

By Carolyn Schierhorn

Retailers face a number of challenges, however, when it comes to rapid

What could retailers do, then, to streamline the branding process and bring their own lines and products faster to store shelves? The answers range from reconfiguring corporate infrastructures to more effectively leveraging new technologies to communicate with outside vendors.

Retailers with dedicated groups tend to have more streamlined processes in place and realize, for example, that “how people shop for laundry detergent is very different from how they shop real,” Maute says. Such retailers



Top of Mind

also recognize the need to tailor the branding story to consumer behavior within a particular category.

Mine consumer insights

Many market research groups are striving to understand consumer behavior across a wide range of demographics and categories. Such market intelligence can help determine optimal package sizes, as well as item varieties.

Working with its Private Brand Council (consisting of retailers, wholesalers and manufacturers) and IRI, FMI has been conducting research specific to how new private brand products are developed and launched and how consumers view and engage with store brand items.

“We’re scrubbing social media to find out what consumers are actually saying about private brands,” Baker shares.

He notes that FMI plans to issue a four-chapter white paper on this research in phases next year, with the first chapter to be released around the end of January.

Private label manufacturers, which frequently work with a range of retailers that target different demographics, can be founts of information on

consumer behavior, too. To be innovative with store brands, retailers and private label manufacturers need to pool their consumer and category insights and collaborate on product development, Baker says, pointing out that creativity can be found on both sides of the partnership.

“From surveying our Private Brand Council, we know that manufacturers are bringing new items to retailers, and retailers are bringing new items to manufacturers,” he notes, adding that sometimes retailers and manufacturers glean new product ideas during trips overseas.

Streamline communication

During the packaging design phase, which has historically been time-consuming because of all of the external players and required sign-offs, new technologies can help shorten the time to market, Baker suggests.

To realize efficiencies, retailers may be tempted to bring or keep design in-house, but that’s usually not a good choice, according to Maute.

“I believe that design is one of the most under-leveraged tools in U.S. private label grocery packaging today,” he adds. “If you were to look at the UK market,

Top of Mind

which has significantly higher penetration and market share in private brands, you'll see that retailers like Tesco and Marks & Spencer and Waitrose use the top design agencies and have some of the most beautiful packages in the marketplace."

Indeed, because of technology, design agencies can be used more effectively and efficiently today, allowing a retailer in California, for instance, to work closely with a design team in Chicago, according to Baker.

"Design companies are setting up monitors and equipment inside of brand owners' buildings so that retailers can watch photo shoots from their offices in real time and make suggestions and decisions immediately," he says. "So technology is a major solution in trying to reduce the time it takes to get a product to shelf."

Take smart shortcuts

Rather than start from scratch with a new brand or line, it can pay to leverage what already has been done. Earth

City, Mo.-based Save-A-Lot, a division of Supervalu, Eden Prairie, Minn., came to this conclusion when it acquired the America's Choice trade name from the bankrupt Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P) in late April. Less than six months later, the retailer is rolling out America's Choice Creations, its new store brand line of "decadent" sweet and savory shelf-stable products. To diminish the initial time to market and build momentum, the entire line will be introduced in three launch phases.

"It's good to take advantage of somebody else's hard work," Baker observes. "That brand has been around for such a long time. And in certain areas of the country, it's going to resonate very well with consumers

because they are going to recognize it.

"In other areas of the country, people will be seeing it for the first time," he adds. "But whenever you can shorten the learning curve, that makes sense from a branding perspective." **SB**

