

# Simpler Packaging

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This project started out by looking at current and future packaging design trends based on a few packaging websites I enjoyed browsing. It seemed that there was a push to rely on minimal art and white space. In order to relate this topic to printing, the project was supposed to examine how less ink and more recyclable materials affected the print companies – were companies redesigning their packages to be more sustainable? If so, were these companies doing it for ecological reasons or for aesthetic purposes? However, though these questions are valid, the ink saved from using more white space is not the primary concern in the sustainability of a package.

After conducting an interview with Don Carli, further researching the entire packaging process, and reading Jonathan Dudlak's answers to my questionnaire, I found that companies are currently utilizing Product Lifecycle Management tools in order to figure out how to streamline their processes and eliminate wasted time, energy, and materials. Though my initial question was good to ask after the entire cycle had been examined, it was a smaller portion of the sustainability movement than my later research. I redefined "simple" to mean more than just merely a "simple design on the outside of a box or bottle." Instead, the simplicity that mattered more was involved with creating a product that used fewer steps and natural resources in manufacturing, transportation, and recycling.

Creating a "simple" package is not an easy task for a company because it often costs a great deal of money and time in the beginning. But in the long run, it prevents a great deal of waste. "Simple" packaging is becoming a valued commodity for consumers and it will become necessary for a company to produce in order to survive in the future American commercial world.

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## Chapter I

Product packaging is rapidly changing in order to keep the consumer's interest and apply products to a modern, contemporary world. From a design perspective, a package's job is to sell the product and to make the client glad that they bought the item once it is on their home shelf. The recent trend is for brands to simplify their packages, either in design or production methods, in order to both cut down on waste and differentiate them from competing products on the shelf. With the new switch to simple packages that rely on one or two bold colors on a neutral background and the use of effective typography, it is easy to pick a favorite package on the shelf: it is the one that is minimalistic and clean-looking or the one that looks more "sustainable." To tie the concept of redesigning packages to the printing industry, one must first find the cause behind the simplification then proceed to see what impact it has on the three types of people the redesigns affect: the designer, the printer, and the consumer. This study asked the questions: Is there a simplification of packaging trends and what effect does the simplification of packaging design, production, and materials have on the printing industry?

Simplification of a product's package is not as easy as putting clean text on a plain background, though this is what many companies have tried. This study will look at case studies of package redesign that have helped and hurt companies that have decided to make a design shift. Companies, especially large firms, do extensive research before completely changing the look of their product. These large companies have the most to gain and lose if they change the way their product looks. Therefore, there must be positive research indicating that heavily-designed products are losing market share, motivating the companies to simplify their packaging. This study tested the hypothesis that there are three factors for new, simple packaging – the push for sustainable products, the frustration with over-packaging, and the desire for product differentiation. These issues within middle-to-upper class society of the United States increased the appeal of minimalist design and package efficiency: no extra graphics, ink, or wasted materials on something that merely gets a product from Point A to Point B. This is not to say that the package did not have to be aesthetically appealing or plain-looking; the human eye is still drawn toward certain design elements: good typography, white space, and aesthetically relaxing colors can positively differentiate "sustainable" looking products from their flashy and showy neighbors.

From the preliminary research and observations on this topic, the three previously noted causes that resulted in a switch to minimalist, environmentalist design have helped the package printing industry gain both revenue and publicity. Companies that want to simplify their brand identity turn to packaging companies for consultation on an entire line of products, possibly increasing the demand for new and simpler printing and packaging. Once one company has created a clean-looking package to stock the shelves, competitors of this brand are motivated to refresh their own image by printing new marketing and packages. These products become more marketable in the eyes of the average consumer, the design-conscious consumer, and the environmentally-minded consumer. The last type of consumer, the environmentally-conscious consumer, brings up another issue that minimalist design has on printing:

to what extent are new, simple designs better for the environment due to their use of fewer inks and more-sustainable substrates? Printing companies are gaining revenue by printing “sustainable” marketing materials, and they are consulting with clients on “green” methods of printing to gain even more money on printed packages. For the sake of simplicity within this paper, we will assume the “green” refers to “sustainable, less-wasteful, and more environmentally friendly,” though it will be formally defined later by the AIGA; after this, I will no longer put quotations around the word “green.” This study aimed to see if the societal push for sustainability was the cause for the simplification of print or whether minimalist design was the inspiration for simpler packages; evidence seemed to lean toward the popularizations of sustainable, waste-less packaging. Whether the “green” movement has helped the printing industry, due to the mentality that simple-looking packaging appears more resource-conscious, was a major factor in this study.

The purpose of this study was to determine what components create a successful, green package redesign. It was essential that this study incorporated the printing aspects of simple-looking packaging. Therefore this project will also examine if and how the shift in contemporary design affects the printing companies who produce the new packages. Visual simplification of products is a trend that can be seen in stores varying from low-end supermarkets and convenience stores to high-end spas and technology companies. Perhaps it is the mere contrast between the new and the old that is inspiring minimalism, or maybe there is more to the issue. This study explored the relationship between the new packaging minimalism and how the package printing industry is influenced.

## Chapter II

Average consumers may have noticed that many companies are redesigning their advertising, products, and packaging in order to create a more “sustainable” image for themselves. The purpose of this study was to find whether or not packaging art and industrial design was actually changing for the greener and how this change, if proven, affected the packaging industry. Was packaging becoming simpler? Subsequently, we will see if there was a different reason companies switched over to simpler-looking packaging, such as a design shift toward Minimalization. As Linda Tischler, the Senior Writer for the business/technology magazine Fast Company, stated:

It is innovation’s biggest paradox: We demand more and more from the stuff in our lives--more features, more function, more power--and yet we also increasingly demand that it be easy to use. And, in an Escher-like twist, the technology that’s simplest to use is also, often, the most difficult to create.

This quote from Tischler’s article on “The Beauty of Simplicity” shows how we, as consumers, demand the best product, the best advertising, the best packaging quality – yet we also want our purchases to be simple as possible. This study attempted to discover if and why consumers are actually picking up the simpler, sustainable-looking packaging or if they still want the extravagant packages that do little to cut down on waste. We will also look to see if the packages that are marketing to the environmentally-conscious consumer are actually greener or if consumers are just attracted to the more basic-looking packaging due to artistic choice – are white space, basic shapes, and less-artistic complexity coming back into style? For search engines or anything in general on the internet, simplicity means less processing that has to be done on the servers. With the amount of people who use Google as their search engine, even small additions to the Google homepage would mean exponential energy increases. Regarding simplicity in general, in the same article as above, Tischler shows how Google uses a simple interface in order to keep people coming back for simplicity:

The technology that powers Google’s search engine is, of course, anything but simple. In a fraction of a second, the software solves an equation of more than 500 million variables to rank 8 billion Web pages by importance. But the actual experience of those fancy algorithms is something that would satisfy a Shaker [a sect deriving themselves from the Quakers]: a clean, white home page, typically featuring no more than 30 lean words; a cheery, six-character, primary-colored logo; and a capacious search box. It couldn’t be friendlier or easier to use (Tischler).

Because this paper addressed simplicity on the whole, rather than just a push for sustainability, we examined the roots of the trend toward simplicity, whether it exists or not, and found possible causes for the push toward visual, material, and industrial design minimalism. We also examined the movement toward simplicity in design, just in case there was an alternative cause – the main hypothesis for

simplicity being sustainability (or at least sustainable-looking packaging) and environmental causes. According to Hitwise, a site that collects and sells data they create from their own statistics and the articles of other scholarly sources, Google controls 59.2 percent of the search market, up from 45 percent a year ago; (The Microsoft Network, in this case, a search engine) MSN's share is down to 5.5 percent and Yahoo's has 28.8 percent (Tischler). This statistic sets up one of this study's premises: simplicity has become a prized commodity in the American middle-to-upper class. However, for a company to change their look to accommodate the need for minimalism, it is not easy:

So why don't those sites simply hit the *delete* button and make their home pages more Googlesque? Hewing to the simplicity principle, it turns out, is tougher than connecting with tech support, particularly if you try it retrospectively. 'Once you have a home page like our competitors,' Mayer says, 'paring it back to look like Google's is impossible. You have too many stakeholders who feel they should be promoted on the home page.' (MSN says more than half its customers are happy with its home page--but it's experimenting with a sleeker version called "[start.com](http://start.com).")(Tischler).

