

The moment of truth

It's a tough world for brand managers. More than two thirds of new products fail to meet expectations. So it is vital to improve the development process by reducing errors and speed-to-market.

A software tool has recently been launched by Belgium-based pre-production process supplier EskoArtwork, in partnership with French company Vitales, which aims to satisfy these requirements by enabling the creation of realistic digital mock-ups, including print effects (embossing, hot-foil, metallised inks) and different substrates and placing them onto virtual retail shelves.

Called Vizualizer, its ultimate goal is to simulate the 'First Moment of Truth' when the consumer has first eye-contact with the product in the store.

"It all starts in a retail environment by placing a new package precisely at the location where it will be offered to consumers," explained Kris van Bael of EskoArtwork. "This has many advantages, the first being the augmented reality."

Packaging designers can experiment with the virtual in-store concept by placing a virtual product in the virtual retail space.

Van Bael's colleague at EskoArtwork Jan Ruyschaert elaborates: "For example, let's follow the process of a green virtual homecare package. It is first positioned on the virtual shelves, where several colour changes can be performed. The user can zoom in and interact with the product, pick it up from the shelves and experiment with container material," said Ruyschaert. "Changing container colour, material properties and textures are now made possible."

"The user can experiment with label substrates, changing from paper to foil, or to holographic, and so on, and also create artwork in 3D, emboss or deboss it, and add dynamic graphics directly onto the shape. They can explore ink and finishing effects, and fine-tune the attractiveness of the product up to their limits."

The product can then be placed back on the shelves so that the brand owner can see the virtual product in real time and space.

"It allows for comparisons, reduces time-to-market drastically, limits risks and reduces commercialisation failures by simple mouse clicks."

What makes this software tool a real breakthrough is that it has borrowed technology from another sector. EskoArtwork joined forces with Vitales and transferred technologies from the video-gaming sector into the packaging design process, using straightforward plug-in

A tool for simulating the point-of-sale experience could provide a timely breakthrough innovation for brand owners and design agencies.

Dominique Huret* reports



Visualisation software allows a brand to simulate product placement on the shelf



software, Adobe Illustrator.

This solution is a three-way integrated collaborative platform. Firstly, the designers gain maximum freedom to boost their creativity. The brand owners get involved early and continuously in the process and are better protecting their brand integrity. And finally, converters who actually produce the packaging reduce stressful and costly trial and error sessions and production runs.

"Last but not least, Vizualizer can be a powerful tool to promote new products to the retailer in order to get crucial extra space at the right place on those precious shelves."

**Dominique Huret is beverage and packaging expert at independent consultancy Cape Decision in Belgium.*

More information from EskoArtwork, Kortrijksesteenweg 1095, 9051 Gent, Belgium. Tel: 32 9216 9211. Fax: 32 9216 9464. www.esko.com