

CREATIVE IDEA GENERATION FOR REFILLABLE BODY WASH PRODUCTS

Dr V. A. Lofthouse¹

¹Sustainable Design Research Group, Department of Design and Technology, Loughborough University

ABSTRACT

This paper presents as a case study, the development and delivery of a creative workshop, generated to meet one of the deliverables of a two year collaborative DEFRA funded research project, carried out by designers at Loughborough University and a multidisciplinary team at The Boots Company (January 2006 – December 2007). The overall aim of the project – Refillable Packaging Systems, is to develop refillable packaging systems for a body wash (bath or shower) product and investigate its feasibility with respect to consumer acceptance and sustainability improvements. In order to generate a range of concepts for the project, a half day creative workshop was developed and delivered on two different occasions to two different groups of participants in September 2006. The aim of the workshop was ‘to generate an innovative concept for refillable packaging systems for ‘body wash’ products’. This paper reports on the creative process that two groups of participants were asked to follow, reflecting on why each of the activities was included. The summarized outputs of the workshop are presented and conclusions are drawn.

Keywords: Packaging, Innovation, Creativity, Sustainability, Case study

1 INTRODUCTION

The wide spread use of refillable packaging is recognised as having the potential to reduce the amount of packaging waste going to landfill. However in the past, attempts to extend the use of refillables beyond a few traditional areas have met with little success and as of mid 2003 no major retailers in the UK operated any schemes in the reuse of primary packaging [1]. It is believed that recent advances in technology, particularly new forms of retailing such as internet shopping and the development of product service systems may provide the opportunity to re-evaluate the role of refillable packaging systems. The innovative project, reported on in this paper, aims to address these issues and consider different ways of delivering refills in a product service systems context, to encourage the purchasing of refills whilst enhancing customer convenience and reducing packaging waste.

The overall aim of this two year DEFRA funded Loughborough University – Boots collaboration is to develop refillable packaging systems using a product service system approach and investigate their feasibility within the personal care market. In order to generate concepts around this area, a half day creative workshop to help facilitate the creation of potential refillable packaging system concepts for body wash products, was developed and run with two different multidisciplinary groups on two different occasions in September 2006. The key challenge of developing the creative workshop was to determine how to encourage the participants to think about the different types of refills available, outline the attributes of body wash products, feed in other sources of inspiration [2], and provide the group with the time to generate ideas which met the refillable packaging systems brief. In order to meet these requirements and achieve the aim of the workshop, a series of activities specifically focused on the needs of the project were generated from a range of external stimulus (literature, courses, previous workshops) and combined together to educate the participants and encourage creative idea generation. These activities which together formed the ‘creative workshop’ referred to throughout this paper were set within a creative context, as outlined in section 3.1.

2 THE WORKSHOP CONTEXT

The first of the two workshops, was run at Boots Head office in Nottingham, UK with a multidisciplinary group from Boots and Loughborough University, which included a Packaging & Environmental Compliance Adviser, a packaging technologist, the Botanics brand manager, and several sustainable design and packaging design experts. The second workshop was run at Loughborough University with a multidisciplinary group of experts. Industrial design expertise was provided by two internal designers, one designer from Sprout Design Limited and one from CasperGrey. Sustainable design experience was provided by two consultants from Design Wales and three researchers from Loughborough University. Specific marketing expertise was provided from one participant from Nottingham Trent University and a level of packaging expertise was provided by all of the participants.

Both workshops were held in a spacious, self contained room, with a large table in the centre and chairs around the edge (see Figure 1). A laptop and projector were set up at one end, along with video to record the session. A Dictaphone and microphone were also set up on the desk and a still camera was available. Embedded in the activity was a designer/researcher who was briefed to capture any interesting comments, findings and reflections.



Figure 1 The room layout for the Boots workshop

A series of creative templates that would be used during the workshops, were attached to the walls and the large table was covered with A2 sheets of paper and ‘decorated’ with body wash product examples, coloured pens, Post-it™ notes, boiled sweets, nuts, water, shells, stones, and Tangle toys™ [3].