Relating this concept to the print industry, it is not as simple as deleting all of the design work that has gone into the box and slapping a green sticker on the top. Designers within the company have various feelings about eliminating different parts of their design and packaging. For some companies, a design has been going through a process of evolution for decades, and completely altering the design of the package is more complicated than starting over with a blank primary display panel (PDP). A PDP is the front of the box that is displayed to face the customer when on the store shelf. Here is how Mayer, Google's director of consumer Web products, thinks about the tension between complexity of function and simplicity of design:

Google has the functionality of a really complicated Swiss Army knife, but the home page is our way of approaching it closed. It's simple, it's elegant, you can slip it in your pocket, but it's got the great doodad when you need it. A lot of our competitors are like a Swiss Army knife open--and that can be intimidating and occasionally harmful (Mayer).

We looked at Google, despite its distance from the packaging industry, because of its uniqueness among search engines and internet sites; its simplicity can be examined to figure out if simplicity in design is bigger than just advertising and translates into a worldwide trend toward simpler interfaces and personal preference.

Sustainability, as this study formally defined it: Sustainability is the dedication to keep in mind the environmental and economic impact on the environment (social and environmental) of generations to come. Practically, it is the conservation of resources in a way that will allow similar quality of business/life practices with less negative environmental impact. This definition incorporates an indefinite amount of information that has been read or heard from experts in the fields of sustainability and graphic communication.

The American Institute of the Graphic Arts' (AIGA) "Print Design and Environmental Responsibility," is an influential guide, published within a printed series called Design Business and Ethics, for designers to consult when trying to become more sustainable. It states that, "Printing inks and toner are the second largest uses of carbon black, which is primarily manufactured by the incomplete combustion of oil" (Carli 7). This fact, as seen by amateur and professional designers of printed materials, can be remedied in two ways: change the design to incorporate fewer consumables (paper, ink/toner, and bindery materials), or talk to the printer about using materials that have a smaller environmental impact. The first option is where most designers start, as they often have little influence over the printer's materials.

CitiBank is trying to change the way it prints, recycles, and manages waste. The same AIGA document states that,

There is no need for environmentally preferable print to require aesthetic compromise or unreasonable premiums, and the brand image value of responsible print has measurable importance. For example, a partnership between CitiGroup and The Alliance for Environmental Innovation 4 is expected to generate annual savings of 1,000 tons of solid waste, 19 million gallons of wastewater pollution, and 2,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions with no increase in direct costs. At Citibank's current rate of annual paper use, this change alone will result in potential savings of 6,700 tons of wood each year, enough to build 500 average single-family homes in the United States (Carli 10).

In this statement, one can see the benefit to a company for complying with the new sustainability movement. More importantly to this study, however, is the fact that brand identity and the aesthetics of printed materials do not have to be compromised by much in order to reduce materials. In this case, it is clear that either materials or design have something to do with CitiGroup's remarkable resource savings. This statement sets up the premise that minimalizing design may have an impact on sustainability. Therefore, the trend toward reducing visual clutter in print may be due to the huge push toward sustainability. The word "minimalizing" was not meant to reference "minimizing," it was instead used to mean "the act of employing Minimalist qualities", and reflected a Minimalist movement in art – where design is reduced to its simplest forms – balance and placement are emphasized rather than decorative properties.

The following quotes from AIGA emphasize how the visual design of a product can be more important to sustainability than certification aspects of ink and paper:

The challenge is to work as a partner with clients to design solutions that create less waste, less negative impact on the environment and more value to stakeholders. Sustainable design strategies are the key to print's future. To quote designer/ architect William McDonough: 'You don't filter smokestacks or water. Instead, you put the filter in your head and design the problem out of existence' (Carli 12).

Whether the issue is paper, ink or the selection of a printer, designers and specifiers make environmentally preferable choices only when the environmental "lifecycle" aspects and impacts of their raw material and production process choices are-evaluated against alternatives. A lifecycle analysis (LCA) involves measurement and/or estimation of how much energy and raw materials are used and how much solid, liquid and gaseous waste is generated at each stage of the product's life... (Carli 14)

These quotes emphasize how sustainability is a driving force in the minimalist design of the packaging movement. This study contrasted Minimalist design with the minimizing of packaging materials. One or both of these can be seen in several major companies today. Companies like Microsoft and Apple are switching their program boxes to only be as big as they need to house a CD; their cover art is not minimizing in graphic quality or becoming more minimalistic, but their packaging is able to use less paper material in order to do the same job.



Transition in Apple packaging size for a CD ROM

Also, the common sense, minimalist notion that less ink on paper multiplied by the thousands of times the package is printed also proves the theory that simplified design helps companies boost their conscience and business credibility. After all, sustainability is a selling point in many situations for printers and designers, as illustrated in this last quote from the AIGA's statement on sustainability:

Business leaders at companies such as DuPont, Johnson & Johnson, Procter & Gamble and Toyota are moving from seeing environmental stewardship as a necessary evil to viewing sustainability as a driver of top-line growth and opportunity. For many of the world's largest transnational corporations, sustainability has become the central focus of efforts to secure their future economic growth and create new markets for their products (Carli 9) .

Tying sustainability in with simple package design must be done with explicit intentions so the customer can see how a company is trying to eliminate waste. Patricia Verdolino, a Client Director at the well-known Landor design firm, states:

More and more companies are focusing on quality, value, and sustainability to help consumers feel good about their purchases. By satisfying both practical and emotional needs, consumer brands hope to encourage spending without guilt... Consumers are seeking comfort and security rather than status. Brands that hearken back to simpler, better times will do well. Nostalgic branding that speaks to old-world sensibilities will encourage consumers to do more with less. Products that help consumers create experiences at home rather than spend on outside entertainment will also do well (Verdolino).

Though the image of simplicity often helps company images today, there are certain guidelines to simplifying design. This brief synopsis of Tropicana's redesign failure show how simple is not always better:

After its package redesign, sales of the Tropicana Pure Premium line plummeted 20 percent between Jan. 1 and Feb. 22, costing the brand tens of millions of dollars. On Feb. 23, the company announced it would bow to consumer demand and scrap the new packaging, designed by Peter Arnell. It had been on the market less than two months (Zmuda).



The article goes on to say that there was no drop in sales for the rest of the refrigerated-orange-juice section, meaning that Tropicana was an isolated case of decline for the time period, and therefore giving credibility to the notion that Tropicana's redesign failed, rather than mimicked a trend in similar products (Zmuda). With certain minimalist redesigns failing PepsiCo's brand of orange juice, this paper asked the question (reiterating from Chapter I): "Is it merely sustainability that drives the new minimalistic design age?" If the entire drive for putting less ink on paper were merely to illustrate sustainability, all designs that removed visual clutter would work to the advantage of the company. However, with case studies that show that certain designs are not profitable, it was essential to make sure that a redesign has more going for it than minimalization. As Rob Wallace, a writer for Package Design Magazine writes:

If simplifying brand messaging and identity is so successful, why aren't more brands doing it? Quite simply, being simple is hard. It's difficult for traditional marketers to abandon their verbal vocabulary and embrace a new visual language. However, smarter marketers understand that the best brands "thin slice" their messaging and communicate one thing very well rather than two or three things poorly. These brands communicate through imagery rather than words and better connect with consumers as a result.

After a company has designed their product and sent a certain message for a long period, it takes them a long time to come to the realization that simple is better. As Wallace notes, it is best to convey fewer messages well than many messages poorly. However, companies want it all, and this can be hard for them to let go of. When a redesign takes place, it needs to convey a message of both quality and uniqueness. In the Tropicana case, one can see that it may have simplified its look, but it did not differentiate itself from generic brands, therefore lowering its quality in the minds of consumers. Tropicana did not seem to

redesign its package to be more sustainable, but rather to create a new, simpler brand image. One cannot judge the success of a more sustainable-looking package, but one can see how simplification is more complicated than just reducing a package down to color, type, and white space. Companies must not only lose their need for filling up space on a package, but they must also use the small amount of design in order to send the right message and keep the positive ideas from their previous packaging.

Looking to history as a source of information about minimalism shows us that complex, worrisome times are often when simplicity emerges. This quote from [Metropolismag.com](http://Metropolismag.com) suggests that the need to buy premium products and high waste might be driving the utilitarian design seen today:

At the recent ICFF [International Contemporary Furniture Fair] in New York, objects such as Jasper Morrison's simple wooden Crate, Jonas Damon's eco-friendly cork side tables, and Joan Gaspar's minimalistic fluorescent light point to a return to the basic qualities of materials. The stripped-down look of these products—often grounded in sustainable thinking—and their rejection of ostentatious and wasteful ornamentation show the flip side of today's new geometries (Makovsky & Mayer).

The online Encyclopedia Britannica notes:

In both music and the visual arts, minimalism was an attempt to explore the essential elements of an art form. In minimalist visual arts, the personal, gestural elements were stripped away in order to reveal the objective, purely visual elements of painting and sculpture (“Minimalism”).

