





*Andy Warhol* THE WARHOL COLLECTION

new idea spreads from one consumer to the next. Theories abound on the mechanics of diffusion, with Everett Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory being a much-accepted one. (First proposed in the 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*, this theory has been widely published and discussed. A quick web search will bring up numerous commentaries.)

### **HOW TRENDS WORK IN PACKAGING**

Because packaging is so closely linked to consumer preferences, it provides a clear way to evaluate the stages of various trends. It is here that trends are transformed into functional applications—they help sell products. However, package design is also where the adoption of a trend can get complicated. If you are too early, you can miss your target consumer. Too late, and it's seen as old news. So visual trends need to be applied with careful consideration of the product's brand and its promise. Does the trend actually fit the brand and will it attract the right buyer?

In packaging, trends tend to grow slowly, because there are longer lead times in product development cycles. We see early adopters and influencers coming from small start-up brands that have less at risk, while it may take years before big brands catch on to a trend. When we see large brands begin to use specific trends, we know it is a trend that is toward the top of the bell curve. Within the marketplace it can be challenging to pick out new and emerging trends, as there are many different stages of a trend's lifecycle. Also, consumers are at different stages of acceptance within the bell curve of a trend, so it's vital to understand the products' consumers. You must learn the buying habits of specific target audiences in order to better understand their comfort zone and how far the packaging can stretch to motivate a purchase. It's about knowing how far the brand you are designing for can be pushed.

### **HOW DESIGNERS CAN HARNESS TRENDS**

Designers must understand what motivates and establishes visual trends. For the most part, these concepts are directly influenced by the environment and societal attitudes and beliefs. Emerging artists, underground music, fashion, the internet and small theater companies provide fertile ground to view what will be tomorrow's visual trends, and although they may ultimately look different in later commercial applications, their roots can be traced back to these origins. These movements are typically five years ahead of the mainstream, and are dependent largely on the pace of a subculture and how extreme the trend may seem. The recent rise of Pop Art and Lowbrow Art in advertising and packaging grew in popularity for years before appearing within mainstream brands like Target, Banana Republic and Coca-Cola. The resulting awareness and fresh artistic flare have given these brands a boost in popularity ... along with helping to move the associated visual trends up the bell curve.

Knowing about and watching these movements turn into trends is not enough to bring success; brands need to understand when and why to use a visual trend. As packaging designers, it is

our job to entertain, influence, inform and motivate the purchase experience. To do this effectively we must have a strong sense of what cultural, social and political trends are influencing society at large, as well as being able to discern how these things are affecting our target consumer.