3 THE WORKSHOP

The following section will outline the activities selected for the creative workshop and reflect on the reasons for their inclusion.

3.1 Workshop plan : Introduction

At the start of the workshop the facilitator/ project manager welcomed the participants, introduced herself and asked the others to do likewise. They were then asked to make themselves a name badge. The home made badges helped to reflect the relaxed environment that was being aimed for and gave the participants something to do.

The creative context of the workshop was then introduced to the group. The array of ‘nibbles’ and toys on the table were referred to and their purpose was explained. The oils in nuts has been found to lubricate the brain, the sugar in boiled sweets keeps you alert, fiddling with shells and toys helps to stimulate your neurons and encourage creative thinking and water helps to keep you alert [3]. Participants were encouraged to help themselves to whatever they fancied playing with or eating, and also encouraged to get up and walk around as they wished. Introducing these elements and outlining

their role, proved to be an effective warm-up exercise and created quite a fizz of excitement and interest from the participants. Following this, the timetable for the day was then presented and the aim of the workshop - 'to generate an innovative concept for refillable packaging systems for 'body wash' products' was reiterated.

3.2 Workshop plan : Background thinking

It was identified that in order to generate appropriate outputs from the workshop it would be important to ensure that all participants understood:

- what was meant by the phrase 'systems delivery',
- what constituted a refill, and
- what was meant by 'body wash'.

In order to achieve these aims a series of informative introductory activities were delivered to the participants within the 'background thinking' section of the day.

The first activity was a short PowerPoint presentation on 'packaging systems' which defined a system as "a group of real or abstract entities, which together comprise a 'whole'" and demonstrated that "within a system every element interacts or relates to another one". A typical car club system [4], the One-time video camera [4] and the Casa Quick detergent home delivery services [5] case studies were then described to provide three examples of how systems can work.



Figure 2 Casa Quick case study slide

The next two activities set out to raise the participants understanding of refills. Research carried out in the early stages of the project identified that it was important to recognize that there are many different types of refillable packaging approaches which can be differentiated in terms of their type and level of interaction with the consumer [6]. As a result of this sixteen different types of refillable packaging were identified, labelled and described, e.g. Lightweight self contained refill delivered through dispenser = Customer buys a self contained refill which they take home and put into their durable dispenser. Applications include Wipes, face creams, razors, cosmetics, fabric conditioner & air fresheners.

A consumer questionnaire which aimed to investigate consumer attitudes about a number of these different refill approaches identified that until consumers were specifically made aware of the different types, they had a tendency to relate all experiences of refills to one specific refill experience – milk bottles, razor blades or face wipes. In light of this, it was recognized that within the workshop it would be important to raise the participants awareness of the variety of refills available, to try and reduce the potential for confusion and ensure that they could clearly communicate their ideas to one another. A combined approach of an interactive game and presentation were selected and developed to meet this requirement.

The interactive game called “Match up”, involved a large paper template which listed the names and descriptions of the different types of refills (see Figure 3) and a series of laminated images of the different types of packaging which were given to the participants. The participants were asked to match the images to up to the descriptions and encouraged to help each other out. This activity had the combined benefits of encouraging discussion, teamwork and physical movement.

