

# A New Year: A New Definition Of Luxury

**Although luxury prevails as the champion *recession-proof* market segment, these last three down years have none-the-less created a dramatic shift in the definition of luxury.**

In 2012, luxury will no longer be defined by excess and conspicuous consumption — now luxury means products with higher perceived value and increased practicality. Demonstrating this is the near-disappearance of the ‘logo-covered product.’ The face of luxury is becoming much more subtle, understated and less ostentatious. Branded names are still the strong sellers, but the economy has dictated that it’s no longer fashionable to make sure everyone knows what brand you carry or wear from meters away.

Besides the evolving definition of luxury, the “who has access to luxury” is changing too. Flash deals from online companies like Gilt Group are making luxury accessible to everyone, and making the multiple-purchase consumption of luxury easier and more available... and in these recessionary times, luxury beauty products are some of the biggest winners. As funds are tighter for large luxury purchases, smaller ones, such as an in-home Kérastase deep conditioning hair masque, have become the purchase of choice.

Because the luxury customer is the better-educated customer, and the green movement is affecting all segments of the market, naturally it is impacting the luxury market. The luxury customer is no longer happy buying a product that has layers and layers of unnecessary packaging that just reinforces how “precious” a product should be perceived. I’m currently working on packaging a luxury product where the protective case will have “another life” after its primary use — either as a storage or decorative container — and doesn’t just end up in a landfill.

What’s apparent is that successful luxury products and brands are those that can and do evolve. Being able to navigate these rapidly changing times and still maintain superior branding standards is today’s challenge. To evolve, brands must never forget that innovation, reinvention, and some future thinking go a long way to assure success. Successful brands challenge the future while respecting a brand’s history.

The rich have always been — and still are— the consumers of “bespoke luxury” products, the ultimate in luxury. When your product is one of a kind, hand-made or customized to (or for) you, you create instant exclusivity — no one else can have what you have. Companies that trade in customized bespoke luxury, such as Brioni for men’s suits, Remote Lands for travel, or Goldetto for bespoke luxury iPhone cases, will continue to enjoy huge successes by tapping into the psyche of true luxury.

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## Power-modernism — The Future Of Packaging

It's nearly year-twelve of the new millennium and technology is speeding ahead, consumers are racing to keep up, and the market is tagging-along to keep up with all of it. 'What's new' is 'what's old' quicker than ever and factoring-in the amped-up volume of competition makes survival of the fittest-product even more challenging. In today's market, we have a split-second to grab a customer's attention—after that, they're on to something newer. To be successful, a product has to make a consumer stop and look—and go closer to read and buy. It has to speak with a powerful, clear and simultaneously attractive voice. So how does a product see overwhelming success in this brave new world? The answer's in the design—design that speaks to the times.

Essentially, what's making or breaking product success in today's market are its aesthetics and communication — the design of “the package.” Dieter Rams, the design genius behind Braun's revolutionary products from the 60s and 70s said, “good design helps a product to be understood,” but in this new millennium, the rules have changed and all bets are off. Having a product be understood was good enough in the last century, but in this new one, to be simply understood isn't nearly enough. In today's market, what doesn't speak up and stand out is left behind and forgotten. The language that a product speaks has to be crystal clear, finely tuned, and have a beautiful voice that people want to hear— it has to speak with a new *visual vocabulary*.

That new vocabulary uses typography, imagery, color and form to communicate in ever new and groundbreaking ways: focusing, exciting, and innovating the message. It steers clear of anything extra, dated, busy or confusing. The look is always strong, powerful, sophisticated and bold—essentially, *power-modernism* for the twenty first century. *Power-modernism* precisely balances bold, strong modern typography with sensitivity for design: aesthetics, balance, harmony and open-space—and sometimes combining powerful imagery (photography or illustration) in a way that is never cluttered or too busy to understand immediately.

The beauty product industry is a never-ending cycle of constant launches and promotions where product successes and failures are clocked by the hour. As part of my work, I meet on a daily basis with marketing teams in the world's biggest beauty companies to get briefed on new packaging projects and to modernize existing ones. It's becoming more and more common to be briefed on packaging a new product and then watch market and competitive changes alter the project's brief constantly during the design process. It forces you to react quickly because *the future is now*—and you'd better be ready for what's coming next. One week a product has to be a certain color and the next week, that color is wrong. One week, one product benefit is important to communicate and the next, it's another one. This creates an exciting environment to polish and perfect the 'recipe' of *power-modernism* and a micro climate ripe with potential wisdom that can be then applied to all markets.

All you have to do is a little surfing online to see the incredible increase in velocity of evolution in the global market—and to be successful, packaging design has to evolve at that same

speed. Simply put, products need to *cut through the clutter* like never before, and the need for *power-modernist* packaging that makes a consumer stop and take notice has never been greater.