

Updating an Icon:

Business Drivers Often Dictate
The Correct Pace of Brand Evolution

by *Philippe Becker*

Nature's Gate is well-recognized for its natural and organic personal care products. Their natural herbal shampoos and conditioners in the familiar squat translucent bottles have been an icon in the category over 25 years.

Paddy Spence, president of Nature's parent company Levlad, came to Philippe Becker Design (PBD) with the challenge of evolving the brand and packaging in order to maintain category leadership and compete effectively in the rapidly evolving personal care category.

> Sharpening the leading edge

Nature's Gate had such a dedicated, loyal following. Whatever we did with the brand and packaging had to keep that base intact, yet also appeal to the new customers coming to the category. Add to that some very real business drivers and we had our hands full. PBD broke down those business drivers into four simultaneous goals:

Functional evolution – The iconic shape that had served the company for so long with its Classics product line proved to be problematic to consumers and to retailers. For consumers, the rotund bottle was difficult to grip and did not fit easily in the shower caddy, so slimming it down a bit was a priority. The bottle also had a larger-than-normal retail footprint, which relegated it to the lower shelves at the store. The new bottle had to rectify that situation as well.

Category evolution – Over the last five years, dozens of new natural personal care products with more contemporary branding and packaging have entered the marketplace. Traditional players in the category have been introducing new natural and organic lines as well. Natural and organic products are no longer a market niche. The mainstreaming of the category has also brought with it innovation and excitement. Nature's Gate's classic-but-dated look was losing relevance among consumers in this evolving, lifestyle-driven category.



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Correct brand evolution has to be sensitive to loyal customers' expectations of the brand while exploring how far the logo can stretch.

Reemphasize leadership – More than 25 years ago, Nature's Gate literally created the natural personal care product category. New packaging and branding would give Nature's Gate an opportunity to reemphasize its category leadership and more clearly define itself in the marketplace not just with consumers, but also with retailers. Spence had also wanted the work to lay a foundation for the brand's growth. We wanted to layout a rationale and structure for all our various sub-brands, says Spence. We need to give some unity across the lines but still have a distinctive look and feel for all of the sub-brands.

> Improving brand and bottle

PBD began by reworking the Nature's Gate brand. The original logo had character and equities we liked. For example, we liked the stylized Lotus flower and lettering style, but the flower overpowered the Nature's Gate lettering.

We re-proportioned the elements to improve legibility while still retaining the original feel. We made subtle but major changes going from a circular, wrap-around shape to more of a banner shape, and we tucked a smaller Lotus flower beneath the type.

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Next up was the form factor of the bottles. Retaining the iconic nature of the original bottle while reducing its retail footprint and increasing grip-ability was prerequisite. With the new brand and graphics, the bottle had to resemble the original look, or we felt we might confuse existing loyal customers. To many people, the bottle was the brand.

Additionally, the decision was made to go from translucent to opaque bottles. PBD felt it gave the brand a more uniform presence, and therefore a larger presence, at retail. The client added one more reason to go opaque based on consumer feedback. It seemed consumers felt the aesthetic appeal of the bottle dropped when the bottles became half-empty after consumer use. Going opaque fixed that instantly.



> An organic evolution

For the company's Organics line of products, it was also about giving it a higher end look. This is a premium product line and it needed to have a premium look. Additionally, the Organics bottle shape carried through the look of the Classics line to create a consistent brand family look.

This was a more challenging project than we originally imagined. Both the client and our team thought it would be a nine month project yet it took two years. But once it was completed, Nature's Gate was able to go to market aggressively. According to the client, the entire program has produced the desired results. Sales growth has earned Nature's Gate more retail space and improved retail locations for existing, as well as new products.

In a recent discussion, Spence summed up the project: "The repackaging allowed us to position for future growth sales growth and product line growth. Product line growth is critical. And without a strong packaging foundation, you can't maximize the growth of brand and bring on new items within the context of the overall brand. We can now very easily roll out new items that fit within the brand context." ■