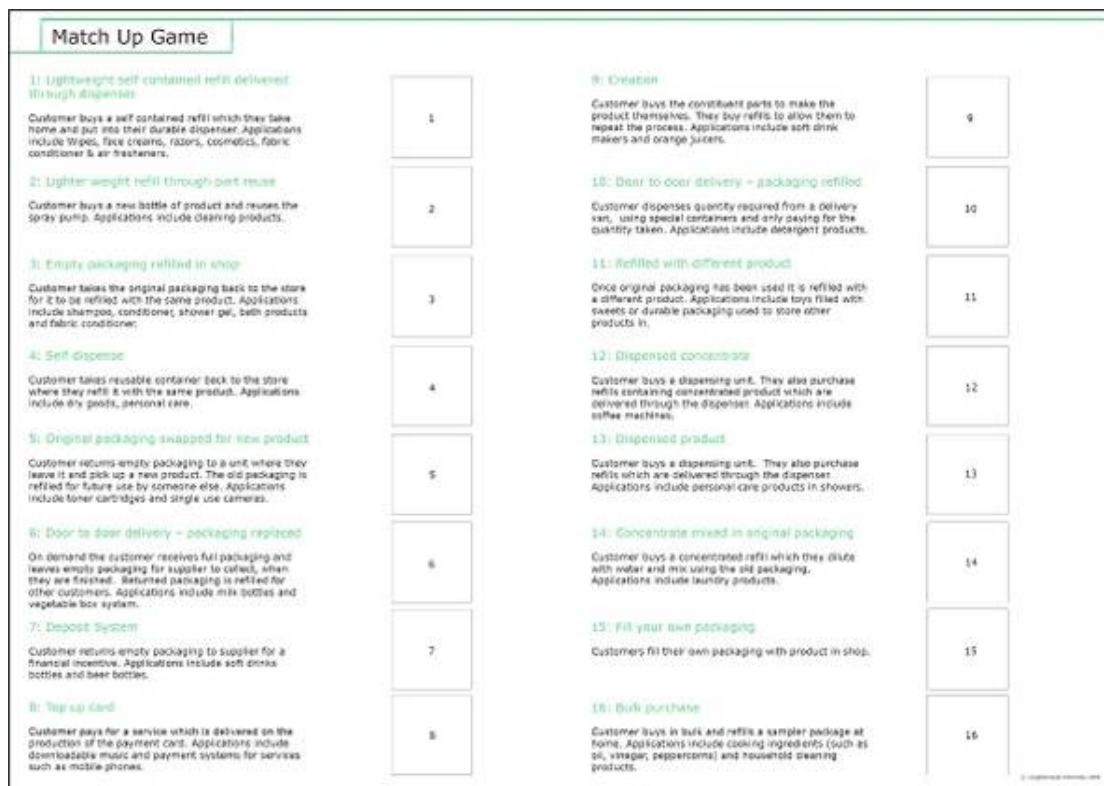


Figure 3 ‘Match up’ game template

To finish of the education, the participants were given a short PowerPoint presentation which summarised some of the most interesting findings which came out of the early consumer research [6]:

- Attributes leading to positive experiences with refills: good product quality, durable packaging, convenient delivery, good value, less waste, easy to use, clean and hygienic, takes up less space, light to transport, no mess, cheap, quick to use/refill.
- Attributes leading to negative experiences with refills: inconvenience, hassle of maintenance, perceptions of increased waste, poor product quality, bad delivery, bad quality packaging, ‘fiddly’ to refill, length of time refill will be available.
- Reasons why people actively purchase refills: Convenience; Cost; Altruism in association with product quality, and/or cost; Easier to transport; To reduce waste and/or actively reduce the amount of stuff they buy; Ease of use; Good experience of the product’s quality; Good past experience; Brand association; Take up less room; Fun; Considered the ‘norm’.

Each point was presented on a separate slide with a title, illustrative image and a range of relevant quotes to help demonstrate a grounding in reality.

Finally the participants were given a short visual slide show which aimed to get them thinking about ‘body wash’ products. The slide show aimed to illustrate how these products can be ‘trendy’, ‘luxurious’, ‘sporty’ and ‘healthy’, and how they can be described and delivered in many different ways. The delivery approaches highlighted included: spray, liquid, foam, crystals, bubble, block, wipe, balls. Each approach was illustrated with a colourful image.

To wrap up the morning session, the participants were given 3 minutes to brainstorm what they thought innovative refillable packaging systems for ‘body wash’ products might look like. The aim of this

activity was to give the participants to ‘brain dump’ any ideas which they had sitting in their heads – which might otherwise stop them generating new creative ideas.

3.3 Workshop plan : Idea generation

Following a short coffee break the participants came back into a two hour idea generation session in which they worked through three exploratory creative activities and a development session. After a reminder of the challenge - ‘to generate innovative concepts for refillable packaging systems for ‘body wash’ products’ and an introduction to the three rules of creativity – do not criticise other peoples ideas, do not criticise your own ideas, and listen to each other, they launched into the first activity – Random Links.

