

MAKING PACKAGING WORK ONLINE:



5 PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

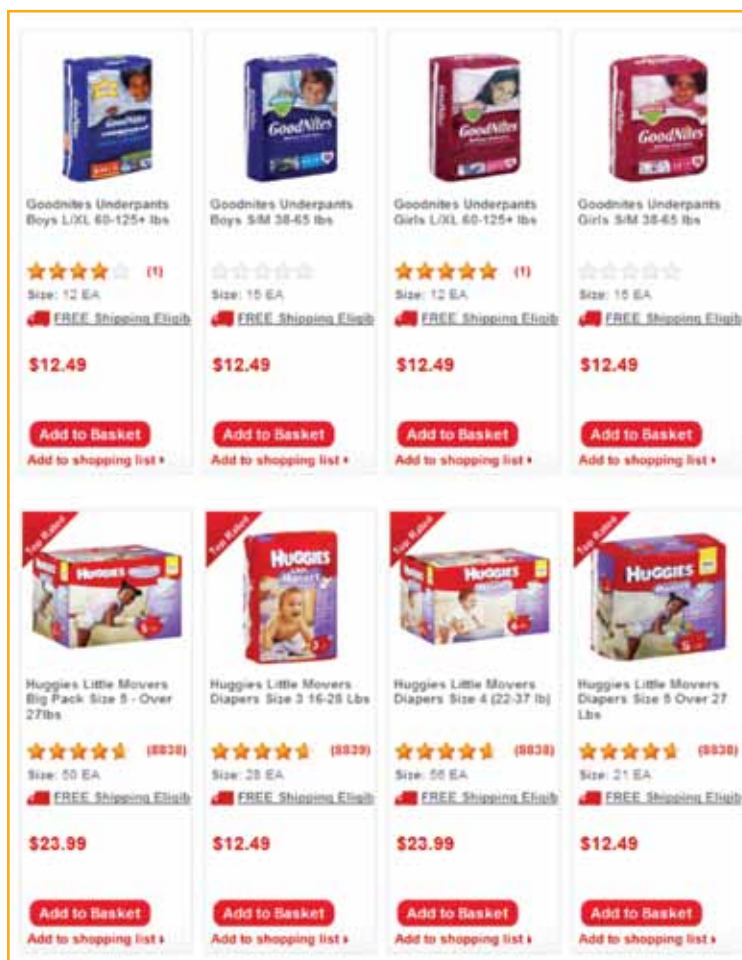
By Jonathan Asher

“How does our packaging look and work online?” It is a question that we’re hearing more often from our clients, in categories ranging from diapers to dog food. And certainly, it is a relevant issue, given the growing impact of Web-based shopping — and shoppers’ increasing tendencies to do “homework” online prior to visiting the store.

➤ PACKAGING’S ROLE IN ONLINE SHOPPING

With that thought in mind, Perception Research Services (PRS) recently conducted a series of in-depth interviews to observe and discuss online shopping for health and beauty products (such as vitamins, OTC medications, cosmetics, and hair and skincare products). The research process included using PRS Mobile Eye-Tracking to document what these shoppers did — including what they saw and missed — as they went through typical online shopping trips. Afterward, we conducted follow-up interviews to better understand their thoughts and reactions.

➤ **Online shoppers typically rely on package thumbnails for brand identification and product confirmation, as they sort through a range of product options.**

