

Financial Desk; D

**Advertising; Packaging The Light Product**

By Sandra Salmans

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AMERICANS are seeing the light. First it was low-tar cigarettes. Then came light beer. Now food manufacturers such as Nestle, General Foods and Del Monte (a subsidiary of R.J. Reynolds, which should know all about the trend) are developing lines of light foods, with reduced calories, less sugar and fewer fats and starches.

The trend toward lightness is presenting new challenges to packaged goods designers, according to Alvin Schechter, president and creative director of the Schechter Group. Mr. Schechter, 46, who has spent nearly 20 years in the business of giving images to corporations and their products, is the man who colored More 100s beige and has helped package many of Reynolds's low- and lower-tar cigarettes since 1970. Other clients include Nestle, Anheuser-Busch, Noxell and Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing.

In the cigarette world, the quest for light is nothing new. When the first light versions of established cigarette brand families came out in the early 1970's, package designers did the obvious. "They used white to show lightness," said Mr. Schechter. "Redness was equated with full flavor. It was a much simpler world."

When Reynolds brought out its lowest-tar cigarette, Now, in 1976, Mr. Schechter, who had the assignment of packaging it, suggested a change to silver. Since then, he asserted, that color has been devalued by a proliferation of low-tar cigarettes in silver packages. He predicts more innovation in taste and other areas, and a return to more vivid colors in packaging.

So far, white seems to be the color for cans of light beer, as well as some food lines such as Libby's and Del Monte's low-sugar canned fruit. Nestle has brought out a New Cookery line of 30 items, with a rather spartan package design by the Schechter Group. The background color is a deceptively rich-looking cream. The idea is to make the food look appetizingly healthful, rather than medicinally dietetic.

As more products go light, Mr. Schechter said, it will become increasingly difficult to differentiate them on that basis. In fact, Mr. Schechter said, it is no longer necessary to emphasize lightness in the package design for cigarettes. "Every new cigarette product tends to be light, so it's not the primary communication need anymore," he observed.

What takes over when lightness fades, said Mr. Schechter, is a strengthening of the brand family in the package design. Three years ago, when the Schechter Group played a design role in the Camel Lights introduction, the pack was cream-colored with a small camel. When it was re-issued this year, it brought back the larger camel and pyramid.

Similarly, the packs of Winston -Filter, Lights and Ultra Lights - all use the same basic squared-off design, although in different colors; so do the packs of Vantage Lights and Vantage Ultra Lights. And the packs appear together in advertisements: by William Esty for Winston, by Leber Katz Partners for Vantage.

Illustrations: Photo of a potato box

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