
Evolution of the Clamshell

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Sex toy manufacturers and retailers are faced with a new challenge as a new demographic of consumers emerges: Produce and sell toys that appeal to the women and couples of Generation X and Y.

Gen X-ers and Y-ers are keenly focused on technology, but packaging is what grabs their attention. And the competition for toys is getting stiffer. With so many vibrators, cock rings and condoms on the market, consumers need a good reason to buy one product over another.

Some toy companies are even turning to gimmicks. For example, the Cream Vibrator comes in a milk container; it's kitschy, discreet, edgy and artistic, taking the sleaziness out of buying a sex toy.

Toy manufacturers are hard at work using branding and aesthetics to their advantage. A prime example of this would be NJoy's Eleven. This 2¾ lb., 11-inch hollow, steel dildo with sculpted heads on each end comes in a premium, high-grade leather bag with concealed magnetic closures. It's said to be one of the finest packages ever made for a sex toy, which would help explain its \$300 price tag. The Eleven also marks the redesign of NJoy's packaging; prior to the design overhaul, its products came in a wood-composite box made of all-natural materials.

"We don't do things halfway," NJoy co-founder Greg DeLong says. "A cardboard box wouldn't have done this justice. Sure, we could have sold it with a lesser package, but that's not the point of the Eleven. We are striving for a new paradigm to deliver a finished, branded product."

There is no competition for this toy; it's a niche market and generally found in glass cases of boutique sex shops. NJoy's goal isn't to sell thousands but to create a unique product that will bring a pleasurable experience to women and couples. The Eleven is very discreet; it can go under your bed, in a drawer, be tucked in your purse or be carried as a high-end purse. The package is eco-friendly and won't end up in the trash like the traditional disposable plastic packaging. The packaging could very well outlast the toy.

Topco Sales, an industry leader in the toy market for 35 years, has become more eco-friendly with its packaging. Committed to green, Topco has reduced the size of its packaging and now sells products in disposable clamshells embossed with the Topco logo.

"We understand the importance of being environmentally conscious and the responsibility we have as one of the world's largest novelty manufacturers," says Desiree Duffie, director of marketing and public relations for Topco Sales. "This will help shed a positive light on the adult toy industry as a whole." The move definitely appeals to the company's environmentally conscious consumers: Topco has seen an increase in sales with its new packaging.

The new generation of toy buyers is curious about sex and the props that go with it. There has been a huge surge in sales for S&M kink toys and products. And companies like Spartacus Enterprises are looking to capitalize on bringing bondage into the bedroom, making it less taboo and more mainstream. Spartacus recently spent a great deal of time and money redesigning its packaging to make it couples- friendly. The new packaging is more inviting, with bright colors, intriguing design elements and transparent clamshell styles.

"The goal of our packaging is to hook the customer in visually, so they'll stop, take a closer look and appreciate the quality of the items," says Alice Beckett, a Spartacus sales and marketing associate. The company also has added sexy models and more product information to its packaging. The result has been couples feeling more comfortable to try new sexual realms — and a sharp sales increase.

There is a demand for high-tech toys, of course, but price seems to always be a barrier. Affordable high-tech toys that use simple, stylish packaging as their branding can only result in bringing pleasure more mainstream, and the OhMiBod music-powered vibe priced at \$69 has done just that.

Building on the huge success of the iPod, this vibe plugs into an iPod and pulsates/ vibes to music. Packaged in a bright pink sack with the OhMiBod white logo, the vibe comes complete with a pink garter, soft skin sleeve and a splitter that allows you to plug the vibe and your headphones into your iPod. You can even download songs at iTunes.

Owner Suki Dunham spent eight years working for Apple and understands the importance of packaging. "We spent almost as much time focusing on our packaging as we did on our product design," she says. "We tried to make the packaging

approachable and the experience of opening the box a fun process."

The goal of the OhMiBod was to make the customer comfortable, like they were buying an accessory for an iPod. And with pages on MySpace and Facebook along with a YouTube presence, the OhMiBod line of vibes has gotten a lot of attention from consumers and wholesalers.

Selection and product displays in brick-and-mortar stores are traditional ways of selling toys and definitely still hold water. Castle Megastores has 16 stores in Arizona, New Mexico, Washington and Oregon and a new store opening soon in Fairbanks, Alaska. Its Phoenix flagship store is the largest adult store in the country with 18,000 square feet; President and CEO Mark Franks, refers to it as "the mother of all selection."

Castle buys virtually every product made by every manufacturer. But if an item doesn't sell or has too high of a price point, the stores won't carry it. And of course, packaging is important to sales.

"Decent packaging with aggressive price points drive sales," Franks says. Elements of good toy packaging include a product list of materials, features on the box and point-of-sale marketing: phallic/non-phallic, hard, soft, waterproof, multiple speeds, batteries and kudos/rave reviews from magazines.

Packaging also affects how merchandise is displayed in Franks' stores. Odd-shaped and small items don't do well and are hard to display, he says. And having a porn star on the package doesn't equal sales; with performers seeking high royalties on their products, the price of the toys they endorse are higher than the average product. If customers can find a generic toy that's \$10 or \$15 cheaper, they will buy it.

And specialty toys like the Eleven don't do well in Castle Megastores; their customer base is 55-60 percent women and couples. Niche items don't do well because their clientele wants to get in, buy what they need and have little conversation to reveal things about their personal lives.

Retailers also are beginning to understand that it's not just selection but the environment that sells a toy. With 15 years of experience under its belt, Babeland has capitalized on giving the customers a comfortable, hands-on experience. Toys are displayed out of their packaging on glass shelves and in their flirty, whimsical window displays.

"We believe that feeling and touching a toy before you buy allows you a better perspective on something they are going to be using intimately," buyer Alicia Relles says. Models of every toy are on display with batteries, so customers can turn them on, feel the vibrations and know how they will perform once they get them home.

Additionally, Babeland's salespeople — whom the company calls Sex Educators — share information with everyone who walks through the door. And if a customer's question isn't answered when shopping, the store conducts classes and seminars in all of its stores. Babeland also has a huge online presence. Its site has tons of product reviews and detailed descriptions, so a customer won't feel bad about dropping \$185 for SaSi vibe.

Technology, branding and exciting packaging are leading the evolution of the clamshell. Gone are the days of packaging that's not flashy, informative or original. Catching the attention of the buyer through packaging is a trend that should be around for some time.

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