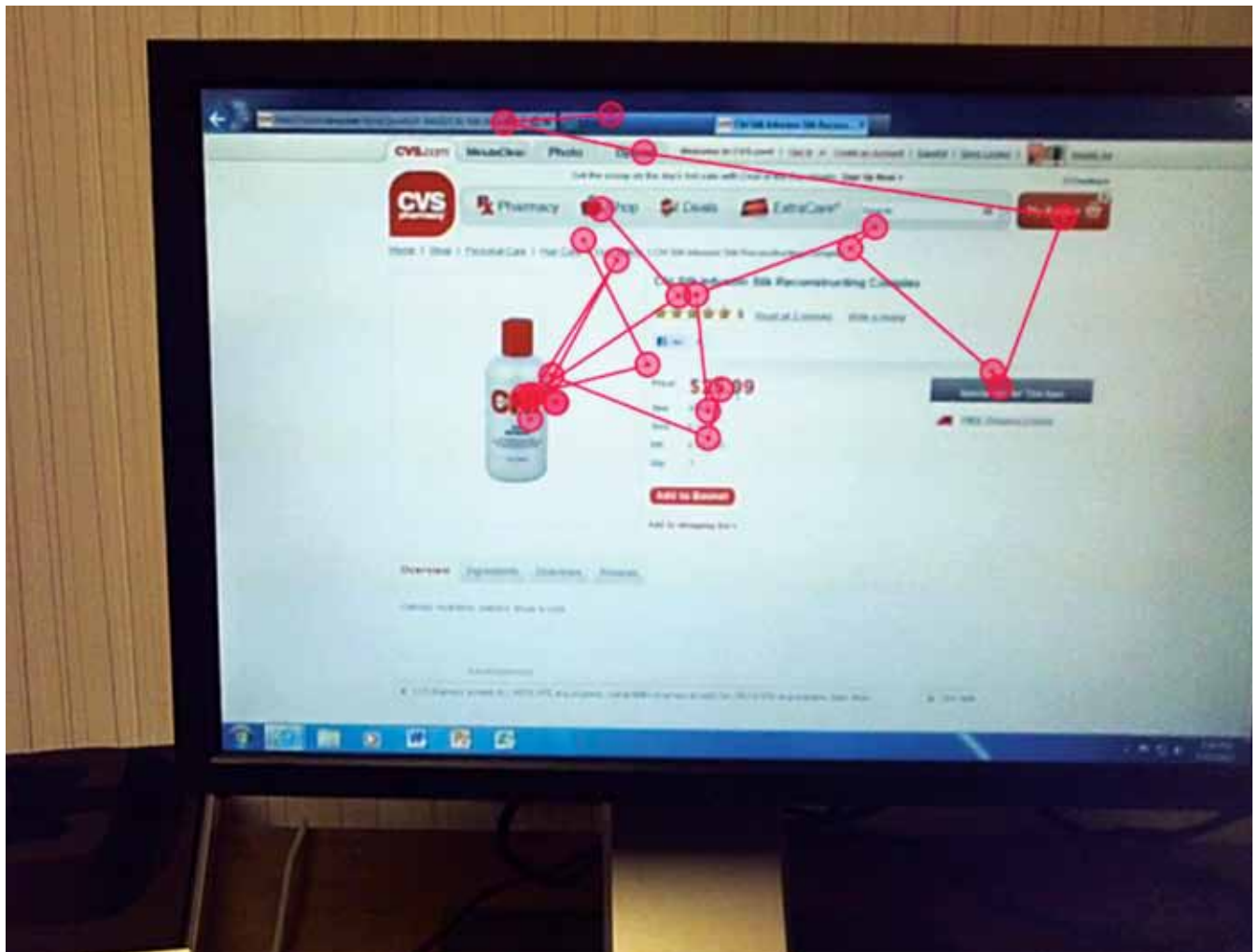


Overall, we found that packaging plays a very important role in the Web-based shopping experience, albeit in ways that vary somewhat from the brick-and-mortar world. This is due to several key factors:

1. The different stages of the Web-based shopping experience

Web-based shopping has several distinct phases (search and “de-selection,” product comparison/selection, confirmation and fulfillment) that place different demands on packaging.

- In nearly all cases, the package is a vital tool in the search and “de-selection” process, as initial searches inevitably lead to a myriad of items to consider — and online shoppers usually rely on packaging images for brand identification and product confirmation.
- Later, once shoppers form a smaller consideration set, the package also plays a central role in product and brand comparisons, which often take place across screens and/or websites. While the Web allows for additional information delivery (beyond the pack), our eye-tracking research reveals that shoppers typically rely on the pack for feature and benefit communication.
- Once shoppers place a product in an online shopping cart, we see them frequently double-checking the pack to confirm correct product selection, prior to the final purchase.
- Finally, with online shopping, packaging also plays an important role in the fulfillment process. When the product arrives at home, the package reassures the shopper that it is genuine (not a knockoff). Thus, in addition to providing



+ Eye-tracking research reveals that most online shoppers rely on the package visual as the primary source for feature and benefit communication, as they consider and compare products online.

+ **Packaging also plays an important role in the fulfillment process, as it can provide brand reassurance and add value through additional information, product samples and/or promotions.**

product protection, the outer shipping container can be valuable as a branding and marketing vehicle. In fact, it can also add value to the online shopping experience by sharing additional information, product samples, etc.

2. *The lack of shelf context*

In some ways, the package may be more critical online, because there's a more level playing field than in physical stores: Both big and small brands are typically represented by one SKU — and larger brands find it harder to create billboards that dominate shoppers' attention and become self-fulfilling in maintaining their category leadership.

In addition, because Web-based shoppers typically see only one SKU at a time (rather than a larger brand at shelf), they often struggle to find a particular variant within a line (form, formulation, scent, etc.). In fact, we find that some shoppers simply purchase the first variant they encounter, without realizing it isn't their usual variety.

3. *The lack of tactile interaction*

Because shoppers can't physically pick up packages — and small packages often look similar to larger ones in an online context — shoppers have difficulty gauging product quantity, particularly when quantity information is not always readily apparent. Predictably, this sometimes leads to price/value concerns, as shoppers focus on price alone.

> FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR ONLINE SUCCESS

Given the uniqueness of the online shopping context, marketers and designers will be well-served to keep several core objectives in mind as they develop and adapt their packaging for the Web:

1. **Foster brand recognition.** Create a distinctive and memorable set of visual equities, via the package shape, color and/or graphic elements, to foster immediate brand recognition online.
2. **Support a quality impression.** Utilize high-resolution digital images of the package, to promote a quality brand/product



impression. Also, remember to display the packaging (primary and/or secondary) that is most important to shoppers.

3. **Clearly convey quantity.** Use simple and legible copy, particularly related to size/quantity, to ensure the right price/value perception.
4. **Facilitate product comparisons.** Find ways to quickly show the relevant product range, so as to help shoppers pick the right product for them.
5. **Add value with the shipper.** Use the outer container to provide brand reassurance and add value at the fulfillment stage.

By following these principles and understanding the online shopper, companies can help avoid potential barriers to purchase, create stronger synergy between online and in-store efforts, and position themselves to “win at retail” in this growing channel. **BP**

Jonathan Asher is executive vice president at Perception Research Services International (www.prsresearch.com), a company that conducts more than 800 studies annually to help marketers “win at retail.” He can be reached at jasher@prsresearch.com or 201-720-2724.