

## Ben & Jerry's, Frito-Lay and Oreo Put Diversity Messaging Right on the Pack. There Are Risks and Rewards.

"We try to make it work pretty hard," the Unilever brand's global creative director said of packaging.

By **S.L. Fuller** | October 24, 2022



*Courtesy of PepsiCo*

If there's one CPG brand known for taking societal and political stances, it's **Ben & Jerry's**.

The **Unilever**-owned line of ice cream puts company values front and center on its packaging — like when it released a design of two cows in top hats, ostensibly getting married, on the front of "I Dough, I Dough" packaging that celebrated the **U.S. Supreme Court's** 2015 ruling in favor of same-sex marriage.

"We're definitely not making choices based on popularity," the brand's global creative director, **Ellen Kresky**, told CPG Specialist.

Does taking a certain stance risk alienating a portion of consumers? Potentially. But research shows the majority of buyers prefer to spend money on brands that have purpose. And brands that don't make an effort to connect with demographics typically left out of CPG promotional materials risk missing out on key pools of buyers.



*Courtesy of Ben & Jerry's*

As inclusion, diversity and representation take center stage in American popular culture, brands are taking the opportunity to join the conversation. Packaging is one eye-catching way for CPGs to get that messaging across.

"The way people discover Ben & Jerry's, and the way they interact with us, is usually through our packs," Kresky said. "So, we try to make it work pretty hard."

### **The Future, and Checkered Past, of CPG Packaging**

For decades, Mars-owned Ben's Original line of boxed rice was called **Uncle Ben's**. It changed after the police killing of **George Floyd** in 2020 prompted companies to evaluate the contents of their products and associated marketing from a diversity, equity and inclusion perspective.

**Barnum's Animals Crackers**, a century-old classic produced by **Mondelēz International's Nabisco**, altered its packaging in 2018. Under pressure from animal rights activists and shifting public sentiment, animal cages were removed from the packaging design.

**Land O'Lakes** took the Native American imagery off its butter packaging in February 2020. **PepsiCo's Quaker Oats** announced it would discontinue the **Aunt Jemima** brand a few months later. The list of CPG design changes goes on.

"A lot of the brands that are repackaging right now are legacy brands. They're the brands that have a rich history, started around or before the turn of the century," said Nathan Young, head of strategy at Deloitte Digital's Ethos division. "Some of the choices that would have been OK when that brand was debuted are just no longer OK in the context of today and in the eyes of today's consumers."

## CPGs Rework Package Designs With Representation in Mind



*Photo by Mark Mozart (CC BY 2.0) via Flickr*

vi Cracker Jack branded popcorn and peanuts went on sale for the first time in 1896 (the photo on  
ew the right was taken in 2014). Though the packaging has gone through several iterations, the  
th mascot has generally been the same: a male sailor with a dog.

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In years past, people would write letters to their representatives or protest on the lawn of government buildings when pushing for policy changes, Young said.

But now, "What people have realized is, instead of showing out and casting a physical vote, they can vote with their wallet," Young said. "When you put boycotts on companies for bad behaviors, or when you reward companies for good behavior, that tends to be a lot more effective."

In a 2021 survey from Havas Group, 73% of global respondents said they believed brands "must act now for the good of society and the planet." And 64% said they preferred to buy from companies known for purpose, as well as profit, while 53% said they'd pay more for brands that take a stand.

So, when consumers are parsing "bad" from "good" in the aisles of a grocery store, packaging could be the deciding factor in whether a product ends up in a cart. But there's a fine line between purpose-led actions and virtue signaling. To avoid the latter, CPGs bring in outside help.

### **Mondelēz and Frito-Lay Don't Go It Alone**

Partnerships are one way CPGs can ensure their packaging designs bring authenticity that consumers — particularly millennials and members of Generation Z — seek.

When **Mondelēz International's Oreo** released its Pride Pack packaging design this year, it leaned on its multi-year partnership with **PFLAG**, which describes itself as "the first and largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and their families."

The Pride Pack design features words of encouragement, support and pride from allies that appear to be hand-written. The words came directly from "PFLAG-ers," as **Liz Owen**, director of communications for **PFLAG National**, calls them.

To view the graphic, click here or go to [https://www.cpgspecialist.com/c/3689104/489454?referring\\_content\\_id=3689104&referring\\_issue\\_id=489454](https://www.cpgspecialist.com/c/3689104/489454?referring_content_id=3689104&referring_issue_id=489454)

"We are decision-makers on everything with them," Owen told CPG Specialist, talking about the CPG partnership. "We get to ask the questions."