With this definition of Minimalism, the definition of design was in question. If minimalism seeks to strip away all that detracts from design, then it can be stated that the new packages that have employed simplicity are seeking to emphasize the actual design rather than inundate the consumer with an amount of design that cannot be processed or appreciated. Minimalistic design is a rebirth of design rather than an elimination of it, and seems to be necessary when art gets to be too “cluttered.” Encyclopedia Britannica suggests the year 1913 as one possible place for Minimalism to have begun, and notes that a simple black square on a white background, painted by Kasimir Malevich in that year, began the 20<sup>th</sup> century flow toward simplification. The simple designs of the 50's, 60's, and today, can even be attributed to the frustration with the complex societal problems. Later in this project, Jonathan Dudlak, a Project Manager for a large packaging company, claimed that current packaging trends mimic the 1950's.

The consumer can see how packages are being redesigned in order to relate the philosophy-side of design reduction to the printing industry. Logically, it is an inverse relationship, meaning that with more companies trying to minimize their packaging, the more the printing companies must create printed products. Has the printing industry, which is suffering the same, or greater, financial downturn from the

current economic crisis, been given a new task that could bring printers more business? This study aimed to find out if printers are getting more business through the sustainability and simplicity movement. Though consumers today want to simplify their lives, they also have a more-developed eye for packaging and design. Consumers want to seem like they are conserving resources, but they also want to feel like they can splurge a little within their means. As Richard Brandt, the Executive Creative Director for the Landor states:

‘Acceptable consumerism’ is the new ethos, with conspicuous consumption a thing of the past. Compare the fortunes of Neiman Marcus and Walmart: The luxury icon has experienced a 30 percent decline in sales, while the big-box giant has posted gains. Luxury hotel, restaurant, and automobile categories are all reporting significant losses (Brandt). Staying in is the new going out, and a ‘staycation’ is the new vacation. Many consider food on the table and a roof over their heads the new luxury paradigm. Consumers with more substantial means will be less interested in displays of wealth...Although their desire for luxury will remain keen, flaunting it will be considered bad taste. Instead of overt status symbols, we’ll see discreet luxury designed for connoisseurs who value subtle expressions of wealth (Brandt).

The new minimalist movement, which boasts of “pure art,” is pushing companies to create different packaging in order to appeal to the consumer. Though the old packaging is being thrown out, the new market for creating simple packaging is asking printers to create simpler “look-and-feels” that are visible on the store shelves each time one goes to the store. Creating the right balance between minimalization, design, and brand identity is the variable part. As Bob Bischoff, the president of a brand consulting agency that specializes in packaging called Core BrandingWorks, states :

Of course it is ideal to first conduct primary research with store brand customers. However, if that is not possible, jump on the national brand design trend. Take advantage of the national brands’ research results, base of knowledge and investment. Their marketing teams are usually in-the-know. Following their lead can be a very simple way to compete in a challenging visual marketplace (Bischoff).

Large companies like PepsiCo. Can do their own marketing research, however, smaller businesses must look to simple statistics and see what the larger companies are doing to sell more. By employing common sense, the smaller companies are keeping their look simple in order to differentiate from the overwhelming designs on the shelf.

Brands that have their own stores, like Bath and Body Works, don't have to differentiate themselves from other brands, but they do have to compete with them. A simple comparison of some of their new bottles to their old, country style packaging shows how simpler design now catches the eye of consumers (see below). The feature of the new package is the "floating" text, which is printed on a label on the front of the bottle. The picture is more vivid, but is more of a background than the feature of the package. More vivid colors point the eye to the simple text. The bottle's design also looks much more streamlined and sleek compared to the old bottle. The newer bottle is more flexible, indicating less plastic is involved.



Bath and Body Works redesign

TheDieLine.com is a popular web site in the packaging graphics world. It often highlights designers, their designs, and what they have to say about different trends. Ted Mininni, the author of this particular article, is the president of Design Force Inc., the leading brand design consultancy to consumer product companies with Enjoyment Brands™ Design Force. This quote from Mininni sums up the social aspect of packaging's minimalistic design:

It's time to change this prevalent thinking. Packaging as billboard is yesterday's idea. Today, we need to think beyond packaging as advertising space. Yes, it is essential to get, and keep, consumers' attention in retail environments. Yes, packaging has to refer back to the brand and communicate that brand's unique attributes. But does it really have to shout to do that? Or, is it better to whisper? In the midst of the chaotic din at retail, what are consumers more likely to notice? (Mininni)

When information is conveyed to the audience in an intimate way, such as whispering or in confidence, the information is perceived as more believable and authentic. Shouting advertising at a consumer may not be the way to convince them of its ability to satisfy their need. Packaging and its main purposes was

examined in this study. The way companies go about presenting their product on a package is shifting toward whispering the message or at least stating it in a normal, rational tone of voice rather than yelling. As these companies seek to create a simpler look, the way their packaging is printed must be considered, as with any redesign.

Whether or not the amount of ink and substrates are conserved with the new design was also examined in this study. Key choices in inks and substrates seemed to be more eco-friendly and resource-efficient; many of these green alternatives create the minimalist looks that consumers gravitate toward: kraft paper (a brown paper that is less processed and bleached than usual papers), thinner plastics, organic fibers, and less-processed stocks. Newer packages often sell their product based on the fact that the package itself is compostable, recyclable, or reusable, and a less-processed look appeals to those who are looking for a cleaner conscience. The look of a product can be deceiving, however. A product can use a less-processed-looking substrate, reduce the ink coverage on a page, and even eliminate all color on their package; however, the minimalistic package can still end up being worse for the environment if the materials they choose to use leave a larger carbon footprint or take more energy to transport them to and from the production plant. Greener Printer is a business in Berkeley, California that has been serving its community for over 20 years. Part of its web site provides extensive research on creating the most sustainable product from its conception to its waste. Their suggestions for sustainable considerations are as follows:

The folks at Design Can Change have gathered some great resources for designers who want to incorporate more sustainable practices into their work. They have prepared a Sustainable Design Checklist that covers topics such as strategy, execution, production, distribution, and end-of-useful life. Some of their suggestions for auditing the sustainability of a printed piece include:

- Serves multiple purposes and maximizes shelf life
- Raises awareness by displaying environmental specs
- Limits ink coverage and areas of solid color
- Is printed by a printer that has environmental certification
- Uses recycled, FSC-certified paper that was processed chlorine-free
- Uses soy- and vegetable-based inks and avoids metallic inks
- Avoids foil stamping, thermography, and lamination
- Uses up-to-date mailing lists that accurately target your audience (Greenerprinter).

Therefore, though minimalist design helps to create a look that might be more “green,” sustainability is not always the motive for a simple-looking package. The above list reflects the complexity behind sustainable design. Design Can Change is a nonprofit company and web site that is funded by major design businesses and is written by major designers who specialize in sustainable design and production. In a later section of this paper, we will examine how companies are working around these guidelines in order to create the same looks with less environmental impact.

A switch in societal views of simple design has occurred: minimal advertising was used before on less-expensive products, now simple packaging can often mean a more expensive or desirable product. Simple design, when carefully planned by design professionals, can add value to the product. In the famous article “Simplicity is Highly Overrated” by Donald Norman, a well-known emeritus professor at University of California, San Diego and author of books on usability, he states that people tend to buy products that have more features and are more complex these days. Though there are more features of products that we use today than of those from the past, this study worked under the premise that having more features does not necessarily mean that a product must give up on simplifying these features. An article by designer, researcher, and writer Joshua Porter states that:

Certainly, following Norman’s conclusion that people choose complex over simple would suggest that teams strive for complex designs with many features. It may not be right aesthetically, but it is better for the bottom line. Norman states it plainly: ‘the truth is, simplicity does not sell’ (Norman).

But Schwartz’ description of trade-offs suggests a different approach. Instead of focusing on adding features, design teams should focus on helping users find out what they really need before they purchase. When design teams understand that buyers want to avoid trade-offs, they can use this insight to their advantage (Schwartz).

By understanding what users really need, design teams will prevent users from falling into the trap of assuming that complexity equals capability. The trick is to communicate to your customers before they purchase. Designers (and this includes copy writers!) must communicate that a product contains all of the features users need (or will need), while also communicating that each of those necessary features is simple to use. This will prevent users from worrying about trade-offs and provide people with the confidence that they’re choosing the right product (Porter).

Creating many different options in a simple way will create the best marketing to a customer who wants many different features. The packaging itself would be simple in order to convey the uses of the product (inside). Companies like Apple have many different versions of each product they sell, each version having several different subtypes. However, because the way their simple advertising presents the products, it is never a hassle to figure out which product subtype is right for each customer. Many companies these days operate like Apple, providing more features with a simple user interface, due to the overwhelming amount of competitors in the market. It is essential to create value with simplicity. Most of the time the way to show a consumer simplicity is with printed products, and therefore the new trend toward minimalism affects the printing industry.

