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## JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER? ALWAYS.

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How often have you chosen a deodorant or cold medicine based on which package looked best? What you're doing is judging quality based on the design of the package.

There are numerous examples of this throughout the supermarket. Another good one is wine. Once you've decided you'll spend \$15 and want red, it's up to the design to sell you. You're not consciously scrutinizing the type style or examining the production techniques, you're just looking for something that has, to put it un-academically, the right vibe.

Design is the most visible, and therefore the most accessible, manifestation of a brand. Design affects us on both emotional and rational levels, whether we're aware of it or not. Bad design makes a company feel cheap or not credible. It may create a feeling of vague distrust or actually cause the consumer to consciously stay away. In the best examples of good design, the design itself is not conspicuous. It supports the message, strengthens positive associations, connotes strength and reliability, and makes information clear.

### DIFFERENTIATION BY DESIGN

Many companies think credibility is achieved only through looking like the other brands in a category. Let's pick up our packaging examples again. The aesthetic we expect on cold medicine wouldn't be appropriate on a wine bottle. Or would it?

A savvy brand can exploit preconceived notions about what a certain product is supposed to look like. Consider the hip, new wines or lower-cost wines that are using modern typography, bright colors, and fun illustrations on their labels. These wines are using design to appeal to a consumer with a different lifestyle and a different relationship to their product. And companies that

maximize the impact of design use it to develop their image from top to bottom. Some favorites:

Volkswagen has always been smart about how to use design. Beyond the innovative design of the cars themselves, VW has carefully crafted all aspects of its image. In the 60s, they pioneered the advertising approach to feature their product on a white background with a self-deprecating headline ("Lemon.") set in simple, friendly type. This style has influenced Apple and others, and VW still uses it to great effect today. This smart attitude and simple approach is apparent in every aspect of their brand.

Target has also leveraged design into a competitive advantage. Whether it's their marketing, the look of their stores, or the celebrity-designer appeal of their proprietary home and fashion products, design positions Target as credible and higher quality, as well as fun. Starbucks is another design success story. They've carved out a unique niche as the customer's "third place" (after work and home). The design of Starbucks' physical space has helped make this possible. If dropped unknowingly into a Starbucks, you'd recognize it immediately. The comfortable yet exotic feel is effective—even to a cynic like me who analyzes these things for a living.

**GREAT DESIGN IN THE HEALTH SPACE:  
WORK TO DO**

Brands in the health space are slowly realizing how design can help build their brand and bottom line. In fact, by addressing design at all, a healthcare organization is differentiating itself from the pack. By developing unique and engaging design solutions, Remedy helps clients break through the clutter and create unique experiences for their customers. For our hospital clients, for example, the biggest opportunity to leverage design is inside the hospital itself; using the facility to communicate the desired brand experience. Consider how a clean, well-lit, and smartly branded parking deck can set the tone for a positive experience... and, by contrast, consider the damage a dreadful parking deck can wreak on an otherwise positive experience. If you take nothing else away from this article, mull over this question: what's your parking deck saying about your brand?