

Home baking: Cause a stir in a rising market

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Home baking has experienced a renaissance as recession-hit Britons tighten their belts. *Ben Bold* looks at packaging's role in its success story

Baking is one of the most primal forms of cookery and bread has been one of civilisation's food staples for millennia. Like baking itself, the packaging used to protect baking ingredients has changed little over the years - the continuing prevalence of the paper bag used to contain flour and sugar, packaging at its most basic, being a case in point.

So it is perhaps surprising that something so steeped in tradition has, in recent years, become so fashionable. Sales of ingredients are testament to the resurgence of baking.

"We're cooking more - making cakes and making flapjacks," says Charles Banks, director and co-founder of global food consultancy The Food People. "We're doing that because of the credit crunch - because in tough times we hark back to the practices of our parents and grandparents, that wrap us in an emotional blanket."

Sara Gardner, category development controller of home baking at Kerry Foods, who is responsible for Homepride, says: "[Home baking's] renewed growth over recent years can be attributed to a few key areas - consumers going back to basics during the recession, an increase in celebrity cookery programmes and schools putting cookery back on the curriculum."

Sweet success

Another reason given for baking's increasing popularity is "the rediscovery of the cupcake," says Judith Allan, production director at London-based design agency Jones Knowles Ritchie (JKR), which redesigned Silver Spoon's identity (see case study). She cites the popularity of bakeries such as the Magnolia Bakery in the US and the Hummingbird Bakery in the UK.

Hummingbird Bakery opened in south Kensington, London in 2007 and has since opened a second store in Soho. It sells an array of colourfully topped cupcakes and cakes as well as home-baked pies and brownies, which bring out the inner child in anyone who passes by the beautifully decorated shop window. It even has its own cookbook so customers can bake their own at home.

"More brands are entering the market, or putting more products into the marketplace," says Grant Marshall, creative director at The Design Group (TDG). The agency works for baking brand Dr Oetker and is currently involved in a home-baking project for the brand, although details are still under wraps.

"Eight years ago, the market was pretty mainstream, with the likes of Betty Crocker seen as the industry standard." Marshall says. Back then, he was instrumental in creating the identity for Victoria Foods' Jane Asher baking range to challenge the likes of Betty Crocker. "That original packaging and black branding is still in the marketplace now."

Although more brands now compete in that market, the continuing dominance of the paper bag for sugar and flour shows that the packaging of home baking products has remained relatively unchanged over the years.

The ideal format?

JKR's Allan points out the various technical considerations when packing products like sugar and flour. "This is where paper bags, which have a roll-over top, are a great pack format as they are simple and straightforward," she says. "The roll-over top allows for the variation in fill due to density, for example, and the nature of paper itself allows for a slight breathability of the pack so that if there is any moisture in the product when it is packed it isn't trapped in the filled product."

Other considerations are the hard and angular nature of sugar granules. On a sugar filling line, a bag is sealed and then knocked on to its back on the conveyor, making it more stable. But as the bags are conveyed to the palletising area, any spilled sugar on the line scratches the backs of packaging and would remove any coloured ink printed there, as well as creating coloured dust.

TDG's Marshall prioritises the usability of packs. "Resealability is key, and keeping freshness," he says. "When it comes to sugar and flour, the perception of home-baking products limits what you can do with packaging."

However, home baking packaging is not without its innovations. About 18 years ago, Homepride was second in the flour market, behind McDougalls, to introduce a new form of flour packaging. Working with A&R Carton, Homepride introduced its own Cekacan, which uses the same induction sealing technology as Tetra Paks and gave consumers a rigid alternative to the paper bag.

Charging the same price for a 1kg Cekacan pack as it did for the 1.5kg paper bag, the brand still managed to grow its distribution from 37% of UK supermarkets to 72%.

"[Before that] marketing people used the Cekacan for expensive products," says Chris Wildt, the general manager of Cekacan at A&R Carton. "Homepride stood that on its head by taking a basic product and saying we can gain a market niche. And it did so in a declining market."

Gardner adds that the Cekacan is still popular: "Younger consumers especially find this packaging attractive and it is seen as a favourite with the 'occasional baker'," she says.

Fencor Packaging, which manufactures corrugated shelf-ready packaging for many baked goods brands, recently worked on an innovative form of cake packaging for start-up bakery firm Nutty Tarts. Fencor designed and sourced specialist micro-flute material to make a corrugated baking tray, into which Nutty Tarts pour raw cake mixture, which is then baked before going on shelf.

Elsewhere, The Food People's Banks reckons that there are opportunities for further packaging innovations, but argues that they are at the top end of the market for premium ingredients.

Differentiation through design

While technical packaging innovations are rare, one area in the sector that has experienced more dramatic change is on-pack branding. As the market for home baking grows, so too does the number of brands residing in that market. Consequently, there is a greater need for brands to differentiate themselves.

Homepride's Fred character - who years ago used to star in the brand's TV ads - still appears on its packs of flour. "It's important that the brand keeps Fred on the front of the pack," says Kerry Foods' Gardner. "In addition, consumers love Fred so much that they crave him in their home. This is why Fred collectables are available as on-pack promotions."

There are also an array of peripheral home-baking products that brands can extend into, such as cake toppings, decorations, flavourings and colourings. Silver Spoon recently expanded its range into cake decorating accessories under the sub-brand Cakecraft, through which it markets products such as coloured icing in squeezable tubes.

TDG worked on the Whitworths account for several years and part of its brief was to reassess dried fruits packaging, to broaden its appeal beyond home baking and into snacking. "Home baking was their bread and butter, but wouldn't provide expansion in the future," says Marshall. "It's interesting that when we came on board, home baking was seen as more stagnant."

So can consumers expect to see more innovatively packaged home baking products appearing on the shelves of their local supermarket? Marshall hopes so. "There's always an opportunity to have a refillable container, which is a way of taking a brand into the kitchen." He adds that as the sector becomes more enthused and energetic as demand continues to grow, it "has the opportunity to become more aspirational than it has been".

CASE STUDY: SILVER SPOON

Before it unveiled its new-look logo at the end of 2005, Silver Spoon's brand identity was

a red lozenge-shaped logo against which the words 'Silver Spoon' were printed in bold white lettering.

Judith Allan, production director of the brand's then-design agency Jones Knowles Ritchie, said that the logo had little to distinguish it from supermarket own-brands and that it lacked distinction.

The agency was briefed to redesign the logo to create better stand-out in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

"We focused on creating a really good, strong brand image which would encourage shoppers to want to buy into the range of sugars, so they had the right sugar for the right purpose - caster sugar for sponge cakes, dark brown sugar for rich fruit cakes, and so on," Allan explains.

The old logo was replaced with a blue-and-white spoon motif, set against a background of a 'forest of spoons', which Allan said would give "a sense of family to the brand - so people saw granulated sugar but there was a clear link to the rest of the range."

The spoon logos were printed against colour-coded backgrounds, which meant that consumers would be able to easily distinguish between the variants - a blue background denoted granulated sugar, while orange and pink backgrounds denoted caster sugar and icing sugar respectively.

The branding was initially used on Silver Spoon's Granulated, Light, Low, Calorie Tablets, Low Calorie Granules and Half Spoon variants, but was rolled out across the brand's other variants over the course of 2006.

Introduction of the new look was backed by an integrated marketing campaign, which broke in the spring of 2006.

Jones Knowles Ritchie no longer handles the account, but the brand identity it devised is fundamentally unchanged.