Ultimately, value is what is being conveyed by a package's look-and-feel. There are two elements to simpler packaging that we have examined in this study so far: sustainability and a changing design movement. Though both of these are important and are probable causes of the packaging shift today, we must look at the way a customer decides what and why to buy. We must add in a third element to this study: customer's perceived value of a product. Though many people today want to buy a good-looking, environmentally-sound package, above all, they want value. Value includes both the mood the package sets as well as the way it markets its sustainability – but it also includes how the product is perceived price-wise. With the current economic slump, companies are trying to keep their product going at a far lower price than before. Ted Mininni talked about how companies need to cut down on their costs, thus companies can kill two birds with one stone by hiding under the “sustainability” cause for minimizing packaging and also lowering variable costs by decreasing in packaging size and cost.

Smaller, lighter packaging generally raises red flags with consumers. It usually signals they're getting less product for their money instead of the steady, insidious price hikes which always cause consternation, especially in a down economy. But that isn't always the case nowadays. Consumer product manufacturers, faced with several dilemmas, have steadily worked to cut down on extraneous packaging for very good reasons. With the rise in raw materials, energy, manufacturing and transportation costs, coupled with the meteoric rise in environmental consciousness, they've been consistently cutting down on packaging (Mininni).

Value is what shoppers look for, and along the way they'd like to get a package that can soothe their conscience and look good on their shelf. When companies can simplify their packaging, they can cover all the bases. Though sometimes the sustainable-look can misconvey its actual commitment to the environment, many companies are also failing to advertise their green efforts:

Many companies' sustainability measures are going unnoticed since they are deliberately choosing not to communicate these initiatives. Whether this comes from a fear of the perception of green-washing, or companies simply feel it is the right thing to do sans advertising the fact, it is a mistake not to market social responsibility as a cornerstone of branding or rebranding efforts. As long as sustainability initiatives are communicated in a fair and honest manner, companies stand to gain appreciable value in consumer perception. How about this for a paradox: cutting packaging down to size will only increase its importance in promoting the brand. The old adage: “Less is More” is true, after all (Mininni).

Simplicity in packaging is about showing the customer that your brand knows where it is going, understands the environmental constraints, looks good, and is still within the budget. Stephen Hahn-Griffiths is the Director of Brand Planning at Mullen, a large marketing agency that has branches in many of the large cities in the Eastern United States. His interest in simplifying packaging falls not in sustainability or in art Minimalism, but rather in conveying the brand's mission to the consumer:

But why's being simple, so brilliant? It's because in an undifferentiated world, being clear about what you stand for is how you get to own something – get talked about and become ultimately engaged. Seriously, if you can't boil down the brand idea into a word or two, then perhaps you don't really have a strategy. Think about this way. If you can't clearly tell a brand story and translate it into a single-minded POV – then how do you expect creative teams to develop work? And what do you expect a consumer to take away from a brand message when you're asking them to remember five things? These days, no one has the time or the patience for an over-intellectualized and complex definition of strategy. Complexity breeds vagueness, uncertainty, and ambiguity. Simplicity provides clarity, direction and focus (Hahn-Griffiths).

With the articles and professional opinions discussed in this chapter, it is clear that simplicity is occurring in many areas. Simplicity is rooted in three factors so far: sustainability, a clean-looking design trend, and the movement to convey a clear brand message. Companies big and small are showing their support of simplicity as shown in this passage by Michael Coleman, the Managing Director of Anthem Worldwide's Chicago office. Anthem is a large branding company and is active internationally. Michael Coleman states:

Some say it started with Google, sporting the cleanest user interface on the web at the time. (Interesting that Microsoft's Bing is now trying to out-simplify Google on functionality.) Others say Target paved the way, with a simpler, cleaner shopper experience, utilizing design as a strategic advantage in its pitched battle with Wal-Mart. (Equally interesting that Wal-Mart is now trying to out-design and out-simplify Target.)

**Other examples abound:**

Häagen-Dazs touts a few simple ingredients with its Häagen-Dazs five™ line. Pepsi creates Throwback versions, harkening back to simpler times. Coca-Cola renovates its trademark brands, eliminating gratuitous and superfluous design elements to express brand symbols more simply and compellingly. Volkswagen builds an entire design language around simple forms. Philips touts "Sense and Simplicity" as more than a tag line but as a corporate covenant. Countless other brands feature simple, back-to-basic value propositions that appeal to a seemingly endless desire for the honest, the true, the uncomplicated...in a word, SIMPLICITY (Coleman).

If companies are trying to show their efforts in the environmental sector, they need to make it clear so they can sell more. Rebranding happens all the time, but evidence shows that there is a clear direction for new company images these days: simplify. Whether the cause is to prove a brand is “going-green” or whether it is to lower the cost of packaging, companies must follow the trends and make sure their packages meet the value needs of the consumer in order to compete in the seemingly-paradoxical complex world of simple packaging.

The material gathered from scholarly articles and other publications put out by known design firms and professionals brought to light many of the issues that were examined within this study. Many design professionals quoted within this study have noticed a trend in simplification due to reasons such as sustainability and societal values. Simplicity, which is a movement that starts with the human need for efficiency, is reinforced by the packaging that is seen on store shelves today. This study’s purpose was to find whether minimalistic design and sustainability are practiced in packaging design today (2009) and whether or not these principles seem to be enforced by people who make their money and reputation in the packaging industry.

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## Chapter III

“Simpler Packaging” looked at the current trends toward sustainability and minimalizing that packaging design is undergoing and the causes behind the transition. This study mostly employed elite and specialized interviewing, with some in-depth email surveys to supplement the interviews. The topic “Simpler Packaging” started out mostly based mostly on design, which was hard to define as a whole; design often varies from region to region. This study already defined the research to be limited to Americans (living in the United States), and this study further showed that the information needed to be taken from large cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, since these cities are where most of the marketing, branding, and advertising agencies are located for American companies. Large cities were chosen because of their influence on design, on the whole, and because these cities represent a larger population than a smaller geographical location markets to.

Elite and specialized interviewing was conducted on appropriate, high level managers from chosen companies in order to get a big-picture view of the trends in both the design transition and the packaging production switch toward simplification. Elite and specialized interviewing differs from usual interviews in that it is aimed at experts on the topics who are used to a corporate setting and polished presentations; the interviews were conducted with no question sheets and as a conversation rather than a journalistic interview (Levenson). Packaging (production) companies were interviewed first in order to find trends in the way packaging is created. The following list of questions was sent to Don Carli, the President of the environmental-consulting agency Nima Hunter, and Jonathan Dudlak, the Project Manager for Chicago Paper Tube & Can Co, respectively.

Questions for Don Carli:

1. How has packaging changed in industrial design within the last year? Three years?
2. How has packaging changed in (art) design within the last year? Three years?
3. What are your predictions for packaging in upcoming years? (Simpler-looking? More complex? More packaging, less packaging?)
4. If you were to classify the trend in packaging, what decade from the last century would you say packaging in 2009 mimics ?
5. Have you seen a big push to change/simplify the design of packaging?
6. How does this (previous question) affect the packaging industry?
7. Does this (simplification) usually mean more sustainable packaging?
8. What trends do you see in corporate redesigns, if any?

9. What major differences are there between big companies' and small companies' identity designs and redesigns?
10. Do you see most companies turning to simpler designs in the near future (5 years, 10 years)?

Questions for Jonathan Dudlak:

1. How has packaging changed in industrial design within the last year? Three years?
2. How has packaging changed in (art) design within the last year? Three years?
3. What are your predictions for packaging in upcoming years? (Simpler-looking? More complex? More packaging, less packaging?)
4. If you were to classify the trend in packaging, what decade from the last century would you say packaging in 2009 mimics ?
5. Have you seen a big push to change/simplify the design of packaging?
6. How does this (previous question) affect the packaging industry?
7. Does this (simplification) usually mean more sustainable packaging?
8. What trends do you see in corporate redesigns, if any?
9. What major differences are there between big companies' and small companies' identity designs and redesigns?
10. (For Flint Group) What changes in ink usage have been made by companies who wish to do a redesign on their product?

Based on packaging label designs seen on TheDieLine.com, I selected design companies with differing simplistic styles to make sure that an array of different packaging printers and designers were interviewed. To clarify on the method of elite and specialized interviewing, the list of questions was not present in the interview setting. Rather, the questions represented the information and topics that were covered in this project; actual wording and order varied with the flow of the interview. The information in the parenthesis was not asked, as it could have led the interviewee to favor a certain answer; parenthetical information was to clarify the question for the interviewer.

