
Intelligent Design for Law Firms

By Gerry Riskin

by Gerry Riskin, Edge International

In a recent issue of Fast Company, an article entitled “The Interpreter” starts out like this:

Claudia Kotchka is holding the secret to understanding design at Procter & Gamble in her palm. It’s not a P&G product, but a tin of Altoids®, the “curiously strong” mints produced by Wrigley. As the scent of peppermint oil wafts out of the box, she points out the nostalgic typeface, the satisfyingly crinkly liner paper. “Even the little mints look handmade,” she says. “It’s not completely full. The whole thing is very authentic.”

Then comes the twist. “Let’s say P&G buys this brand. What are we going to do?” asks Kotchka, P&G’s vice-president for design innovation and strategy. “[Employees] always gave me the same answers. ‘We’re gonna cost-save on this tin. We’re gonna get rid of this stupid paper — it’s serving no functional purpose.’”

She plops the tin on the table and picks up another product, unable to suppress a mischievous smile. “And I go, ‘Okay! Exactly! And this is what you get.’” Kotchka reveals “Proctoids®,” a box made of cheap white plastic from P&G’s baby-wipe containers. With uniform beige ovals jammed into the container, fewer colors on the lid, and no paper, Proctoids® taste like Altoids®, but they look as appealing as a pile of horse pills.

Gone is the pleasure people get when they buy Altoids®. Gone, too, is the up to 400% premium they pay. “That’s what design is,” she says of the look and feel. “That’s what designers do.”

What Claudia says Procter & Gamble would do to Altoids® is exactly what most law firms do. Good lawyers believe that high-quality work should speak for itself and therefore be in high demand. But in the real world, people are attracted to the “crinkly liner paper” — the “experience.”

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