STANLEY goes XTREME

Designers at Stanley Pool Their Knowledge to Launch New High-End Hand Tools

By Ron Romanik

For many professional contractors, carpenters, and handymen, Stanley Tools are the best of the best. They are depended on for strength, ease of use, and durability. The iconic rectangular yellow Stanley nameplate on a package is one of the clearest signs of quality craftsmanship.

The productive and efficient staff of Stanley package designers at the New Britain, CT, headquarters updates or designs new packages for about 2,000 SKUs each year, often turning around complete package designs in very short time frames. With so many SKUs and the current multilingual requirements, the in-house staff of 12 designers and administrators consolidates package design tasks whenever possible.

Over recent years, Stanley packaging strategy has reflected the "good-better-best" arrangement of many product lines, where the tiers have common attributes that convey their target demographics and price points. Last year, when Stanley was developing a number of tools to be even better than their current best, the company decided to launch them all together as a kind of brand extension line and to develop a consistent package design strategy for the line.

Stanley's previous top-of-the-line hand tool products were called "Fat Max" to emphasize the premium features, ruggedness, and durability of the products. Stanley decided to take advantage of the strength of the Fat Max name and extend it for their new top-of-the-line—Fat Max Xtreme. At each stage of their price point progression, Stanley has been amazed to find how many people will pay a premium price for their most-used tools. Stanley has realized that a certain percentage of consumers will pay extra for the best quality tools, especially if they use the tools many times daily.

Dedication to innovation

The Stanley Works has been part of New Britain since 1843 when Frederick Trent Stanley established a little shop downtown to manufacture door bolts and other hardware from wrought iron. Stanley's innovative spirit and passion for doing things right made his Stanley's Bolt Manufactory rise above the other small foundries in town.

Today, Stanley tool designers and package designers are still innovating to set their products apart. Randy Richards has been directing the of packaging at Stanley Works for eight years, and oversees the packaging strategies globally. Richards and his team makes sure the packaging works hard on the shelf to make it easy for consumers to find what they need fast while maintaining a

Customer research led to this innovative level packaging solution that allowed shoppers to confirm the quality of the tool in the store aisle.

Opposite page, top: The blister card on the Fat Max Xtreme tape measure has a raised, curved area to accentuate the XTREME name and silver band, and a "bubble" over the "13' Standout" circle icon. The blister also has raised borders up the sides that act as support beams for the backing and make the package and product—only clipped together—feel like a solid, single item.

Right: Stanley designers also take pride in crafting small-footprint floor displays that have great impact.

strong, consistent Stanley brand. "We're always trying to find new creative ways to make it easier to shop our products," Richards says.

One way to have packaging work its strongest is to simplify the benefit messages to help the product sell itself. On the new Fat Max Xtreme tape measure packages, for example, the benefit lines are succinct. There is the "13' Standout" circular icon and two lines below the "XTREME" silver band—BladeFX High Visibility Blade and BladeArmor 2X Blade Life. The actual product is out front selling itself, clipped onto the front of the packaging.

Having the package showcase the product and make it available for shoppers to touch and test is just one of many techniques Stanley designers have championed over recent years. Stanley's package designs have been recognized as outstanding dozens of times by awards organization and major design magazines. "We're always thinking in terms of the next generation," says Melissa Garrett, senior graphic designer at Stanley Works. "We're constantly thinking: 'What's next?'"

Beyond Fat Max

The Stanley company committed to making Xtreme packaging a clear indication of a superior line of products. When preparing for the concerted Xtreme branding and packaging effort for the entire Xtreme classification, Richards researched other consumer goods categories carefully. He was particularly impressed with what was happening in the vibrant, colorful, and foil-heavy packaging of golf ball boxes and sophisticated shaver products, and applied that insight to the Xtreme brand and packaging strategy.

"The Stanley logo is our biggest asset."