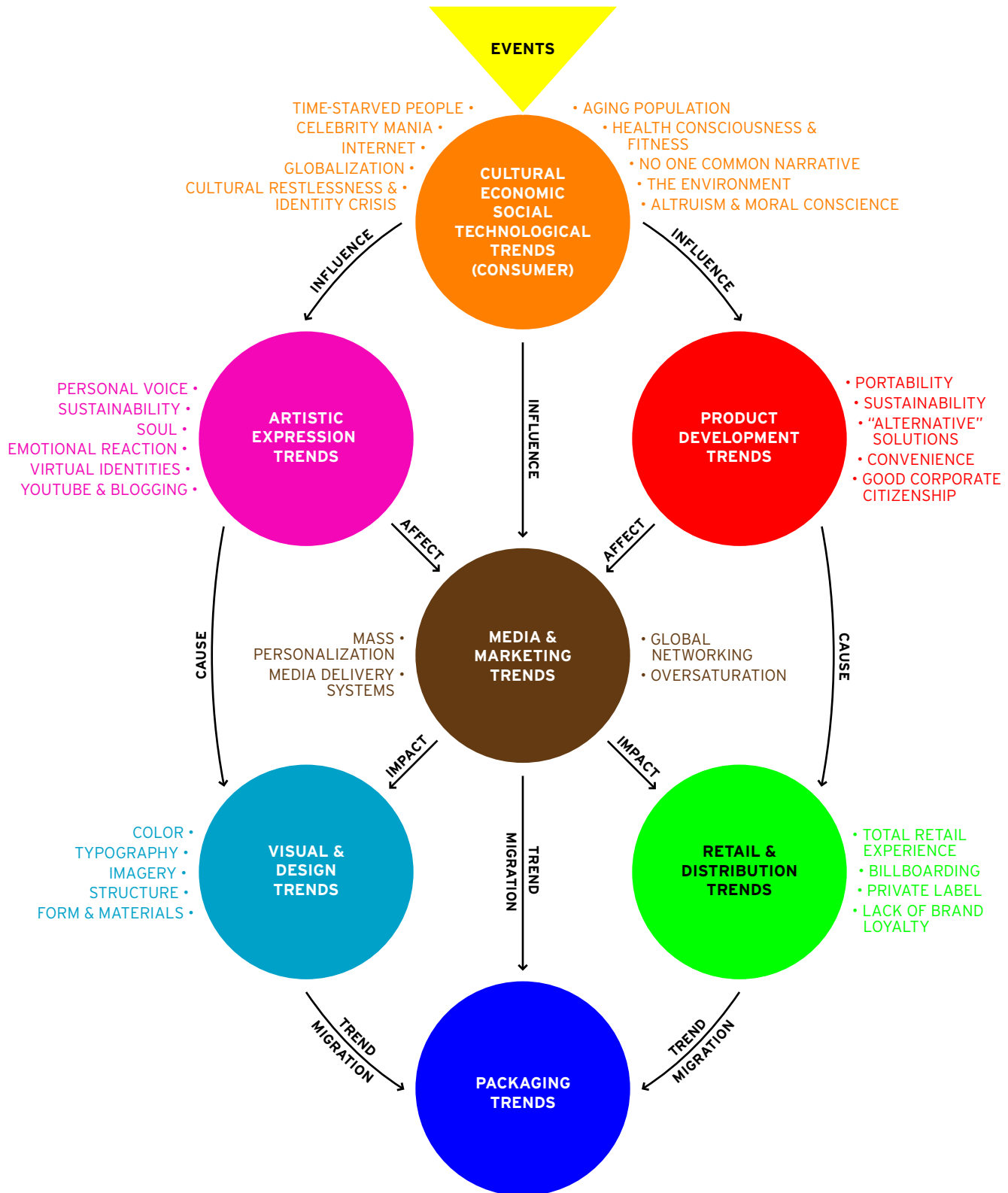
We clearly saw a visual shift after 9/11. For example, car design became more protective, presenting power images through bold, strong design, as seen in the Hummer and Chrysler 300. Popular movies centered on larger-than-life heroes like Spiderman, Fantastic 4 and Superman. Our culture seems to be obsessed with the unknown and supernatural powers as we try to deal with an enemy we can't see: terrorism. Small indulgences and simple pleasures became popular, reflecting our unease about the future. Portability of food and personal items are more important now—is this due to our busy lives or a need to be ready to run away at a moment's notice? With such uncertainty in the air, we have come to look for simple pleasures in everything we buy. We want to be surprised, entertained; in a way, you could say—even with everything at our fingertips—that we are bored. We desire a simpler life, and so are attracted to products and brands that help us slow down.

Environmental concerns have given life to the sustainability or green movement, which hopefully is more than a simple trend and will mean real behavioral changes affecting all aspects of packaging. Consumers are more aware of materials and the waste that packaging creates. Wal-Mart has gotten into the game, establishing a scorecard rating system that assigns each product a number evaluating its effect on the environment. More people understand the idea of a carbon footprint and are questioning how many resources it takes to bring something to market.

### **SOME TRENDS DESIGNERS CAN USE**

In evaluating packaging and spotting trends, we have to keep in mind that designers are working with a consistent palette of tools that can be viewed as trendsetting in themselves. This palette includes color, typography, imagery, structure, form and materials. Any one of these design elements can be a means of expressing a trend.

For the purpose of this article, we have defined a set of 10 trends in packaging. The 10 trends are influenced by a larger set of strategic issues that grow out of a variety of consumer, artistic, business and media trends (see chart on page XX). In evaluating and selecting the 10 trends shaping packaging on a global scale, we searched for patterns and reviewed examples regularly spoken about in high-level marketing meetings at large consumer product companies. This is encouraging because more and more clients are recognizing the strong effect great packaging can have on purchase intent. Not surprisingly, we see store brands or private-label products embracing new trends more readily than the large global brands. This has given rise to consumers involving themselves with store brands more readily, as they feel the packaging is entertaining and engaging. Knowing that design has made the difference is something all designers can use to argue in favor of our industry.