Those questions can range anywhere from, "Is the crew for this video diverse?" to "What benefits do Mondelēz employees receive?"

Another common question, particularly for pride campaigns: "Can we do this not in June?" Owen said. "Highlight 11 other months."

Notably, Oreo released the Pride Pack in May — not during Pride Month in June.

Often, Owen continued, companies admit "other months" hadn't been on the radar. But some big brands have to come to understand the importance of year-round representation.

When **PepsiCo's Frito-Lay** launched its **Cracker Jill** campaign for its century-old **Cracker Jack** brand in April, it did so to coincide with the start of the baseball season. But "the intention is for Jill to continue to join Sailor Jack as a member of the team roster and part of the brand ethos," the CPG said in a press release.

Consumers can buy bags at baseball parks, and they will receive a bag when they donate \$5 or more to the Women's Sports Foundation, while supplies last.

Like Mondelēz, Frito-Lay made sure to surround itself with a diverse set of partners to pull off the campaign, which is all about championing women. Sailor Jack has long been Cracker Jack's mascot, and the product's name and package has always been male-focused. That history was part of the impetus for the multi-faceted Cracker Jill campaign.

One of Frito-Lay's partners was the designer of the new packaging, **Monica Ahanonu**. The process was collaborative, with both parties giving and receiving feedback. The first pitch Ahanonu handed in was of one girl.

"She was mixed, because that's just like America," Ahanonu told CPG Specialist. "So many people are mixed, and people are from different places. And then after that, they were like, 'OK. Now that we have one girl, let's expand and do all different types of people.'"

Ahanonu went on to create five different female designs for the Cracker Jill bags, with a diverse set of bodies, skin colors and styling. Frito-Lay said it was "inspired by the most represented ethnicities in the U.S.," based on Census Bureau data.

To view the graphic, [click here](https://www.cpgspecialist.com/c/3689104/489454?referring_content_id=3689104&referring_issue_id=489454) or go to [https://www.cpgspecialist.com/c/3689104/489454?referring\\_content\\_id=3689104&referring\\_issue\\_id=489454](https://www.cpgspecialist.com/c/3689104/489454?referring_content_id=3689104&referring_issue_id=489454)

After the Cracker Jill campaign launched, the consumer favorability of the Cracker Jack brand increased 13%, **Flavia Simoes**, Frito-Lay's senior marketing director, said in an email. More than 3,000 people donated to the charity attached to the campaign, and the brand's purchase intent grew 12%.

"The campaign had over 9 billion impressions and sparked overwhelmingly positive conversations on social media, which is a testament to what can be achieved when you put purpose at the heart of your message and goals as a brand," Simoes said.

### Beating the Backlash

The internet is rarely a place void of criticism. One look at the comment section online, Ahanonu said, and it was clear some consumers were skeptical about the authenticity of the Cracker Jill campaign.

"It's not just enough to repackage and have more diversity on your packaging," Young said. "Companies who really want to make positive change, and get credit for it, have to do their homework. They have to really understand these issues."

In other words, the packaging on the exterior of a product has to match a corporation's internal operations.

"The consumer overall is highly skeptical of brands' efforts in sustainability and diversity and inclusion because they have had a pretty blurred track record over the decades on those issues. And I think they're right to be skeptical," Young said.

As Frito-Lay celebrates women in sports, PepsiCo has gender parity as goal within its [PepsiCo Positive initiative](#). The CPG aims to have women in [50% of its managerial roles](#) by 2025, and it has several benefits and policies within human resources to support women.

**“I think we pride ourselves on being different and also being quite courageous.”**

**Ellen Kresky, Global Creative Director**  
Ben & Jerry's

Mondelēz, for its part, has an LGBTQIA+ employee resource group and a Rainbow Council. A gay employee detailed both in a corporate blog last year, titled "[Why I Decided to Come Out at Work](#)."

To Young, CPGs that work to improve their operations and workplaces are the ones best equipped to mitigate credible blowback from comment sections.

One example, Young said, is making the business a more attractive place to work. As people resign from their jobs in droves, some are looking for more meaningful work. Companies that don't demonstrate a commitment to improving peoples' lives, Young continued, are at a disadvantage when compared to

companies that do.

"It does have knock-on benefits. ... All of those things are going to signal to, not just consumers, that the company is doing something positive and doing something different," Young said. "It just helps their company grow."

As Owen put it, showing diversity on packaging, displaying those values, "means something." It makes consumers who usually feel marginalized and overlooked feel acknowledged.

"I think we pride ourselves on being different and also being quite courageous," Kresky said. "We don't always do it perfectly, but that's what we aspire to be. I don't think we would be who we are if we defaulted to something safer."

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