



CATALOGUE OF ERRORS?

Are catalogues as effective as they could be? And what new products are going to making customers reach for the phone with sweaty palms of need in 2007?

The following extract is taken from online encyclopaedia Wikipedia's 'catalogues' entry: 'The earliest catalogue recorded was uncovered in an archaeological dig about twenty miles south-west of Jerusalem in the ruins of a Roman trading outpost. Dating back to around 400 AD, archaeologists working on the dig were amazed by the striking similarity, both in terms of content and style of presentation, to its modern day equivalent. An office products catalogue, some of the faded product pictures closely mimicked devices that are seen on desks to this day...'

As you may have worked out, the above is a falsehood. It seemed a good way to introduce the idea that catalogues, and often the products within them, don't seem to change a lot. Can we accept that what we see today is the ultimate product of catalogue evolution, without fault and an ultra-efficient commercial tool? Part of the answer lies in the fact that some dealer groups, such as Superstat, are now launching online versions of the paper original. However, Tracey Moreton, Esselte UK trade marketing manager says that resources on the web are being used in conjunction with the printed catalogues.

"Our experience shows that end users do still prefer to order from catalogues," says Moreton. "We at Esselte continue to produce hard copies because this is what dealers require to send out to their customers. As a result of the web, catalogues have become thinner with rather less text and more bullet points describing the products. Customers are now directed to web sites to download more comprehensive details."

Research from Avery showing that 57% of consumers still use traditional catalogues for reference indicates their value remains. However that doesn't change the fact that catalogues have remained fairly inert in their development over the past five to ten years, something which could be responsible for that Avery percentage not being higher. According to Jane Rowe, marketing director for John Dickinson Stationery, improvements can still be made.

"They provide an information resource but research with users of the catalogues does highlight that much of the on-page communication is not absorbed and needs to be much stronger," says Rowe. "There is a high degree of inertia in terms of how people order. It is very easy for purchasers to rely on ordering the same old codes without reference to the catalogue. The portfolio of products is changing year by year and more needs to be done to highlight the new products that are available and may better meet the need of the customer. Without people looking at catalogues in more detail, innovative debuting products may go unnoticed."

Rowe adds that there are also challenges in some categories to communicate real product differentiation, a gripe particularly relevant within the envelope category where the price differential can be wide.

"However the quality and features of some of the branded envelopes really do offer a business differentiator for the customer," she adds. "For a company who wants their communications to stand out in a packed post tray, brands such as these really do make a difference in the perception of quality and company image and this is notoriously difficult to communicate from a catalogue page." >>

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Avery's PR manager, Mel Holden, adds that there is an opportunity to use a category management approach in order to create catalogue pages which prompt a higher level of consumer purchase within categories. Holden also cites a lack of space for photos of products in application as a problem, along with catalogues offering an abundance of choices of what appear to be the same product, without differentiating between them.

Rowe agrees, adding that the price of a product is not the only piece of information that needs highlighting – it is the balance of price and quality which is key.

"For example, purchasing any notebook product from our Oxford portfolio of brands guarantees a high quality product at a good price. It ultimately saves the customer money as the paper quality ensures that both sides of the page can be used with minimal 'show through' of ink – not always the case with the cheaper products where you may end up only using one side of each page," she says. "There is room for improvement in the print quality of some of the catalogues in the market as it is often difficult to get a good representation of some more design oriented products. There is also room for innovation around how products are displayed in terms of branding and feature highlights."

So that's a summary of some things wrong with the current batch of catalogues. What dealer salespeople need to do to raise the value of their average catalogue order is take that information and work against these flaws. Thankfully, where new products are concerned, some catalogues are taking the step of highlighting them as 'new'. Perhaps a good move for a dealership, suggests Rowe, is to create a supplement just featuring new products, giving customers a quick guide to the new lines and references to the main catalogue page.

And what might be in that supplement this year? Avery is launching several new products in its Identification range during 2007 to help meet what Holden describes as the "ever growing demand from consumers". This includes TripleBond Labels guaranteed to stick three times longer than ordinary labels.

Esselte, following the success of its premium quality Leitz 180° lever arch files, has introduced the ACTIVE range, which is



suitable for everyday use. Described by Moreton as "stylishly designed in durable, lightweight new patented polypropylene material with an elastic fastening strap with a button to keep the papers safe, it is ideal for organising paperwork at the desk or on the move".

She goes on to add that the ACTIVE range has unique features for active management of short term A4 paperwork in the office and on the move. The files have curved spines in two formats – 50mm and 75mm, designed to be easy to carry and to fit comfortably in the hand.

Finally, Rowe explains that John Dickinson has extended the Black n' Red recycled range and launched a new environmentally friendly selection of Basildon Bond for the office.

"Completely new to the John Dickinson portfolio for 2007 is a new notebook brand called npad, a funky range of vibrantly designed notebooks which combines fashion and function to meet the everyday needs of students and office workers," she adds.

As demonstrated above, those all-important new products to get end-users excited are inside your 2007 catalogues, you've just got to help uncover them. Otherwise they might as well be buried in a fictional Roman ruin somewhere near Jerusalem for all the good they'll do your sales. ■

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