For the study, other above-mentioned companies were contacted for opinions on the current design-side of packaging. The answers to the questions asked of the design firms were analyzed by comparing their answers to the answers of the other design firms to find consistency/variation on the simplicity trend in packaging. Because this study's purpose was to find whether simplicity is a common trend, it was important that designers confirm this. I mailed questionnaires out to a few different design firms that have well-established clients (like Nike, the NBA, Pfizer, Real Simple, Calvin Klein, Dreyers, Kellogg, Trader Joes, etc.). in order to make sure that this study was not catering to a certain style or type of packaging.

Unfortunately, the questionnaires were never sent back , so art design was not covered in the next two chapters. Don Carli's interview occurred over the phone, so it was not important whether or not the interviewer had a sheet of paper in front of them. The elite and specialized interview process applied only in that the tone of the interview was professional and backed with concrete ideas from an expert.

## Chapter IV

### Don Carli

Previous to my interview with Don Carli, the president of the environmental-consulting agency Nima Hunter, I was looking for a surface-level prediction of what packaging would look like within the next few years of our newly-green society. However, after a two-hour interview with Don, I was able to see that his version of future packaging was going to be much more comprehensive than I had foreseen. While some of the large technological changes Don spoke of were further in the future than what I intended to study, changes toward the futuristic vision of Don Carli can be seen in some of the advanced packaging companies of today.

I interviewed Don on October 28, 2009 around 10 a.m. and did not finish until about 12:30 p.m. His in-depth look at the current and future packaging trends matched a few of the ideas I had presented thus far in my project, as well as dispelled a few of my premises. My conclusion was made known in Chapter V of this project. For now, I will recount the interview with Don Carli without drawing many conclusions.

The first thing Don wanted me to do before proceeding was to define two key words of my project: “simple” and “packaging.” I defined “simple” as “taking away unnecessary elements – visually and structurally.” For packaging, Don and I used three of the main purposes of a package: containment, representation of the product to the customer, and advertisement. Don was not quite satisfied with my then-definition of “simple.” I later showed how I hybridized my definition of “simple” to mesh my first ideas and my new ideas together to prove that simplicity is needed in packaging today. My list of questions can be seen in Chapter III, and this chapter will go over the answers that Don Carli and Jonathan Dudlak provided in their interviews.

Don Carli had little to say about the industrial engineering side of the packaging since he does not design the package structure himself. He commented that it was now possible to go through the entire lifecycle of a product before it was manufactured by using Product Lifestyle Management (PLM) tools. This software allows the creator to see the different steps it takes to get to a finished package. Minimizing steps decreases the package’s wasted time and materials. PLM’s help find how large a package’s carbon footprint is. Carli stated that Great Britain has started putting, on the bag/box, the amount of carbon it takes for the product (and packaging) to get into the consumer’s hands. This type of consumer information may soon be mandated by legislation in the United Kingdom. Here in the United States, we do not have as large of a company responsibility to the consumer, though California and other ecologically-minded states are progressing toward this type of social and environmental awareness.

Don said that innovation companies like IDEO and Frog have been able to use PLM's successfully since they already use a multi-disciplinary approach to creating a product in the first place. IDEO and Frog are companies that other businesses contract out to in order to create a better product or develop an idea to its fullest potential. These types of innovation companies have worked on many of the inventions we see and associate today with the companies who have hired the innovation companies.

Carli also declined to state much about the artistic design of the package, but he predicted that with Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), packages of the future will not have to provide as much legal and nutritional material on the physical packaging. Rather, phones will pick up the RFID signal and display the information on a screen. The package will be scanned through the phone and the screen will display everything from Nutrition Facts to the amount of energy it took to create the product. This technology can lead to one of two things: either the packaging art will be minimal or the packaging art will be able to focus on the art and design of the package rather the legal requirements. Since the advertising of the product is an important role of packaging and we are highly visual beings, the packaging will not go to the plain white boxes that Don Carli envisioned. Instead, with the RFDI readers, we will see a larger canvas for the designer to sell the product and make it appeal to people. Don Carli said that packages of the future will be screaming at you, "Buy me!" Perhaps in a more subtle way, but nevertheless, the readers will allow the boxes to market directly to your buying trends and to your interests. Instead of "Buy me!" they may say, "These snacks will be great for your daughter's soccer game on Saturday."



Nokia RFID-reading phone

Though all of this may seem theoretical, phones that can read RFID tags are already being tested and sold (Romen). Another non-RFID technology that is able to add to the physical world via cell phones is Layar. Layar is an application that one can add to their phone. It can add digital images to the real-time image that the phone can capture through its built-in camera. So while looking through a screen at the world, one look down a street and titles will appear above the places of business that are not there in real life, but have been added by Layar through the application (Layar).



Layar application examples

In this case, the amount of money corporations normally spend on packaging would go toward the technology to market to the customer via their smart phone. In this case, the packaging would not be minimized, but would merely be advanced in a different direction. From the fact that packaging has a much higher rate of being purchased if it is picked up off the shelf and held in one's hand, it seems that packaging would still need to be tactile and multi-sensory, even if an RFID tag was embedded beneath its surface. Don Carli's version of packaging may still come about, but those without phone RFID readers and those who wish to just browse the aisles without their phone will still need something to judge whether a product is purchase-worthy.

Therefore, though packaging may evolve into a technology field, it is primarily a print field at the moment, and we must work toward decreasing the energy and materials output. After steering our conversation more toward the current and near-future model, I found that Don Carli's idea of "simplicity" was not the same as mine. We agreed on the idea that sustainability is something that companies are being urged to enforce as laws and social pressures create the drive toward less waste. Since we both agreed on sustainability as a current trend, I asked Don what his definition of sustainability was. Though I could not get him to state an exact definition of "sustainable," he did mention that, "Simplicity in and of itself is not a trend. Sustainability is much bigger. Sustainable design can create elegancy, but it is, by no means, simple. Eliminate the superfluous, identify the externalities. Pare things down to the absolute basics – find a tool that makes [sustainability] easy to understand." The idea of systems thinking is important in what I find to be "simplifying," and Don's idea of eliminating that which

is not needed aligns with my idea of simplicity. Whereas I was talking about the product ending up as being simpler, Don was talking about how the process to get to “simple” was not simple in itself. I agreed with this principle: getting rid of fluff and extra steps means more work for the manufacturer, but fewer materials and waste in the end. Simple.

Therefore, by figuring out that our definitions of “simple” were different, I found that my definition of “simple” aligned with Don’s idea of “sustainable.” This project evolved into a project of figuring out whether packaging was heading in a sustainable direction. The next chapter concluded that packaging is and must go in the direction of my “simple” (and Don’s “sustainable”) in order to lower costs for the companies and increase the brands’ reputations in large markets.

Don mentioned that several things can go wrong in the packaging process, and future packages will prevent much of the spoilage and breakage of the product itself. The future package will be able to tell the company and the consumer when the product has spoiled, as well as if the package needs to be turned over or placed a certain way on the palette. Preventing damage to the package will save on waste, and thus will give the company a better return on investment. Creating sustainable packaging, intuitively, is creating less waste in materials, energy, and time. But more than that, packaging needs to be thought of as a way to successfully get the product to the consumer and to create a satisfied customer. If the package could cut down on product returns (for defects), it could then prevent the company from creating products that did not produce revenue for the company. When companies try to be more sustainable, they may spend more money at the beginning – for innovating, streamlining the processes, and finding better materials – but they end up ahead in their profits later.

Don gave me about twenty websites to look at with companies and consulting agencies who provided tools and ideas for creating smarter packaging. A good way to think of packaging is to find out when it stops being packaging and when it starts being waste. Inspiration is important in re-engineer a product to be simpler or more eco-friendly. One of the sites Don shared with me was of a photographer who artistically portrayed the North Pacific Gyre – a huge area where trash and debris from the ocean collects in the Pacific Ocean - in order to raise awareness on the impact of waste (Jordan). I will share some more of the sites Don referred to me in Chapter V. My interview with Don Carli gave me, more than anything else, the notion that there is much more to think about than mere simplicity for simplicity’s sake. Though I found that my definitions differed from his, Don gave me the resources to find out how to better “simplify” or “sustain” packaging in the future.

Minimalizing packaging does not just mean to give the box a lot of white space, but it means looking at the process that the box goes through to look the way it does on a shelf. As Carli said, “Sustainable packaging wouldn’t wind up in a landfill – it would land in the right stream to create another package.” This should be the overarching goal of simple packaging.

