

A Package That Lights Up the Shelf

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Containers of NXT's men's products have light-emitting diodes.

ABOUT a year ago, when Jamie Leventhal was trying to convince big chain stores to stock his new line of shaving gels for young men, a buyer for Target asked a crucial question: How much would he spend on advertising?

"I told him we would not spend a single dollar," Mr. Leventhal said.

The buyer was stunned until Mr. Leventhal pulled a prototype out of his briefcase. The product, called NXT, is sold in an arresting triangular container that lights up from the bottom, illuminating air bubbles suspended in the clear gel. The plastic is tinted blue, and when the AAA batteries in its base are lighted, the whole thing looks like a miniature lava lamp or a tiny fishless aquarium.

The novelty of the light-up container worked, and NXT's shaving gel — as well as its after-shave and face wash, similarly packaged — will hit the shelves at Target this month. It will also arrive at other retailers like Wal-Mart, CVS, Duane Reade, Winn-Dixie and Fred Meyer.

To call attention to themselves, the products, which are aimed at 18- to 24-year-old men, will glow on the shelves, inviting customers to pick them up. Every 15 seconds, a light-emitting diode (LED) in the bottom of the container flares on, stays lighted for a few seconds, then fades out.

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When brands get creative with packaging, the innovations are usually a one-two punch combined with advertising. That's what Coors Light did with its labels that turn blue when properly chilled, and what Huggies did with a children's hand soap that has a built-in light that flashes for the recommended hand-washing duration of 20 seconds.

But Mr. Leventhal believes the packaging of NXT (pronounced "next") is powerful enough to speak for itself.

"It's impossible for a new brand to spend like a Unilever or a Procter & Gamble," on promotions, said Mr. Leventhal, whose privately held company, Clio Designs, has manufactured a line of women's electric shavers since 2002. "We as a new company could go out and raise \$200 million in venture capital, but that would be ludicrous — why spend \$100 million on advertising that's speculative at best?"

Such talk may send a chill through advertising agencies and media outlets, but retailers who see the new containers can barely contain themselves.

"The packaging was more advanced than anything we'd seen before," Andrea Harrison, category manager for men's shaving at CVS, wrote in an e-mail response to questions. Ms. Harrison, describing NXT as having an "almost nightclub-friendly appearance," said that at CVS, "we consider whether a product in a given package can have impact on our shelf, and this was potentially an impact on a new level."

While most brands want to be placed at eye level or higher, Mr. Leventhal said the ideal shelf location for NXT is lower. "When you look down at them it's more dramatic, so what I'm doing is going into retailers and saying, 'Let's take the less valuable real estate on the shelf and make it more valuable,' " he said.

Each NXT light is powered by two or three AAA batteries, and a rolling switch turns off the contraption when it's upside down or sideways. The light will flash for about a year, so the product is shipped upside-down from its plant in China in boxes that say "This Side Up" in five languages.

Mr. Leventhal declined to say how much the lights cost, but said the additional manufacturing cost was less per unit than what many brands spend on advertising. The suggested retail price for the products is \$4.99 to \$5.99.

Lights in NXT products also are meant to telegraph their ingredients. They are formulated for sensitive skin — "generally the most popular variety across all men's grooming products, from skin care to razors," according to Ms. Harrison of CVS — but NXT favors the term "light" over "sensitive," as in Light Shave Gel.

"For our young consumer, the term 'sensitive' would seem kind of wimpy, " Mr. Leventhal explained.

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The shaving cream is also light on lather, the foam that bursts from the can of brands like Gillette Foamy or that forms when gels like Edge are slathered onto beards. While shaving creams with no lather can still do an excellent job of preventing nicks, foam helps with "tracking," in industry parlance.

Tracking, said Lou Hantman, 85, a chemist who developed shaving cream and other products for Gillette for 50 years — first as an executive and then as a consultant — and who helped formulate the NXT shaving products, is "when you make a sweep down and then you know you've been there."

While a thick lather tracks where your razor has been, it makes it harder to know where it's going, like around goatees or sideburns.

"We believe our target market is interested in what we call 'improved navigation' around existing facial hair guys want to keep," Mr. Leventhal said, adding that he is planning to introduce an "improved" shave gel in six months that foams a bit more.

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