

Between the need for security and impulsive behaviour – how Gen Z is redefining brands and packaging

An interview with Madeleine Lindner, Managing & Creative Director of HAJOK Design

Madeleine, what makes Gen Z tick as consumers?

“Generation Z is very contradictory – and that's exactly what makes them so exciting for brands. There are two poles in their purchasing behaviour: on the one hand, this generation needs dependability, transparency and facts. On the other hand, they love impulse purchases, visual stimuli, and surprises. Especially when it comes to everyday products – things you eat, drink, or use on a daily basis – Gen Z has to find its bearings. Is it healthy? Is it sustainable?”



Just Chillin' hits the sweet spot for Gen Z: it's playful and visually bold, and perfect for spontaneous impulse buys.

Is it credible? Studies show that trust is key for this generation. Brands benefit greatly when they present themselves as credible and value-oriented. At the same time, their purchasing behaviour is contradictory: they are sustainability-minded, yet still impulse buy or even indulge in fast fashion. Here, rationality and emotionality coexist.”

What role does packaging design play for this target group?

“For Gen Z, packaging is much more than just a wrapper. It's both a communication medium and an anchor of trust. They expect design to make a statement: be sustainable, transparent and visually striking. Packaging must convey values while also functioning effectively on-shelf and on social media. Here we can see two design logics at play. Firstly, let's look at everyday products: clarity, guidance and facts are needed here. Nutritional values, added benefits, studies, certifications. Everything that reassures the consumer. Impulse products on the other hand enable packaging design to be playful, bold and unexpected. Colours, typography, humour, limited editions – all of which appeal to Gen Z's love of surprise and inspiration.”



Our REWE to go designs provide orientation with their clear, structured layout.

Is Gen Z the new “square generation”?

“This sounds provocative, but there's a grain of truth to it. Many young people today are more security-minded than previous generations. They are growing up with crises, uncertainties and a constant, intense deluge of information. This leads to a need for guidance, structure, and credibility. At the same time, research shows that Gen Z consumes more consciously and pays more attention to ethical and sustainable brands. Despite their strong



Beautiful and sustainable: Happy Naturals stands for natural body care products in fully recyclable packaging.

appetite for innovation, price, quality and security still play a key role. You could say: they're not square, just thoughtful! They want to be independent, but still make good decisions. They want autonomy, but also guidance. This might seem conservative at times, but it's more about a strong sense of responsibility.”

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Our design for Naschnatur conveys added value and joy, offering healthy indulgence that's both natural and delicious.

At the same time, Gen Z have a great desire for nostalgia. How does that fit together?

“Nostalgia is a huge trend. Gen Z wears 80s and 90s fashion, listens to vinyl, uses analogue cameras, and yes, some even embrace the Walkman look. Studies show that they are particularly nostalgic and have a strong interest in past decades. The retro trend is also connected to current uncertainties. The past feels more stable and emotionally secure. In packaging design, as a result of this, we are seeing a trend toward “neo-vintage”. Retro elements combined with modern functionality, which creates both trust and emotional connection.”

What does this really mean for brands?

“What brands have to understand: this generation wants both autonomy and security. They want products that are not harmful, taste good, are sustainable and offer added value. We're seeing many products with add-ons, like beauty gummy bears with nutritional supplements, or bars or nut mixes that help reduce stress. This fits perfectly with their mindset of self-optimization without sacrifice. At the same time, a brand must demonstrate that it understands these needs and doesn't just communicate them. Gen Z is very quick to recognize when something isn't authentic.”



Gen Z loves retro: neo-vintage blends the past with the present to create trust and an emotional connection.



MORSH transforms design into an experience with bold colours and playful visuals that bring joy at first glance.

How would you sum up Gen Z as consumers?

“Generation Z is not a fickle target group. It is a complex, reflective generation. They want brands that provide security, are fun yet make a statement. Or to put it another way: they are both more rational than millennials and more impulsive than any generation before them. And therein lies the greatest challenge and opportunity for brands and packaging design.”



Our LiveFresh design combines enjoyment and added values, showing that self-optimisation doesn't mean compromise.