## Jonathan Dudlak

As a featured company on TheDieLine.com, Chicago Paper Tube & Can Co. has proven itself to be among the American leaders in high-end packaging. They create and manufacture packaging for many industries such as food, health, and beauty. Jonathan Dudlak is the Project Manager for the company and oversees the different projects that run through Chicago Paper Tube & Can Co. Jonathan and I have been conversing about packaging since the Spring 2009 quarter, and he responded to the survey I gave him via email. (See Appendix 1 for full survey and answers.)

Jonathan's perspective on packaging was more business-focused and looked at the current endeavors of companies to create sustainable packages for conscientious customers. He saw the companies going green for economic purposes with the current economic environment – reducing components in packaging and trying to cut out steps in order to produce a cheaper package. The side effect of this was to become more sustainable since the package requires less for production. Not only are companies trying to cut their costs, but they are also trying to market their product as one that was environmentally conscious. Jonathan stated:

The recent push toward more Earth-conscious containers has really painted over-packaged products in a negative light. So while packaging is still a huge part of sales and marketing, companies have begun to take a more minimalist approach and use more environmentally friendly materials in their packaging, then use that as a marketing tool by advertising the product's eco-consciousness on the package itself (Appendix 1).

Perhaps Minimalization is more of a consequence than a movement itself; if sustainability is the new trend, simplifying the look of a package will really just be helping the company comply with a standard that society is setting for us. Relating simplicity to the printing industry, it is hard to find data on how much the packaging redesigns are costing companies. However, according to Jonathan, it seems that packaging companies have to do more work to keep customers happy – for both financial and environmental reasons. The printing industry seems to be getting more business from their current customers who want to change their designs.

This statement can be seen in companies such as HP, which has reduced the packaging of its computers to barely-bigger-than-the-product sizes and has tried to create their packaging out of fully recyclable materials. Like HP, Jonathan's business relies on materials to sell the product inside of it. Therefore, with sustainability being big in American society, it is difficult to not want to seem green. Jonathan must think of ways to help the client look and be more sustainable. "For the foreseeable future, [green] is going to be the overwhelming new direction."

However, greening is not as easy as merely creating a single workflow and sending all packages through

it. Different industries have different production needs. Clients want to include certain parts of sustainability, and discard components that might not be as convenient for them. Jonathan answers my question, “Have you seen a big push to change/simplify the design of packaging?”:

This is very industry-dependent. At the level of consumer-grade packaging, like mass-market foods, things always seem to get simpler and simpler. Simpler packaging usually means that it's easier to make, fill, and warehouse, which obviously translates to lower costs, and lowering costs is something that has been and always will be the dominant trend in packaging. So at this level the push is always on. Our high-end clients are a bit tougher to pigeonhole that way. Some people know what they want and can afford to not really worry about the cost because of the strength of their brand or product, and those people typically have very elaborate designs that help sell their product. In the cosmetics world, simplifying a design too much can work against you if your unique package is helping your product stand out in a crowd of competitors (Appendix 1).

Jonathan's livelihood is based on satisfying the customer. However, the movement to go green and the movement to cut costs do not always line up. Though Don Carli dealt in theoretical ideals for packaging of the future, Jonathan has to make sure that he retains customers before he envisions what a package should or should not be doing environmentally. Without being professionally trained in industrial design or packaging, customers request things that are not necessarily the best option for the environment. I asked Jonathan, “Does this (simplification) usually mean more sustainable packaging?” He responded with:

Probably only half the time. Simplifying a package by eliminating extra components, shrinking the size, or converting to a different design that incorporates recycled and/or recyclable materials is a positive step toward sustainability. But there is a large contingent of people that will ‘simplify’ their package from, say, a telescoping rigid paper tube container that is 100% paperboard to a single-piece plastic jar to reduce costs, which is a huge move in the wrong direction from a sustainability standpoint, but happens all the time, especially as companies look for new ways to cut costs (Appendix 1).

Because Chicago Paper Tube and Can Co. has many high-end products that it packages, we can see that Jonathan speaks from the perspective of clients who need their packaging to look premium in quality. Sadly, those who buy these products may have the money to spend a bit more on a greener package. However, a company's goal, especially in hard economic times, is to increase their profit margins – changing their entire process may not save them money for a while. If a company does not have the money to actually be an environmentally responsible company to the fullest, it still wants to appear that it is doing its part.

As for the difference between the big business vs. small business transition toward redesigning their products, Jonathan says:

Well, I think most big companies can generally afford to spend a decent amount of money on smaller gains in packaging innovation (things like applying an established packaging type to a new market, making a package out of a small percentage more recycled material than previously, etc.) whereas smaller companies might be looking to revolutionize a bit more with each less-frequent product release because they would need to get some serious bang for their buck if they invest the time and money into development (Appendix 1).

Earlier in the questionnaire, Jonathan said that he did not see companies doing brand redesigns on a large scale. The current economic climate has a lot to do with the lack of spending on social responsibility. When companies are hurting, their social responsibility is to their employees and keeping their company afloat. Jonathan's previous quote that suggested smaller companies were the ones who were willing to develop their packaging more, along with his notion that redesigns weren't popular at this time, disprove my ideas that companies are spending more on packaging print in order to pull more clients in. It would be beneficial for the sake of this study to reexamine the evidence once the United States pulls up our economy and is in a time of growth and prosperity.

I asked Jonathan which decade he felt that current packaging mimicked in design, and he answered with the 1950s – a time of growth and prosperity for many. His reasoning was:

... the most active and innovative decade in packaging had to be the 1950s--aluminum foil and cans, plastics innovations, not to mention the huge growth of packaging as a marketing tool. The combination of a recession the likes of which we haven't seen in decades and a push for waste reduction and environmental friendliness has forced a similar packaging renaissance today, so I'd like to think we're making similar advances today.

It appears that while we are in a slump and we may be limited by monetary resources today, we are still innovating – in both Don Carli and Jonathan Dudlak's minds, we are advancing despite our constraints. Packaging is crucial for the product's success, and those who are buying these packages are more aware of the environment now. Educated consumers motivate packaging companies to become more educated, and the result will hopefully be a simplified, sustainable package that does not aim to merely look more green, but has been created through a green process and is as efficient as possible.

## Chapter V

The overall theme of Don Carli's view on packaging was that it will become smarter and more intelligent, as opposed to becoming more "simple." My idea of "simple" evolved since I first started this project. At first, I wanted to merely examine Minimalist art and packaging that I observed by perusing design websites and publications. I saw on TheDieLine.com a trend of packages using more white space, relying on excellent typography, and minimizing their use of certain passé styles of art. However, after interviewing Don and Jonathan, I realized that the broader question of how packaging is becoming efficient and sustainable is a more beneficial and comprehensive study of my original quest: to better packaging and find out what elements work to get a product into the hands of a customer.

The aim of this study was to answer the question: Is there a simplification of packaging trends and what effect does the simplification of packaging design, production, and materials have on the printing industry?

In order to begin the study, I had to first define "simplification" and "packaging." Packaging, for the purpose of this study, is merely the outside package that contains, advertises, and protects the actual product. We were looking at the primary packaging, or the part that the consumer sees on the shelf, as opposed to secondary packaging which usually serves the purpose of keeping the product fresh or further protecting it. The primary packaging is what marketing departments try to make appealing to the shopper.

My definition of "simplification," as stated in Chapter IV, evolved since I first began the study. At the beginning of the study, it meant "decreasing the visual elements on the package and creating a less-complex industrial design." After beginning my research, I found that I was more interested in what companies were doing to create a more efficient package and a streamlined manufacturing process. This study did not look at all the possible ways to create the simpler package, but rather looked at whether companies were actually creating an adequate package that eliminated as much waste as possible. The answer to that question was: some are eliminating waste. For the most part, companies must streamline their processes in order to cut down on cost and increase their social image. Retail distributors like Walmart are becoming stricter on their green guidelines, and people are becoming more environmentally aware of the decisions companies make. My new definition of "simple" revolved around streamlining the packaging – meaning less waste materials and less wasted energy required to create the package. By the time it reaches the consumer, the company needs to have "simplified" the product in order to keep up with economic, environmental, and social pressures. In manufacturing, "LEANing" a product or practicing Six Sigma would be equivalent to the simplification process I described in this study.

Going back to my original question of the cause and effect of simple packaging, the "simplification"

I started out to study may or may not have been true. According to TheDieLine.com, the “world’s #1 packaging design website,” high-end packaging is going in a simple direction – eliminating unnecessary visual elements in order to create a cleaner, less complicated image for companies. However, the new definition of simplification begins before the packaging design in the value chain. Therefore, though the design of a product might be important to a graphic design team, the larger picture of a package’s production from start to finish relates more to the Graphic Communication industry. The business will profit far more from a comprehensive look at “simple” than from merely the elimination of certain visual elements.