‘Random links’ [7, 8] was designed to get the participants thinking differently. Within this activity one participant was asked to select a random word from a hat and read it out to the group. All the participants then brainstorm as many related words as possible e.g. pencil – round, lead, stripy, sharp, rubber etc. The group was then asked to try and relate as many of those words as possible back to ‘refillable packaging systems’. This activity was designed to encourage them to think differently about the context. The group then carried out a fairly conventional brainstorm identifying the ‘features that a perfect refillable system for body wash would have’. Working together they shouted out their ideas and then recorded them - one idea per post it. The purpose of this activity was to encourage the participants to think without constraints and effectively generate a ‘wish list’ of attributes that could be drawn upon later.

The third creative activity was entitled ‘Excite me - surprise me - amuse me – satisfy me’. This activity was developed by combining the template approach used by The Grove Consultants International [9] and the ‘emotion based’ questions used in the Compass Ideation technique developed by Creative Advantage Inc. [10]. The hybrid activity involved the participants standing up around the template shown in Figure 4 and brainstorming ideas for attributes which would excite them, surprise them, amuse them, and satisfy them in relation to body wash products. The participants recorded their ideas - one idea per post it note on the template. The purpose of this activity was to investigate their emotions around body wash, tap into their personal insights and create a richer understanding of how people feel about the ‘body washing’ experience.



Figure 4. ‘Excite me - surprise me - amuse me – satisfy me’ template

Finally the group were given 45 minutes in which to develop a refillable packaging system for body wash. They were asked to consider how it would work; what it would look like; why it will work; what features it has; what would be needed; as well as the risks associated with it and anything that we

don't know. During the design activity an inspirational slide show was run in the back ground through the laptop projector (see Figure 5). The aim of the slide show was to give the participants some additional sources of inspiration in the background, should they need them.

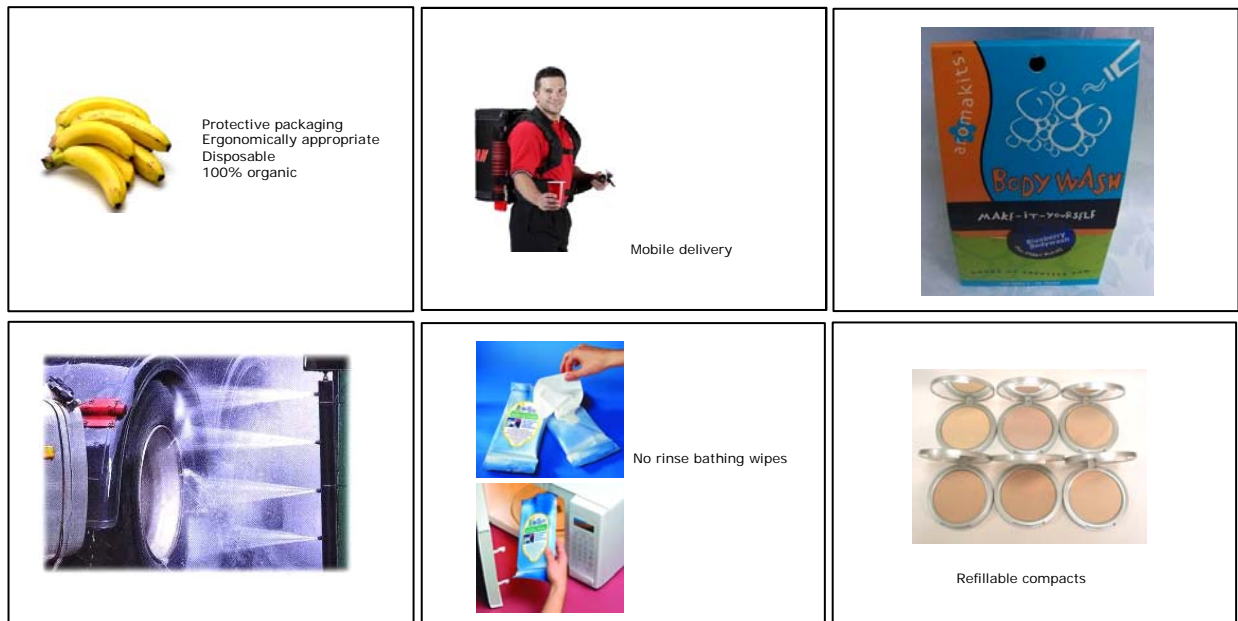


Figure 5. Selection of slides from creative slide show

The session was concluded with a wrap up and reflection from the facilitator.

