



Not Just a Pretty Package

It's widely known and accepted that the packaging wrapped around a toy or game tucked inside can make or break the sales success of the product. We asked some ASTRA manufacturers about their path to package development.

What criteria do manufacturers use in designing packaging? It's an interesting process.

"We needed customers to understand within two seconds what our cars are and how they worked," said Trevor Hite, COO and co-founder of Modarri toy cars that come apart and mash up together to make breathtaking combinations of new car creations. "We also wanted it to stand out on the shelf and our aesthetic was high-end electronics and candy."

Playtime Engineering, maker of Blipblox toy synthesizer, had additional concerns to address with its packaging, said cofounder Kate Sheets.

"For the exterior, our main focus was a sleek and modern design that included a photo of the Blipblox," Sheets said.

"That explains what it does and lists what is included in the box. Our second concern was safety labeling for international sales. These symbols have specific height and width requirements, so we had to make sure all would fit on the back and bottom of the box without looking cluttered. For the interior, we wanted something that would protect the uniquely shaped product during shipping and included space for accessories."

Wow, that's a lot to consider! Some makers, especially those whose products have small parts like Modarri and construction toy Brackitz, considered how to hold the parts in place without employing twist-ties, plastic tie-downs or too much plastic molding.

"We looked to get away from cushioning as it wastes a lot of space; and create a more secure package," said Matt Legarza, CEO of Brackitz.

Hite agrees, and says they have to balance having enough security that the parts don't come loose with it not being so tight that consumers can get them out. The car parts are tucked firmly into a clear plastic mold in the packaging. Hite isn't a fan of using so much plastic, but concedes it is necessary now.

"Until we are a well-established brand, the visibility of the product and light coming through it is critical for our brand," Hite said. "If it were up to us, we wouldn't have any packaging. We want people to touch it. It's a big deal to us that our cars are beautiful. Once we are established, we will have simpler packaging with less environmental waste."

Some toy and game companies create packaging they intend to be used as storage, such as Turing Tumble.

"Since Turing Tumble is a kit, it is really important to keep all the pieces together," said Alyssa Boswell, co-founder of Turing Tumble. "Having a place for each component allows you to quickly glance at the box to see that

everything is back in its place. Educators are a main customer and it works really well for them to be able to glance at their students' trays and see that everything is in place."

Many manufacturers agree that package design and copy are paramount to getting placement at retail and helping retailers sell their product.

"From the beginning we saw our box design as the way to sell our product on a store shelf," Boswell said. "We visited various toy and game stores to consider color, size and layout. We brought a few prints of possible box designs to the stores and put them on the shelf in various categories to see if the game would stand out."

Boswell said she read an article from a retailer that said they were disappointed after demoing a product at a game show and then it arrived in an unflattering box that made it difficult to sell.

While some companies have created two packaging options – one for drop-ship or online sales, and one for retail sales, such as Suitables cardboard pretend play costumes – others think online packaging is just as important as that which is used on the retail shelf.

"We actually took a lot of care and consideration for how the package looked online," Legarza said. "Packaging is a significant portion of the cost of producing products, and manufacturers take a lot of time and effort to make sure their investment pays off."