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'We need more  
packaging, not less'

# Lars Wallentin, an innovative packaging and global designer

LARS WALLENTIN IS REGARDED AS ONE OF THE LEADING PACKAGING DESIGNERS IN THE WORLD. DURING HIS 40 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY, HE HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE DESIGN SOLUTIONS FOR BRANDS SUCH AS NESTLÉ, NESCAFÉ, MAGGI, BUITONI, NESQUIK OR KITKAT. WE SPOKE TO HIM ABOUT SOME OF THE RECENT HAPPENINGS WITH PACKAGING INNOVATIONS.

## What is your definition of innovative packaging?

Innovative packaging has many different characteristics. Let's start with the simplest one: it has to look good. It's all about aesthetics. It's about creativity: it has to be different. It's about ecology: what do you do with the package afterwards. It's about ergonomics: you need to be able to handle it properly. It's about the five senses and it's about the selling effect: if it doesn't sell then it is art, not good packaging. And packaging has a lot to do with communication: the consumer has to understand instantly what the product is about.

I think these are the main areas that you have to think of when you develop new and innovative packaging.

## What have been the biggest changes in the world of packaging since you have been in the business?

When I came into the business in 1962 from Sweden, I was very much influenced by glass, paper, cardboard and metal. The plastics industry had just started. Today, I think it's all about plastic. People want to see what they buy – so transparency has become a big 'buying' factor and plastic is a good solution for that.

Plastic is not only transparent, it is light too, can be recycled or incinerated and of course, with the new printing technologies, you can print everything very beautifully on it.

## Which countries or regions are leading in terms of innovative packaging?

When it comes to material and creativity, our friends from Japan are far ahead. However, this packaging can be too expensive and not used in the Western world. So forget that for a moment.

England is very creative within the sophisticated retailer market. But they have been overtaken recently by France. Brazilians also come very high up as they have little tradition in packaging, and therefore they are more creative.

Another country that has developed recently in terms of innovative packaging is Sweden. They've become very creative while they were not creative ten years ago.

The US is definitely not leading the innovation of packaging. There is too much legislation in the US that kills creativity.

This means in a nutshell: if you want to learn something about innovative package design today, you need to look to England, France, Scandinavia and you should try to make a jump to Japan.

## What do you see as the biggest challenge to the packaging industry?

The challenge to the packaging industry is being able to work together instead of fighting each other saying that cardboard is better than plastic or the other way around. We need more packaging, good packaging and not less. As you know people still have a very negative opinion of packaging, despite saving billions thanks to good packaging in the Western world.

The real challenge for the packaging industry is to try to explain to the public and the industry that it's very often a combination of materials like plastic, cardboard, metal and others that bring the solution. I still see them fighting

each other, and this is not good for the future.

## What is the consumer's role in packaging innovation?

The consumer's role is next to nothing. When Steve Jobs created the iMac and iPod, he didn't need the consumer. He had a vision. If you ask the consumers what they want, they will tell you that they need everything but cannot define it.

## How do packaging trends vary and where will future trends come from?

Trends will depend on how sophisticated a market is. The trend in England with its retailers is that packaging has to be funny. Then you can go to the other extreme that is China, which is at this moment ten years behind – here the packaging is very busy. But watch out! The Chinese are moving at the speed of light. I can tell you, in five years' time I will go to China to learn about packaging design. They have new printing machines, the most up-to-date equipment and they have an ever-growing customer base.

In the US – where trends originated from many years ago – I have not seen many new trends starting because of their approach to packaging design and their legislation. I think the new trends will come from England, France and, maybe in five years' time, they will come from Greater China.

## Looking to the future, how do you see packaging design changing?

Packaging design is evolving very well today on the technical side. This is mainly due to how we use raw materials. Right now we are moving towards thinner films, thinner aluminum and more standardized packaging. One thing that will lead in the next five years is the whole ecological question. However, in terms of communication we stand still; some companies even go backwards as they believe the consumer needs everything on a package.