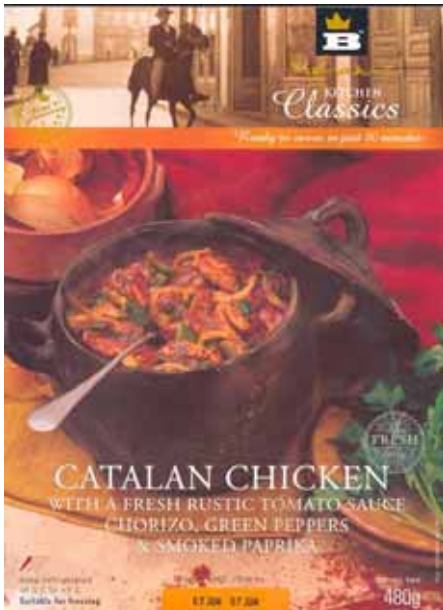
# 10 GLOBAL PACKAGING TRENDS

Breaking rules and thinking differently are how future trends are born. As designers, it is our job to push ourselves and our clients to look past tired solutions and realize that engaging creative can and does have an effect on the bottom line. We live in a world of very astute consumers who are increasingly design savvy. They have seen it all and desire to be captivated. It is our role to be aware of trends on the cutting edge. Whether we are in the early stages or moving the acceptance of a trend into mass appeal, we need to be cognizant of our responsibilities to our clients and use trends that best exemplify the essence of the brand and its target consumer. Remember, these 10 packaging trends are a guide for you to create and develop new trends, because—as noted earlier—once a trend is visible in packaging, it tends to be well on its way to mass public consciousness.

## 1 GREEN

This trend spread very quickly and has caused a lot of concern among all brands, because it affects all aspects of a package—from materials to shipping to reuse through recycling. The growth of the “buy local” movement has emerged as an associated trend; there tend to be fewer resources used in bringing local products to market. Is there a Green look? Visually it is seen in a variety of ways, from obviously earthy materials to simple containers that use less material. This trend is about being honest and truthful regarding your motives. In his book *The Ecology of Commerce*, Paul Hawken brings up the fact that companies have to come to the realization that recycling and waste management is good for business. It has taken more than 10 years for Hawken’s ideas to reach widespread acceptance. Green is about treading lightly on the earth, and to many consumers it’s a lifestyle.





## 2 STORYTELLING

Understanding the origin of a product gives the product more credibility—not to mention the fact that, as humans, we connect to stories and remember them. This is very powerful in establishing a relationship with a brand and its product. The Storytelling trend has grown from using snippets of company or product stories on the backs of packaging to printing these tales directly on the front of the package: The story has become part of the design. Narrative copy is an engaging and entertaining vehicle to slow consumers down and emotionally involve them with a package. Once a connection is made, the products become irresistible.



### 3 LIGHTHEARTED WHIMSY

Packaging is meant to inform and communicate details and benefits about the product it contains. Early packaging did just that. In fact many of these old packages are refreshing to look at, because they are so clear and concise—they were simple. But simple can also mean boring or clinical in feel. When a brand has personality, it is engaging, captivating and fun for the buyer. Taking the notion one step further, we see brands injecting the lighthearted. A bit of fanciful humor (often quaint) brings an element of entertainment to packaging in a way that gives consumers a reason to believe in the product. Whimsy can charm even the most cynical and jaded consumer. We know that people have to shop, so why not bring customers a sense of the unexpected?





## 4 BOLD EXPRESSION

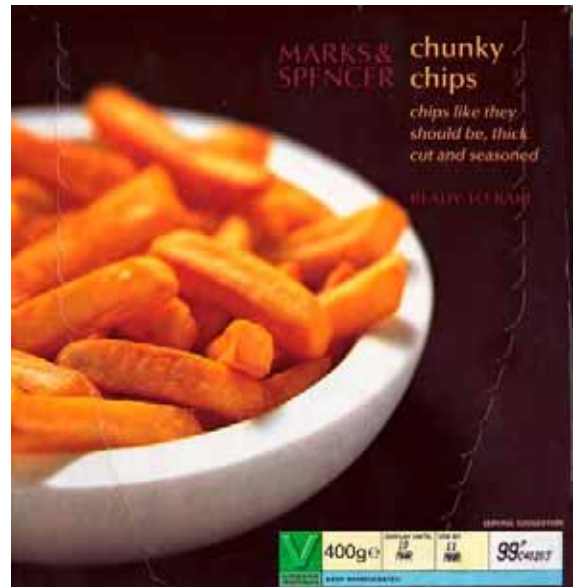
Bold expression has its roots in Pop Art. You'll also see this aesthetic mixed with the feel of comic books. This trend has a bold look and presents itself uniquely on-shelf. Colors are very bright and sometimes used in conjunction with a black line trapping the shapes depicted. There has been a trend towards simplicity, because it is the dream of so many designers to make things seem clean and less cluttered. But instead of clinical austerity, we see simple high-impact boldness on the rise. The practice is especially applicable to specific product types that need a look of strength. Another great use of the trend is in product categories that are highly cluttered, with far too many SKUs.