— Randy Richards, director of packaging

Stanley's New Britain-based consumer research department, led by Paul Wechsler, took packaging works-in-progress into stores to get feedback about how to position Xtreme products. Stanley decided early on that the Xtreme products and packages should build on the momentum that the Fat Max products had built over recent years, a momentum they may have underestimated. Garrett recalls that the Fat Max logo grew bigger and bigger in relation to the Xtreme logo even as they approached the launch time, partially in response to additional consumer testing at retail. "We were trying to take Fat Max to the edge," says Garrett. "We wanted to marry the two together."

To qualify to be labeled Xtreme, a new Stanley product must have a unique feature that no other Stanley product or competitor's product has. For the tape measure, this feature is the "13' Standout" capability of the tape. Whenever possible, they tried to make this unique feature into a trademarked icon with a strong visual graphic communication.

Richards is a strong proponent of icons that are coupled with text, and believes that the quickness of communication is essential. In Europe and Asia, icons are indispensable to reduce packaging iterations for multiple translations. Stanley also coins trademarkable names for products whenever possible to reduce translation. But always, they make sure no product name ever becomes a brand above the Stanley brand.

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Stanley designers have also discovered that small elements of packaging structure can greatly accentuate benefit messages. Ed Czopor, manager of structural design at Stanley, explains that pushing for 3D elements is not often a hard sell, as most times unique structures do not incur an extra manufacturing cost. Czopor points out that graphic and structural teams often work together to solve problems, and they worked very closely when developing the key elements of the Xtreme packages. The clamshell Xtreme packages have a raised, curved bar over an extra silver foil insert indicating "XTREME." In addition, the circular icons stand out more with raised plastic "bubbles" over the circles. These graphic and structural designs work well together to achieve the effect that Richards was looking for.

Good-better-best strategy

Scott Bannell, director of corporate brand marketing at Stanley, believes the company keeps its brand and packaging very consistent. Bannell is chair of the active Brand Council at Stanley, which protects the corporate identity on each of the 21,000-plus products that are out on the market at any one time. "It's a really good process," Bannell says of the Brand Council. "It's one reason why our brand is so consistent."

Aside from the closely monitored, universal Stanley yellow, the company's hand tool lines are loosely organized in a good-better-best arrangement with visual cues on the packaging that are common to each tier. Stanley designers are not averse to applying effective "trade-up" package design strategies to entice consumers to invest in the next highest tier of quality and price.

Basic or introductory-priced items are generally yellow and black with little decoration and few benefit messages. As the quality, durability, and prices rise, the sophistication grows with white-on-black contrasts, metallic colors, product photography, and bolder accents. The challenge is that while each new Stanley product is unique unto itself, it usually also fits into a complex hierarchy of existing SKUs.

> **"We're copied... It's annoying, but also flattering."**
>
> **— Melissa Garrett, senior graphic designer**

With the success of the Fat Max line of products, Stanley dared to think that they might not have reached the limit on the high-end products. "Our customers will pay more than we ever thought possible," Bannell explains.

Randy Richards' concept for these clip strips was to have in-use pictures behind the packaged products. "The more product you sell, the harder it works selling the rest of the product, because the visual gets revealed more." Richards says.

They also realized that many professionals and do-it-yourselfers simply want nothing but the best. The price points for Xtreme products, though not extreme per se, are certainly testing that high-end limit again.

"A lot of consumers look at the price point to determine quality," says Bannell, even at the basic or intermediate hand tool product tiers. For the Xtreme products, the packaging had to bolster that perceived quality. Stanley had already used gold for the Fat Max line, but because that gold was somehat subdued, Richards and his designers felt they could still go "beyond" Fat Max with packaging heavy with shimmering silver. Bannell emphasizes how special attention was paid to make all the elements of the Xtreme products work together—product design, packaging design, product materials, packaging materials, graphics, colors, and price points.

The new Xtreme level tool is a good example of all of these design elements working together. Like the tape measure, the level itself is made of shiny silver metal, and the silvery packaging is minimal but solid in execution. The paperboard packaging folds securely into one of the

hand holds and at first seems to be an integral part of the level itself. The succinct benefit messages are 5X Stronger, Rigid Box Beam Construction, and a large lifetime warranty seal of ".029° Accuracy."