Product Lifestyle Manufacturing options, whether they are comprised of software or a hired expert, need to be examined and implemented to find out how a product currently wastes resources. For some time, certain small retailers have only bought products of certain environmental standards, but Walmart’s environmental initiative broke new ground, as even large suppliers must now conform to green protocol. Walmart’s status as a distributor of thousands of products gives them the business advantage of being able to demand things of their suppliers – thus, big business can also be a catalyst in the push toward simple packaging.

Paper and ink began as my main consideration to waste in this study – paper for the labels and ink for any type of pigment on the package. As stated in Chapter II, “Printing inks and toner are the second largest uses of carbon black, which is primarily manufactured by the incomplete combustion of oil” (Carli 7). If every company efficiently designed their packaging so that every printer used less ink, we might be able to help reduce the amount of carbon black. But ink isn’t only being used in the packaging industry and telling people to do this is much more complicated than just reducing the amount of text and pictures on a box or bottle. A holistic approach must be used in order to reduce our use of everything natural – not just our carbon footprint. I realized that packaging materials of all types must be looked at. As Jonathan Dudlak said, switching from a multiple-piece paperboard package to a single-piece plastic one might sound like it conserves energy by cutting steps, but when it comes to recyclability and production, the plastic container takes much more to create and break down. As far as paper and ink is concerned, it is important to conserve resources of all kinds. But compared to packaging materials like cardboard, plastic, and Styrofoam, paper and ink have less of an overall impact on the lifecycle and should be considered less in the overall sustainability of the product’s package.

Smarter packaging, as Don Carli said, is the wave of the future. Whether or not embedded chips and smart phones are next in packaging’s future, creating a package that can help get the product to the consumer safely should always be a consideration. Though the current design trend might be to create lots of white space and rely on typography, art trends change quickly and cannot be relied upon to reduce materials since Minimalism may not be appealing at the time. To me, smarter packaging meant finding materials that fit the product best, rather than just creating a package for its visual impact. Smarter

packaging will allow the consumer to feel the right way about a great product. Dudlak also said green-looking products actually portray a greener product only half the time – this trend makes it hard to figure out which companies are truly trying to help conserve. It is not simply to look for the more raw-looking package, or do the opposite and only pick products that do not look green since they may be deceiving us. The reality is that green does sell, and the companies who are making a difference by revamping their workflow or switching to better materials are going to advertise their efforts. Information on what the company is doing and what it means for the environment needs to be readily accessible and easy to understand. Perhaps a third party, environmentally-in-the-know company should be involved in order to translate all the rhetoric for the common man (or woman).

Looking at several companies' environmental policies, it seems that companies must at least show that they are putting forth the effort to create a greener product. Because most companies are looking into the environmental impact of their product, any company who does not have a statement on their green policy will lack the social standing that companies appear to need in today's green environment. As an environmental consultant, Don hears mostly from companies who are looking to help their business by taking the initiative and finding out what they can do to be more efficient with resources. However, for Jonathan, his business must cater to what the customer wants, and his company must do the best for its employees and shareholders. Ultimately, many companies like Chicago Paper Tube & Can Co. must do what they need to keep up their profit margins. Companies must realize, though, that in the long-run, implementing new environmental policies will sustain their business and its reputation.

From my research, "simplifying" packaging will be necessary socially, economically, and environmentally. Resources have been proven to be in shorter supply than we initially thought, and the knowledge of global warming and the shortage of petroleum (necessary in plastic manufacturing) will eventually weigh on the public's mind when they make their purchasing choices. Already, the middle and upper classes in the United States and other developed nations are looking for company social responsibility. Patagonia and Timberland, two outdoor companies mentioned by Don Carli, exemplify what it means to go through a systems analysis of their products and packaging. Patagonia states:

Our definition of quality includes a mandate for building products and working with processes that cause the least harm to the environment. We evaluate raw materials, invest in innovative technologies, rigorously police our waste and use a portion of our sales to support groups working to make a real difference. We acknowledge that the wild world we love best is disappearing. That is why those of us who work here share a strong commitment to protecting undomesticated lands and waters. We believe in using business to inspire solutions to the environmental crisis (Patagonia, 1).

This type of statement is made by several companies, but researching the company further, several certifications (by the FSC, LEED, and others) all lend credibility to Patagonia's environmental statement. Their commitment to decreasing their impact on the environment is proven in several ways, including the one seen here:

We became the first California company to buy all our electricity from newly constructed renewable energy plants. We currently operate 13 buildings in the state, including our headquarters and four stores, and use almost a million kilowatt-hours annually. Our Denver store is wind powered. We installed photovoltaic panels that convert sunlight directly into electricity at our outlet store in Reno (Patagonia, 2).

While it is still hard to discern which companies are actually putting forth a great effort and which ones are merely trying to look like they are "going green", being endorsed by the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), and other widely-acclaimed programs can help show the extent to which a company will go to help simplify their product. Simplifying tools such as the Okala Methodology, which assesses a package or product from start to finish and finds its ecological and health implications, can be cited on a company's environmental policy to establish credibility for their thoroughness. Okala is a methodology that is "being used in over 40 design and engineering schools in North America, and supported by industry and product design leaders" (Sustainable Minds). It has 19 Modules, or areas, of study that begin with A. the reason why we need to design with the environment in mind and progresses to B. How we assess the product's weaknesses, C. Life Cycle Strategies, D. Assessments, and ends with E. Putting the whole thing into practice. Okala, which means "life sustaining energy" in the (Native American) Hopi language, allows both students and current designers to figure out how a product can coexist with both the ecological and business worlds.

To the average consumer, it is hard to tell how much accountability a certification holds a company to. However, thanks to the internet, we are able to research the certifications. Simplification of a company's packaging will require a lot of research by both the company and the consumer. However, when all the information is available to the public, it's hard to sugar coat laziness. Ultimately, companies will be held accountable for their actions, and that's where simplification comes in.

Sustaining resources environmentally will sustain a company's economic resources in the long-run. It is not by coincidence that streamlining a process is beneficial in both an economic and environmental way. Most of the time, you get what you pay for. More energy, time, and materials cost more money. Efficiency is built into natural environmental processes, as animals and organisms are constantly figuring out what works and what doesn't and altering their behavior accordingly – or failing to, which results in inferior chances of survival. In the same way, businesses that survive are those that connect the right people with the right product and make a profit in this way. Simplifying is something that highly successful

companies already do. In the packaging world, finding the elements that are necessary to convey the right message to the consumer need to be pared down and examined so that they can be created as efficiently as possible. Once a company has gotten rid of unnecessary elements or has redesigned their packaging to be quicker to produce or containing better materials, it needs to voice their process to the public for the benefit of consumers and other companies.

So yes, simple is a current trend in packaging – but we still have a long way to go before it becomes a large and necessary part of consumers’ buying process. The source of this simplification trend is the environment, social pressure to create a better system, and legislative powers that demand certain protocols be met. Organizations like the Sustainability Consortium are partnering with large companies in order to create accountability for these companies and their business partners. However, the trend toward simplification needs to transition into a mandatory business practice – something that is happening currently but can be exponentially increased with the spread of information on the topic. The main question may have been to find out if simplification was necessary for a packaging company, but the main goal was to educate the reader on what needs to happen to create a better package. A better system is by no means simple, but hopefully, by the time the package and product land in the hand of the consumer, it will be just that: as simple as can be to perform the task it was meant for.

In the introduction, I listed the three types of people the redesigns affect: the designer, the printer, and the consumer. The implications of my study have an effect on all three of these types. The push to create a simpler package can come from any of these three. The simplification must pass through the designer, to the printer, and then to the consumer. If any one of these people is not happy, the simple design has failed. If a consumer is moved to only buy simpler, more sustainable products, they can use their buying power to force companies to streamline products and use better materials. If a printer subscribes to thinking of their materials as limited and precious, they can tell the designer about the changes that can be made to create a better printed package. The designer must begin the process by thoroughly thinking about all the areas in which the product can improve. Simpler packaging only works if the designer, the printer, and the consumer all like the new design. However, since the consumer has different options on the shelf, he/she can choose to find the best product out there to meet their needs. Therefore, the printer and the designer must find out what those needs are and try to match both the customer and the organization’s needs. Hopefully this paper and the knowledge I now have will be able to reach all three of these sectors. Through my fellow Graphic Communication students (printers), my future business colleagues (designers), and my friends and family (consumers), I can motivate a change for the simpler.