4 OUTPUTS

A wide range of different ideas emerged from the two creative workshops and were disseminated to the participants via email. Two interesting outputs from the Boots workshop are illustrated in Figure 6: Test tubes and Concentrate. All of the outputs from this workshop focused on a concentrate being mixed with water.

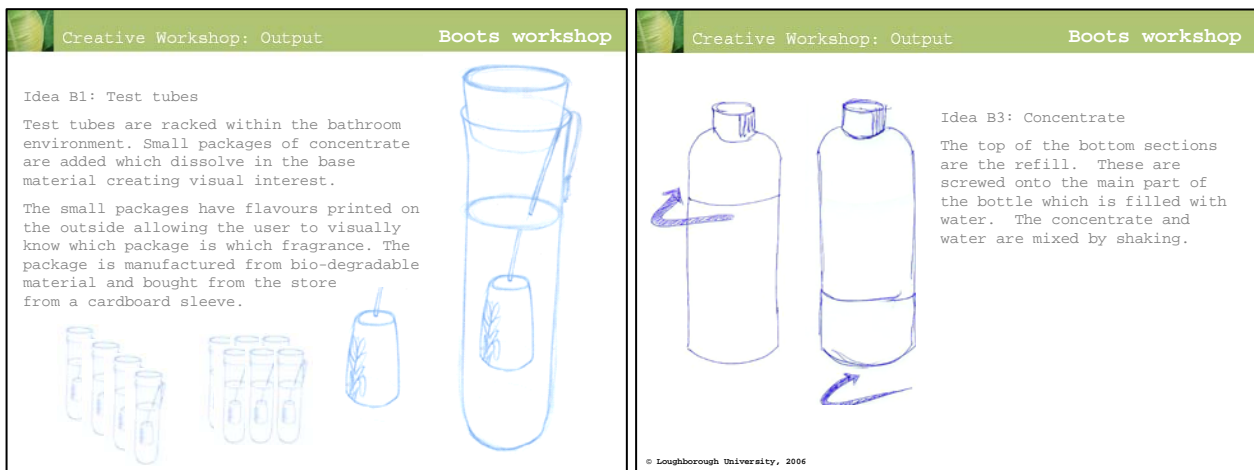


Figure 6. Outputs from the Boots workshop

The Dishwasher tablets idea illustrated in Figure 7 came out of both workshops.

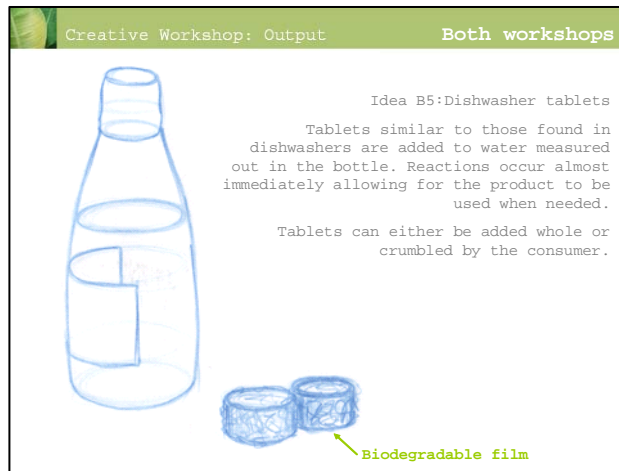


Figure 7. Output from both workshop

Six outputs which illustrate the breadth of ideas developed by the ‘experts’ workshop are illustrated in Figures 8 and 9: Twisting tin; Choc soap; ‘Keep sake’ box; Wobble; Tea bags and Labels. These ideas were a lot more diverse in their focus, falling into four categories – soap delivery, durable packaging, concentrates and flavourings.

