The Innovation Group attended Luxe Pack New York’s 15th annual packaging tradeshow in New York, where more than 250 global manufacturers and suppliers in beauty, fragrance, food and beverage took over Pier 92 to display the latest trends and creative solutions in packaging.

Although packaging may not often be at the forefront of the discussion of branding, subtle changes can make significant differences in the user experience. This year, Luxe Pack reflected broader consumer shifts that show where consumer tastes are heading. Key trends this year includes the introduction of innovation in luxury materials, packaging design gone global, and the new travel-sized packaging.

“On-the-go,” evolved

As consumers increasingly turn to a convenience-first lifestyle, packaging design is responding by adapting to their needs. Smaller products are “more common now,” Nathalie Grosdidier, general manager of Luxe Pack, tells the Innovation Group. “Today’s designers have to reinvent all the gestures for on-the-go packaging to be more convenient for consumers; for example, opening bottles and containers with just one hand.”

The trend may have started with nomadic consumers needing travel-sized products to go through airport security, but the demand has expanded to the everyday consumer. Packaging design for travel-sized items reflect this shift: Rather than just shrinking the original version, products have evolved to offer ease of opening and dispensing. For example, Pacific Packaging Components Inc (PPC) has created a unique squared packaging for cosmetic company Drunk Elephant with an easy twist top that reveals and hides the nozzle for easy, on-the-go applications.

MAC cosmetics recently seized the opportunity to reach a new set of consumers with smaller products. In July 2016, the company launched a miniaturized collection of products called Little Mac. Aside from the
appeal to convenience, the products also were a hit with price-sensitive consumers. Each mini-product cost an affordable $10.

Luxury ceramics

At last year’s Luxe Pack New York, many exhibitors used wood and ceramics as raw materials. This year continues to see more of these types of simple raw materials in packaging, reflecting the fact that more brands are offering “natural” beauty and personal care products. Innovations in ceramics in particular highlighted the material as a versatile vehicle for packaging luxury experiences.

“What is luxury?” Grosdidier asks. “It’s the question of quality and investment in the packaging, always. Bernardaud, for example, is originally a tableware porcelain manufacturer, but they are now introducing beauty packaging to their business.” The family-owned French porcelain manufacturer just released a collection of beauty packaging aimed exclusively at luxury brands and consumers. Bernardaud’s collection of containers shows off different textures, colors, and designs when using porcelain. The material also preserves the quality of the contents and, when held, has a luxurious weightiness.
Another French manufacturer, Les Parfumables, used ceramic to heighten the olfactory experience. They are the first on the market to introduce ceramic fragrance testers, identifying that the material captures the scent more accurately and holds the scent for up to one year. Luxury brands including Hermes, Louis Vuitton, and Ne’emah all use Les Parfumables testers.

Luxury ergonomics

Amber Ellis, senior director of beauty category marketing and product management at Silgan Dispensing Systems (former WestRock), gave a presentation on Exploring the Senses of Luxury Skincare. “Tactile interactions can quickly alter the consumer’s initial impression,” says Ellis. “Best-in-class ergonomic design is strengthened through the three Cs: control, comfort and cleanliness.”

From market studies focusing on the preferred luxury dispensing experience in the Parisian and Chinese markets, Ellis explains that luxury products require certain ergonomic criteria when it comes to the design of pumps. These include a sufficiently wide contoured finger landing area that mimics the natural shape of the index finger, a pump angle that fits the index finger at the preferred finger posture, and a pump height that does not require users to over stretch.

Understanding the appropriate ergonomics and dispensing behaviors in your target market are critical to designing the perfect luxury dispensing experience, according to Ellis, as different regions have different hand sizes, and some even actuate the pump differently.

Both markets agreed that metal or metallized elements aesthetically made the packaging look more luxury and western markets expected a secure locking mechanism on the dispenser. This led Ellis’ team to produce Aria Luxe and Lyric cosmetic dispensers,, which accommodates the feedback from the respective markets they tested in for the perfect look and feel of luxury.

Manufacturers driving trends

Manufacturers and suppliers are typically subcontractors, and often followed instructions from brands. However, this year manufacturers are integrating the company know-how and beginning to advise brands on new packaging trends. For example, plastic packaging manufacturer Texen now has an Innovation Unit. A. Schulman, another plastic manufacturer, even launched its own trend book.
“Before, manufacturers would ask brands, ‘What do you want today?’” explains Grosdidier. “Now they are saying, ‘This is what you should want tomorrow.’” Rather than being siloed, the gap between manufacturer and brands is closing. Watch for manufacturers to infuse more innovation into packaging trends as the relationship evolves.

**Luxe Pack New York 2017: Packaging trends**

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