



**GLOBAL ICONIC BEVERAGE CAN DESIGN AND
MARKETING**

A WHITE PAPER

Introduction

According to marketing and advertising research firm Millward Brown, part of what makes a brand iconic is the ability to possess physical or symbolic features that make it instantly recognisable. For years the beverage can has been the catwalk from which brands parade, but what is it that makes brands stand out to consumers browsing the shelves, and what is it about the can that exudes timeless appeal? This paper explores the world of iconic beverage can design and marketing, focusing on artwork and packaging innovation, the motivations behind them and a look at what the future holds for cans.

Hello, Brand

The first canned beer was introduced into the UK market in 1935 by Fellingfoel Brewery using steel cans with cone-shaped tops sealed with a crown (flat top cans arrived in the 1950s). Until this point, beer came in either wooden kegs or glass bottles, so the robust can was seen as a welcome alternative, particularly for distribution. Less than two years later some 23 British breweries were among a number across Europe offering canned beer.

Breweries were saving substantial costs on storage and distribution - canned beer used 64 percent less warehouse space than the same quantity of bottled beer and its shipping weight was less than half as much as the bottle. This freed up funds for breweries to immediately start advertising this revolutionary product in newspapers and magazines.

This is what they told consumers:

- the can is lighter than glass
- it's unbreakable
- it's resistant to light, which can affect other types of packaging and damage contents.



Soft drinks move to cans

Whilst beer cans had been introduced in 1935, it wasn't until 1953 that the first canned soft drinks appeared. The problem up to this point was that cans were not strong enough to withstand the additional pressurisation which the carbonation from soft drinks presented. To many leading drinks manufacturers, particularly Coca-Cola, the bottle had been what defined their brand; it was their identity, but when the can's technology was perfected, mainly by improving the liner and strengthening the can, the pressure was on to move to the new packaging. Pepsi did this and made the most of its early win by marketing itself as "the up-to-date" soft drink enjoyed by those "who think young." Pressure too came from supermarkets that could see the obvious cost saving and the attraction of offering their customers an array of soft drinks in cans.

How packaging has evolved

In the 1950s, as well as soft drinks in cans, punch-top flat lids were introduced. These required an opener called a "churchkey" to pierce holes in them and were considered a major innovation at the time. There were two holes - one for drinking from and another for releasing air. The cone-top can with a screw top lid and conical head also featured prominently, favoured by fillers because it could be filled just like a bottle on the production line, though as time progressed, more and more manufacturers embraced flat lids because it meant that cans could easily be stacked.



It is also interesting to note that for many years beer was shipped in 10oz cans mirroring the most popular bottle size of the time. One of the first was Long Life which was advertised as "brewed especially for the can". 44cl and 50cl cans for beer followed much later.

Up to 1964, steel cans had been manufactured in three parts – the top, bottom and sides. One of the major technical innovations, which arguably ensured the success of the can, was the invention of a process to make two-piece cans. This meant that the bottom and sides could be manufactured in a single process (through a process called impact extrusion), thus greatly reducing manufacturing time and cost. By 1981, two-piece cans dominated the market accounting for the majority of all UK beverage can production. In fact, in his book *Total Package: The Secret History and Hidden Meanings of Boxes, Bottles, Cans and Other Persuasive Containers*, Thomas Hine says that the eventual triumph of the soft drinks can depended on two important technological innovations: the introduction of the all-aluminium beer can in 1964, and the introduction of the ring-pull top – featured on 75% of cans by 1965 – which meant that cans no longer required an opener. In fact, Hine believes the gradual metamorphosis of the ring-pull top into stay-on ring-pull in 1989 played a critical role for the can, because it “shows how a much-desired product had to respond to both functional and social problems before it achieved a universal, useful form.”

Drinks brands were quick to advertise this exciting can opening advancement to consumers and trade, telling people about the fantastic alternative to burrowing their way into the can with a “churchkey”. A number of adverts appeared across the British press in 1965 introducing readers to the new ring-pull cans and encouraging early orders from retailers.

Just as there have been advancements with can openings, every generation has found a way to make cans even lighter. From a hefty 100g back in 1935 to now just 10g for a typical 330ml aluminium can, the can’s wall is now thinner than a human hair. This combined with a thicker domed base and a robust end makes cans light but strong – helping them thrive in the mass market.

The can continues to evolve and offer consumers and manufacturers a range of features, to increase brand value or deliver a specific goal such as a competition. Here are some of

the innovations that are helping make the can even more appealing.

The widget

Introduced in 1992, this foam-generating capsule activates when the can is opened and encourages a larger “head” on the drink. Although predominately used for stout and ale originally, the widget has also been used for milk-based drinks such as coffee.

Coloured tabs and under-tab printing



Perfect for brand differentiation and marketing, and often used for competitions where the answer is revealed under the tab.



Decorated tops



Cans on lower shelves don't have to miss out - it's now possible to print logos and messages on can tops.