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# Appendix 1

## Jonathan Dudlak's full survey with answers

1. How has packaging changed in industrial design within the last year? Three years?

*While the overriding trend in packaging in general over the past few years has been a push toward "greener" packaging, in the last year, it has taken a back seat to cutting costs first and foremost because of the recent economic conditions. In times like these you don't see many companies investing huge sums of money to convert an existing packaging line to something more environmentally friendly unless it's going to come with some significant cost reduction, especially within the industrial sector. We have received several inquiries from people looking to simplify their packaging with fewer components or a different, simpler type of part entirely. And while this often has positive environmental implications, as well, the motivation has been overwhelmingly economic of late.*

2. How has packaging changed in (art) design within the last year? Three years?

*See below.*

3. What are your predictions for packaging in upcoming years? (Simpler-looking? More complex? More packaging, less packaging?)

*A big part of the Green movement has been looking for ways to reduce packaging in almost every industry. Eliminating unnecessary packaging means reduced dependency on the natural resources used to create it as well as eliminating the manufacturing and transportation energy previously required to implement it. The recent push toward more Earth-conscious containers has really painted over-packaged products in a negative light. So while packaging is still a huge part of sales and marketing, companies have begun to take a more minimalist approach and use more environmentally friendly materials in their packaging, then use that as a marketing tool by advertising the product's eco-consciousness on the package itself. For the foreseeable future, this is going to be the overwhelming new direction.*

*Our experience has been that the complexity of a package design from an aesthetic standpoint hasn't suffered much from this movement, probably since the companies who make the raw materials have also been responding to the demand for eco-friendly products: Printers now use soy inks and water-based coatings to produce the same high-quality graphical elements as before, paper suppliers can make pulpable, metallized paper that looks like a foil without the traditional metallic membrane that can foul paper recycling, biodegradable corn-based resins are replacing plastics across multiple applications.... You can still accomplish a great deal stylistically with all of these new innovations in packaging materials, and it's only going to get better as new innovations happen.*

4. If you were to classify the trend in packaging, what decade from the last century would you say packaging in 2009 mimics ?

*I feel like the most active and innovative decade in packaging had to be the 1950s--aluminum foil and cans, plastics innovations, not to mention the huge growth of packaging as a marketing tool. The combination of a recession the likes of which we haven't seen in decades and a push for waste reduction and environmental friendliness has forced a similar packaging renaissance today, so I'd like to think we're making similar advances today.*

5. Have you seen a big push to change/simplify the design of packaging?

*This is very industry-dependent. At the level of consumer-grade packaging like mass-market foods things*

*always seem to get simpler and simpler. Simpler packaging usually means that it's easier to make, fill and warehouse, which obviously translates to lower costs, and lowering costs is something that has been and always will be the dominant trend in packaging. So at this level the push is always on. Our high-end clients are a bit tougher to pigeonhole that way. Some people know what they want and can afford to not really worry about the cost because of the strength of their brand or product, and those people typically have very elaborate designs that help sell their product. In the cosmetics world, simplifying a design too much can work against you if your unique package is helping your product stand out in a crowd of competitors.*

6. How does this (previous question) affect the packaging industry?

*See above*

7. Does this (simplification) usually mean more sustainable packaging?

*Probably only half the time. Simplifying a package by eliminating extra components, shrinking the size or converting to a different design that incorporates recycled and/or recyclable materials is a positive step toward sustainability. But there is a large contingent of people that will "simplify" their package from, say, a telescoping rigid paper tube container that is 100% paperboard to a single-piece plastic jar to reduce costs, which is a huge move in the wrong direction from a sustainability standpoint, but happens all the time, especially as companies look for new ways to cut costs.*

8 Have you seen a lot of brand redesigns or entire lines of products changing their look?

*No, not so much in our neck of the packaging woods. Things have actually stayed remarkably the same for lots of our clients. Again, it might just be them not wanting to spend the money on a redesign or retool for a new size or style.*

8. Big differences between big companies' and small companies' designs and redesigns?

*Well, I think most big companies can generally afford to spend a decent amount of money on smaller gains in packaging innovation (things like applying an established packaging type to a new market, making a package out of a small percentage more recycled material than previously, etc.) whereas smaller companies might be looking to revolutionize a bit more with each less frequent product release because they would need to get some serious bang for their buck if they invest the time and money into development.*

## Appendix 2

### My Notes from the Don Carli Interview

#### 1. How has packaging changed in industrial design within the last year? Three years?

The use of computer aided design and simulation (finite element analysis, design of experiments, LEAN, 6 Sigma), product design, not packaging design (IDEO), Frog Design, Difference between industrial design and artistic – know about math and science, all about materials, increased methods,

Biggest change: adoption of product lifecycle management tool (PLM) – provide collaboration tools for SAP offers this

In the past three years: pressure coming from WalMart and 100,000supply. Increased lifecycle management, sheer size and persistence, better than EPA and regulatory now...in terms of . all of their companies must commit.

Greater interest in design for sustainability instead of just design. Not simplicity.

#### 2. How has packaging changed in (art) design within the last year? Three years?

Lifecycle analysis issues, pressure on companies to look at waste, awareness as sustainability gains. Anyone who is doing business with Walmart employs sustainability scorecard.

We need more science and rigor. Everyone training at the same time, mainstreaming of product sustainability and design, dialogs, workshops, and training. Ten years ago, sustainability was not Google-able.

#### 3. What are your predictions for packaging in upcoming years? (Simpler-looking? More complex? More packaging, less packaging?)

Smarter packaging. Intelligent packaging = packaging that can sense and respond to its contents and environment. Packaging can sense what is going on around it. External display. Senses light, vibration, transducer then sends out something to a computer or sensor.

Hyperlabel, phone can see infrared. When you look at can of beans, some info can be seen in phone. 3-5 years for it to

Labeling of the product in PAF 20-50, carbon labeling of products, Carbon Trust. Everything must tell you how much CO2 are associated with product and packaging.

Tropicana, Sapporo, already associated and on them. Mandatory labeling. Might be an RFID one, not seen with the eye, but through your devices. Shopping basket will help you buy things. Price may change when you shop, patterns of consumption, data structures might be complex. Inherently, if it isn't smart. Auto ID down to the SKU level. What are the costs of the new things? Printed electronics will get the auto id elements down to the price they need to be to be global. Current methods are not efficient. RFID on palettes. Not on individual products.

Do more with less, smaller footprint. Long term trend.

Developed world differs from developing world.

#### 4. Have you seen a big push to change/simplify the design of packaging?

Simplicity in and of itself is not a trend. Sustainability is much bigger. Does sustainability have simplicity as a large part of it? No. Systems thinking. Attempts to comprehend relationships, multivariate relationships. Sustainable Design can create elegant, but simple probably not. Eliminate the superfluous, identify the externalities. Paring things down to the absolute basics – a tool that

makes it easy to understand. So we are taking away the things that don't matter, but that doesn't mean that the package is simple. An explanation could be simple, but that might not be telling the entire story. His definition of "sustainable" being "paring things down to basics might be my own "Simplicity" definition.

Package can then afford to be simpler. More of the IT infrastructure. Carry the minimum on the package. Technology can fail or the human can fail.

**5. How does this (previous question) affect the packaging industry?**

Printing QR codes and electronics. Might see a number. Packaging = contain and protect product. Enhance it sometimes. Extended shelf life. If the package was smart enough, biological materials. See if it drops, etc.

**6. Does this (simplification) usually mean more sustainable packaging?**

(See above)

**7. What trends do you see in corporate redesigns, if any?**

Vary from place to place.

**8. What major differences are there between big companies' and small companies' identity designs and redesigns?**

Patagonia and Timberland – small companies leading the way.

**9. Do you see most companies turning to simpler designs in the near future (5 years, 10 years)?**

Smarter, not simpler. Integration of physical package with IT infrastructure that makes it smarter. Corresponding sustainability will require the smarter features to still be sustainable. Google, small stores will start with this. EU will first start with this and will expand. EU has set of regulations on smarter packaging. Prolong the life of the stuff in the package. Energy can be conserved if the package can tell you when it needed less. Transportation can be conserved.

Simple might help a bit, but smarter would help it over all. Pacific Gyre.

Sustainable packaging wouldn't wind up in a landfill - Would land in the right stream to create another package.

Tracking trash from MIT – when does packaging become trash?

Simplicity for simplicity sake is not important. Elegant, yes, appear to simple, yes, but actually be simple. Anything that looks easy is usually not.

Sustainability process is not. By design, the whole process toward greening is not simple. Might look that way. Simplification is about reducing the number of steps or LEANing. Get rid of things that don't add value. Commonalities in simplicity and sustainability processes. Simplicity does not have overarching system or framework. Bringing things down to smallest number, but might not.

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TheDieLine.com started my quest for simplification. I look at it almost daily and enjoy the intricacies of the packaging they feature from all over the world.

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