Aside from reducing packaging materials, which Stanley designers are always cognizant of, the level packaging also keeps one of the leveling surfaces "open." Research found that this was important to many professional contractors, because they will often place two levels back-to-back in the store to verify the accuracy of the levels. The accuracy of the level is not the issue, but rather the fact that the customer can gain confidence in his or her purchasing decision in the store.

Stanley designers employ in-use product photography whenever the budget allows. "Words don't catch your eye," says senior graphic designer Melissa Garrett. "You're not always going to stop someone in the aisle with words."

Structures built for speed

Structural designer Czopor stays true to Stanley's belief that touching is believing. To this end, Stanley packages keep the product as visible as possible, and do not encapsulate the whole product whenever that is possible. If there is a new feature or benefit, the designers work to expose that element for differentiation. Czopor explains that if you do not clearly point out the different features at different tiers, they become too much the same and this can confuse to the retail shopper.

In today's fast-paced retail environments, the trick is to beat the competition to the punch and satisfy the "other" customers—retail outlet chains. Richards explains that Stanley has a good idea of the packaging these chains are looking for, but there is still often a give-and-take process when prototypes are presented. "They want the great selling features, they want the excitement, they want the interactive—but they also want it as small as possible," says Richards.

Since hand tools are often heavy, the Stanley packaging may have a secondary or tertiary function. "In many cases, we have to protect the packaging more than we protect the product," says Czopor. He explains that his department uses whatever materials will best accentuate the features of the° product itself to an imaginary discriminating consumer and real test market subjects in the field. "Retail customers do get involved in this process at times," Czopor says.

Oversized product images, bold back panels, and extended die-cuts on countertop displays are attractive to smaller, "two-step" hardware stores.

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Stanley designers even referred to the health and beauty category when they packaged a flashlight in a similar way to the Oil of Olay Regenerist products. The packaging presents the product as almost floating inside, and allows the customer to inspect the product from several angles. Stanley has since extended this successful packaging idea to other SKUs in the flashlight line.

Stanley design teams are always working together to make it easier for consumers to shop their products. These staples boxes feature an information rectangle that condenses the important product facts. In addition, this package features an in-mold label box with separate cover and base sealed with a shrink band, which helps improve pilfer-resistance, enhance product protection, and increase retail facings.

Impact in the stores

To be responsive to their customers in the field, Stanley has four dedicated full-time "Discovery Teams." The Teams are really four individuals in four corners of the world—East Coast, West Coast, Europe, and Asia. These trained market researchers usually take a product or package designer with them on their many and frequent field trips to actual professional job sites or retail environments.

It is not unreasonable for the corporate office to pose a specific question to the researchers one day and get real field results the next day. "There's nothing like having people that do nothing but talk to consumers," says Bannell.

One package design strategy that Stanley is sold on is the use of "in-use" photography to sell a product on the shelf whenever the photography budget allows it. Their line of hydraulic drivers has beautifully lit glamour shots of hands using the product in its most common application. "It really helps sell the product," stresses Richards. "As you're walking down the aisle, in a second you can just glance at the shelf and see these oversized images and you'll know exactly what to buy the tool for."

Stanley relies on outside photographer Bruno Ratensperger in Old Saybrook, CT, to do many of their product shots. Ratensperger splits his time between high-end advertising work, artistic automobile photography, and consumer product shots. Richards thinks having just one primary photographer has many advantages. "He really gets to know the products, and how to light them properly," Richards says.

In-use photography certainly helps sell the Xtreme Functional Utility Bar (FuBar; see cover). Though the packaging is only a folded tag, the pictures clearly illustrate the four primary uses for this powerful and versatile new tool. Using many strategies in this vein, the packaging for the entire Xtreme launch projects confidence in the product, confidence in the price point, and confidence in the consumer's value decision. ■

Stanley design teams devised all the elements of the Xtreme product launches to work together—product design, packaging design, product materials, packaging materials, graphics, colors, and price points.