Shaped cans

Ideal for that standout look on the shelves, cans are able to take on different shapes thanks to blowforming technologies. The Heineken can shaped like a beer keg is one example, whilst other beer brands have launched cans in the shape of beer bottles, increasingly referred to as the can-bottle.



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Embossing and printing techniques

Thanks to embossing, matt finishes and tactile coating, the touch of a can is adding another new dimension to the marketing offer. Tactile coating, for example, can help suggestions come to life – if, for example, a brand owner has a lemon drink, there is a tactile finish to make the can feel like citrus peel.

Fluorescent and thermochromic inks

Fluorescent inks are a great eye-catcher in pubs and clubs, allowing brands to light up in front of consumers' eyes. Thermochromic inks allow cans to change colour when they change temperature, perfect for use in the home to let consumers know when their drink is at its optimum chilled temperature for enjoying. These inks are increasingly being used by beer and cider brands. Coors has used it on its Coors Light cans. “We base innovation on consumer insight,” says Rob Borland, Chief Marketing Officer at Molston Coors International. “So consumers love cold beer because they think it tastes better and the key thing from a business perspective is to link that back into the brand.” Previously changing from white to blue, in 2010 the industry has seen the introduction of new ink technology, which means different colours and different temperatures can be specified to order.

Apertures to make pouring easier



Full aperture ends allow consumers to take the lid right off the can and treat it like a cup. Used initially for food cans, these ends are now starting to be used for drinks too. The world's first full aperture end on a beer can was launched in South Africa by SABMiller in time for the 2010 World Cup.

A size for all

Beverage cans come in a wide range of sizes both in diameter and height. Cans size starts from 15cl, so they can be used for a wide range of drinks for a variety of occasions.



Sustainability

Sustainability is a huge selling point of the can. It is the world's most recycled drinks package and every can which is recycled dramatically cuts the carbon footprint of the next one made because using recycling aluminium to make new products saves 95% of the energy associated with the production of virgin metal. With credentials like these, it is understandable why brand owners constantly count on the can to deliver their brand experiences.

Cans in marketing campaigns

Right from the start, breweries and soft drinks companies were excited by the can's large canvas on which to promote their product, and brands the world over are using a variety of imaginative designs and creative concepts to increase brand appeal.

Film tie-ins

Film studios are seeing the can as a fantastic promotional vehicle to appeal to audiences they want to attract into cinemas. In 2010, North America saw the largest film and soft drinks tie-ins for ten years when Iron Man 2 was promoted on Dr Pepper cans.

The range featured 14 collectible cans displaying characters from the film. The can even made two appearances in the

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film. “It’s one of the biggest movie partnerships we’ve ever done,” said Dr Pepper spokesman Greg Arkop. “If the box office performance of Iron Man 2 is reflected in Dr Pepper sales, we’ll be very happy.” The film went on to take \$300m in its first month.

TV power



20th Century Fox chose the beverage can for its ‘24 -CTU’ high stimulation citrus energy drink which took its hit action series ‘24’ directly to point of sale. It was the first time an energy drink had been created around an entertainment property. The drink came in 440ml cans - a first also for energy drinks. Carl Lumbar, Managing Director of Fox licensing and merchandising, Europe, said: “Here we see the all-action, intense nature of the ‘24’ series matched with an energy-inducing stimulation drink.” The move is indicative of the growing value marketing teams place on the can as a vehicle for extending brand reach.

Travelling the decades

Many brands have used can design as part of their identity. Iconic Scottish lager brand Tennent’s offers a great example. Just after World War Two, Tennent’s displayed photos of beloved Scottish landmarks and sent shipments of cans to ex-pats and soldiers abroad. One picture featuring a demure looking woman saw Tennent’s inundated with letters from soldiers wanting to know more. Shortly afterwards, Tennent’s launched its ‘Lager Lovelies’ marketing campaign. It was an unprecedented success spanning more than two decades. Lager Lovelies cans have become collectibles and some still sell for hundreds of pounds on eBay.

Cans go mobile



More and more brands outside of the drinks industry are embracing the beverage can as a valuable sales channel. For example, consumers in the Ukraine need go no further than the vending machine to pick up a SIM card thanks to radio systems provider TM

Beeline which sees SIM cards available in cans. The idea came about when Beeline was looking for a novel distribution method to help differentiate its product from competitors. To enhance brand identity, beeline cans come in bee colours - prominent black and yellow stripes.

The future

The can continues to be a trusted and innovative vehicle for the drinks industry and its future is bright. Expect to see more promotional tie-ins, whilst innovations in printing techniques, inks and finishes create even more exciting experiences and propositions for consumers and the industry alike. Some experts predict that the future of the can lies in designs which save money and materials and if this is the case the can looks set to promote its excellent sustainability credentials even further. Trends suggest that consumers and industry customers seek convenience, health, sensory, individualism, comfort and connectivity (linking products to friends and sharing) from their products. We can already see how the can plays its part, and it is exciting to think how this iconic beverage packaging will perform in the future.

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