# 5 SHOW DON'T TELL

Too often product packaging is trying too hard to sell you, with copy listing every feature and benefit. Often consumers are left confused by all the information. The Show Don't Tell trend is one that focuses on the product itself and not the brand (the brand is there, but not in your face). The packaging shows you why you should buy this product by romancing the product. This can be done through the use of photography that connotes a mood or feeling about the product, or the focus can be on the benefit buyers get from the product. This trend is an offshoot of the idea of simplicity. Its use in packaging has steadily grown and continues to demonstrate its value, moving up the bell curve and being adopted by many large store brands.



# 6 HANDMADE

Along with the desire to simplify our lives, more and more we seek everyday pleasures and indulgences. Handmade products are seen as special, and many people will pay more for them. But to do so, consumers need to be convinced of their authentic quality. The packaging of these products has incorporated design that is more tactile in effect, while looking hand drawn. This is especially evident in the typography and imagery employed. The packaging conveys that this is a product made just for you, as if it is one of a kind. Handmade is a move away from mass-produced and a step toward the human touch.





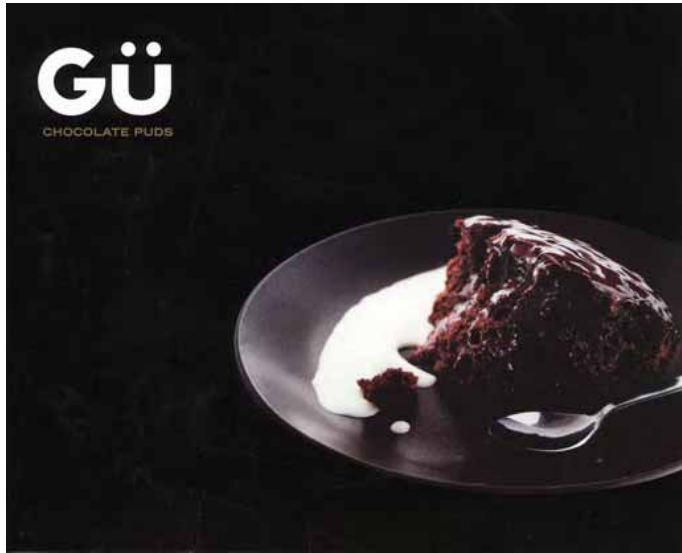
## 7 LIFESTYLE

This trend you could say has been overused in advertising for years, but within packaging it has been avoided. The focus of the trend is on the brand and product benefits. The packaging shows—literally with photos, or figuratively with illustration—the product in use. It is often intended to stimulate an aspirational motive in the buyer. In Europe especially, there is an increase in showing people enjoying and experiencing the product. The effect is achieved in a variety of ways, including showing consumers using the product as well as its affect on consumers after use. The message is that just by purchasing these products, consumers will feel a bit closer to achieving a certain lifestyle.



**8** **BORROWING FROM THE PAST**  
This trend is used to create a feeling and speaks to the prospective buyer's emotional past. We have seen this done through music in Gap ads, and it is the reason '60s iconography is used in products like Izze—as a style, it speaks to our senses and revives positive experiences from our past. Of course, nostalgia and using ideas from the past isn't really new, but the part of the past we are borrowing from can and often does change. The trend is not exactly retro, meaning the complete use of old designs; rather, it picks up specific elements and morphs them to create a more contemporary feel for today's consumer.





## 9 LESS IS MORE

For years we have heard the phrase “Less Is More” bandied about by the design community. Simplicity is often both a designer’s and a consumer’s dream—it makes so many things easy and more compelling. Within the packaging world, this approach has come to imply a quiet elegance, an uncluttered freedom from gratuitous embellishment and a focus on conveying only key ideas. It’s a luxurious plainness. Many big brands have been adopting this trend, proving it effective in selling everything from food to electronics. This year we see additional variations in the idea of simplicity in association with Lighthearted and Show Don’t Tell.



# 10 FREE EXPRESSION

This trend involves the use of “free” artistic expression placed on packaging that is an integral part of global multimedia marketing campaigns. This trend is much more readily shown than described, but seeks to capture an exuberant creativity that surprises and delights younger consumers. It’s often an irreverent take on the product’s traditional heritage—all of which works to avoid overt branding, and appeal emotionally to the media-savvy and cynical, overwhelmed young buyer. This trend acknowledges creativity as a driving force: letting the art speak freely without interrupting the brand or product benefits.

