



Yvonne: Now whatever we think of advertising and branding or about the effect that it has on shoppers, we've got to admit that it's clever - and it's big business! But why does it work? You're listening to bbclearningenglish.com - I'm Yvonne Archer. Welcome to London Life!

Why are we convinced that we'll look and feel like the happy model in the advert if we buy that new shampoo? And look, the bottle's so pretty! Of course, we know what the advertisers are doing - but we still reach for our wallets. Why?

We left London's busy shoppers for The Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising to find some answers. The museum's director, Robert Opie, has been collecting brands and packaging for the last 30 years so he was happy to tell us how it all began. As you listen, try to catch the three types of products that Robert mentions; they were sent to the 'grocers', the individual shop keepers, 'in bulk'. What does Robert mean by 'in bulk'?

Robert Opie, Director, Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising

Well if you go back to say the middle of the 19th century, virtually all the products being produced at that time were sent to the grocer in bulk. And he would make up and blend his own specific teas or he would dole out the dried fruits or the sugar or whatever it was. And it would be prepared in front of you and you could see what the product was.

Yvonne: Up until around 1850, the middle of the 19th century, the products that grocers sold were sent to them 'in bulk'. Did you work out what that means? Yes,

things like tea, dried fruit and sugar - the three products we were listening out for - were sent to them in large amounts or quantities, often in large sacks. So shoppers could see what they were getting when they paid for a pound in weight of tea, for example.

Now as we know, packaging is bad for our environment and makes shopping more expensive. So can't we go back to our old ways and why the big change?

Robert Opie, Director, Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising

Come the packaging revolution, that all disappeared and why was that? Well, people were getting a bit wary about what the grocer was putting into his tea and so on. He was making up weights of that pound that you ordered with little bits of spurious... hmm, perhaps the sawdust from the floor even!

Yvonne: Yuck – sawdust?! That's certainly 'spurious' - shavings of wood instead of pure tea?! It was the dishonest grocer who brought on the packaging revolution. Of course, the people who made the products – the 'manufacturers' - soon realised that packaging could mean new publicity opportunities, as Robert puts it 'a whole new publicity angle'. And customers got a few extras too! Listen out for two examples – the soap package that Robert talks about is from the 1880s...

Robert Opie, Director, Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising

Once the manufacturer had control over his product, he could put recipes on, he could say this is the same quality as the time before. So the whole thing took on a whole new meaning and a whole new publicity angle...

I'm looking here at a Sunlight Soap package – a brand that went right around the world. And the great way that they attracted customers to this was they offered a £1,000 reward if you could find anything wrong with the product. I mean that was a huge enticement.

Yvonne: OK, free recipes are quite useful but the soap product wins hands down for me! No wonder it was so ‘enticing’ – tempting people worldwide. Imagine how many people kept on buying packages of that soap to try to find a bar that wasn’t perfect! After all, a thousand pounds in the 1880s would have been a huge amount of money and it still is today.

Of course, branding and packaging is still about selling products but it’s also about another sales message that will keep on changing...

Robert Opie, Director, Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising

If you buy my brand, you become a hip kinda, cool kinda person. That’s the kind of person you want to be. And of course, that’ll continually change as our perception and our ideals change as society changes.

Yvonne: Can buying the latest product really make people and even children feel better about themselves? And is it OK to try to make us believe that? Why not talk about it in English before our next London Life? And visit us at bbclearningenglish.com for some of the words you could make use of.