertisers talk to consumers,” he says. “There was a time when media talked at people, lectured them, even. People today are looking for a different relationship. Even in mainstream media (eg, radio, TV, print) consumers are looking to become more personally involved by embracing advertising that leaves room for interpretation. They don’t want their conclusions to be spoon-fed to them any more.”

For example, Souter cites the recent Sony ‘Flyfishing’ and ‘Sirens’ TV commercials. These ads, he says, “give you certain clues as to the conclusions they would like you to draw but at no point are specific... The consumer is entering into a new, interactive relationship with advertising, even though they’re seeing it in a non-interactive medium.”

But what’s this got to do with design? Such advertising, Souter says, is “less focused on the brand itself than on the world in which the brand lives – it’s a more impressionistic interpretation of the brand.” And when impressions and contexts come to the fore, design rules.

Take the famous VW ads of the late 60s, consisting of a tiny line drawing, a few columns of copy and lots of white space. Or the equally-lauded Volvo ads of the 70s, showing a car and making one simple point about the way it was built. Both these campaigns were ‘designed’, but the design was subservient to the making of specific points about the product. “After we paint the car we paint the paint,” one Volvo headline ran. Nowadays, rather than being the conveyer of the message, design is becoming the message itself.

“Images are more complex,” says Souter. “The thinking used to be to present a single emblematic virtue about the car. That single-mindedness has gone, replaced by multiple images, most of which are about lifestyle.”

BOTTOM LINE BOOSTER

One upshot of the growing importance of design in the marketing mix, according to Paul Saunders, managing director of Saunders Design, is that designers are getting more ‘air time’ with marketing directors and ad agency creatives. “There’s more awareness of the strategic and business applications of design than there was even two-to-three years ago,” he says.

Marketing messages used to be devised with main media in mind, and would then filter through to below-the-line activities such as direct mail, packaging and corporate IDs. “Now,” says Saunders, “a lot of successful work is being developed below-the-line and then adopted above-the-line.”



For a wine specialist, dust on the bottles can be a plus, whereas in mainstream liquor stores dust on the bottles would be regarded as poor housekeeping.

WHO ARE YOU DESIGNING FOR?

Whether you’re designing a FMCG (fast moving consumer good) package or an entire store, it’s vital to know the state of mind of the consumer group you’re targeting (and that state of mind can change several times throughout a single shopping trip). To achieve this, many designers employ psychographic research – ie, that which measures attitudes rather than past behaviour. In the instance of wine-drinkers, Landini Associates divides liquor consumers into two types, based on the day of the week on which they shopped. ‘Steve and Shirley Special’ consume wine on weekdays with friends and family. Because they’re time-poor they choose tried-and-tested brands, and tend to buy cheaper wines because they don’t need to impress anybody. Typical weekend shoppers ‘Bob and Betty Browser’ trial new and more expensive wines, and they like information, so they can impress fellow diners with their wine knowledge.

wine specialist, dust on the bottles can be a plus, whereas in mainstream liquor stores dust on the bottles would be regarded as poor housekeeping.”

In fact, strip away the design jargon and literal-minded marketers will be reassured to see a familiar marketing principle at work here. The underlying issue with Liquorland was segmentation. Rather than try to be all things to all drinkers, Liquorland recognised that its customers could be grouped into three categories.

Now, mainstream customers have Liquorland-branded stores refurbished with what Landini refers to as a “Year 2000” look; wine-buyers have Vintage Cellars, with its bare boards and wooden racks; and dedicated wine hoarders have Quaffer’s Liquor Market, a ‘destination store’ specialising in low prices and high volumes. According to Landini, the sales increase across the Liquorland group has been ‘astronomical’.

THE NEW LANGUAGE OF DESIGN

Speaking of the principles behind his work, Nick Souter invokes ‘interactivity’, a term he extends beyond interactive new media such as the internet, to encompass the way consumers interact with all media.

Which isn't surprising if Saunders' figures are correct. He cites research showing that:

- Three percent of consumers remember one or more ads in the previous day's newspaper
- Ten percent remember what they read
- Twenty percent remember what they heard
- Fifty percent remember what they saw.

Another reason for the raised status of design is that today's notoriously sceptical consumer reacts more adversely than ever if a product fails to live up to its hype.

"There is now more focus on delivering something, on making sure the experience is not a disappointment," says Saunders.

In this context, Saunders argues, the design of a product can be counted among its benefits – it's part of the sausage, not the sizzle.

However, at a time when business is increasingly recognising design's profit-making potential, both Saunders and Landini believe Australian design awards fail to give the bottom line its due.

"The problem with most (Australian) design awards," says Saunders, "is that it's the industry looking at itself and not paying much regard to the application and effectiveness of the work. Consequently, they (Australian design awards) tend to be cosmetically driven."

THE GRAPHIC DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

If you really want to speak a language well, practise it with a native. If you want to learn Italian, find yourself an Italian. Go to Italy. If you want to learn the language of design, don't talk to sales, don't talk to the marketing department – talk to a designer.

What is design language? Has anyone ever tried to explain to you what it is graphic designers do – what they're good at? Apart from some talk about computer programs, layouts, photography and printing, probably never!

The misconception still exists that graphic designers produce effective work by learning to speak the language of their clients. Learning to speak like insurance agents and bankers? Learning to speak like electronics manufacturers? As if by emulation or by trying to fathom the intricate workings of a field someone else spends 12 hours a day and half a lifetime to master one can also become competent at producing a better piece of design and therefore a better piece of communication! Granted that a designer does need to acquire a certain level of understanding of the business of their clients – it's obvious – what actually is it that designers have those clients pay fees for?

First you have to get the craft side of the industry out of the way. Graphic designers know how to use the relevant software packages. They know how to mock up packs, magazine spreads and web sites. They understand printing techniques. Some have good colour sense or just this uncanny ability to make things look good. But what else is it that comes with the crafting and styling?

THINK OF A VISUAL LANGUAGE – OR A LANGUAGE OF OBJECTS AND IMAGES

What we need to do is stop thinking about graphic design communication as simply a craft (using computers or ink on paper – both are crafts) or as simply communication with picture-illuminated text (it's much more). Just as writers have an affinity for the language of words the people found in graphic design firms have a deep affinity for a language of objects and the values contained with them – the emotive power of a certain image, the beans-ness of a can of beans, the subtle allusions of a particular colour used in just the right way or the implications of the texture of the covering on a chair in a photograph – it doesn't matter. It's a language. It's emotive. And it forms opinions fast. It's also an area where style (anathema to some) becomes inextricably entwined with content.

With few exceptions, all first experiences of a commercial entity are gained indirectly, through print, television or the net. All these media require design, so you might as well use someone who understands the evocative language needed to bridge the gap in understanding between your product and the person you want to buy it. Graphic designers use and understand the evocative and powerful language of image. A visual language. Or alternatively, a language of objects.

Courtesy of Nelmes Smith Ashton



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– Paul Saunders, managing director of Saunders Design