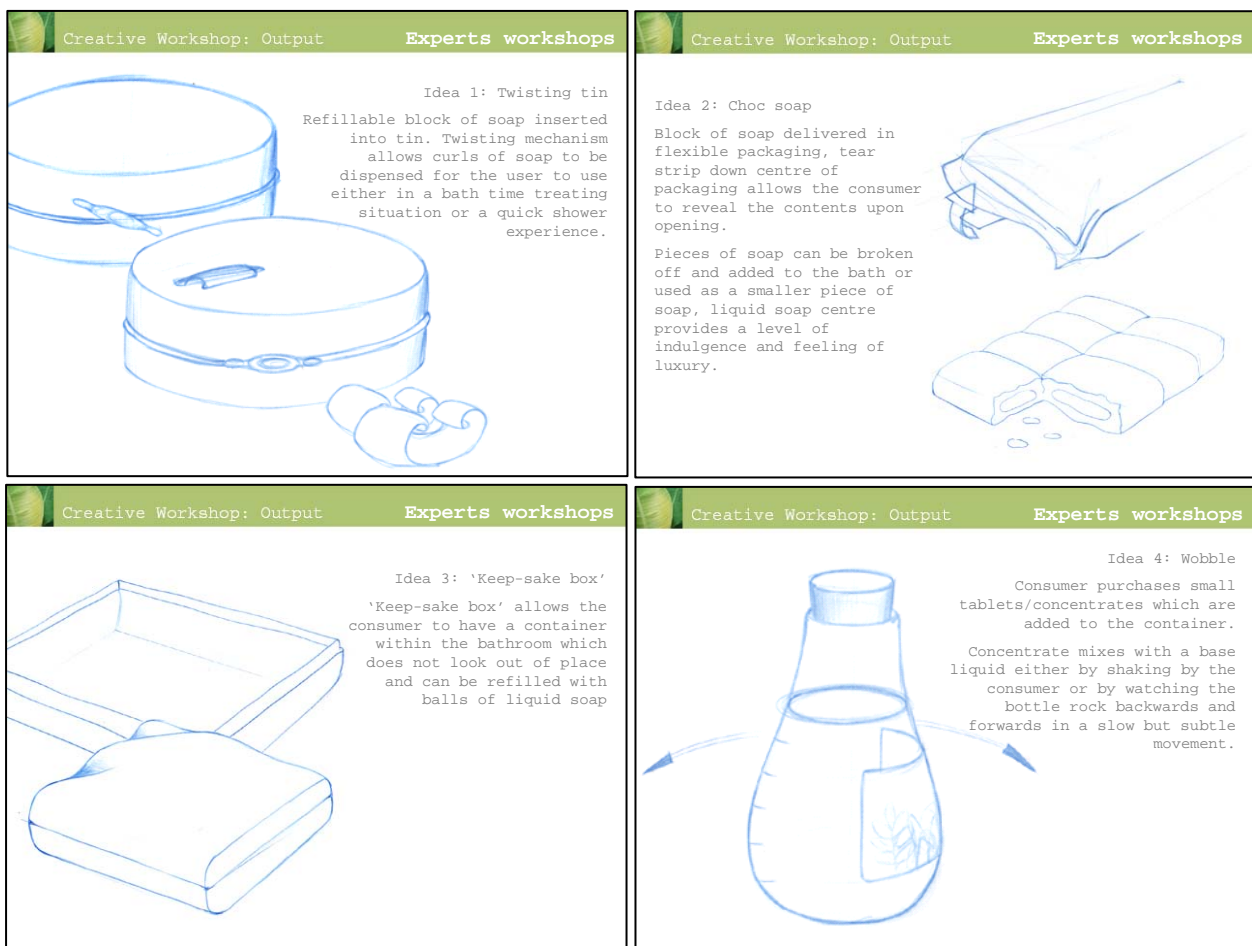


Figure 8. Outputs from the ‘Experts’ workshop

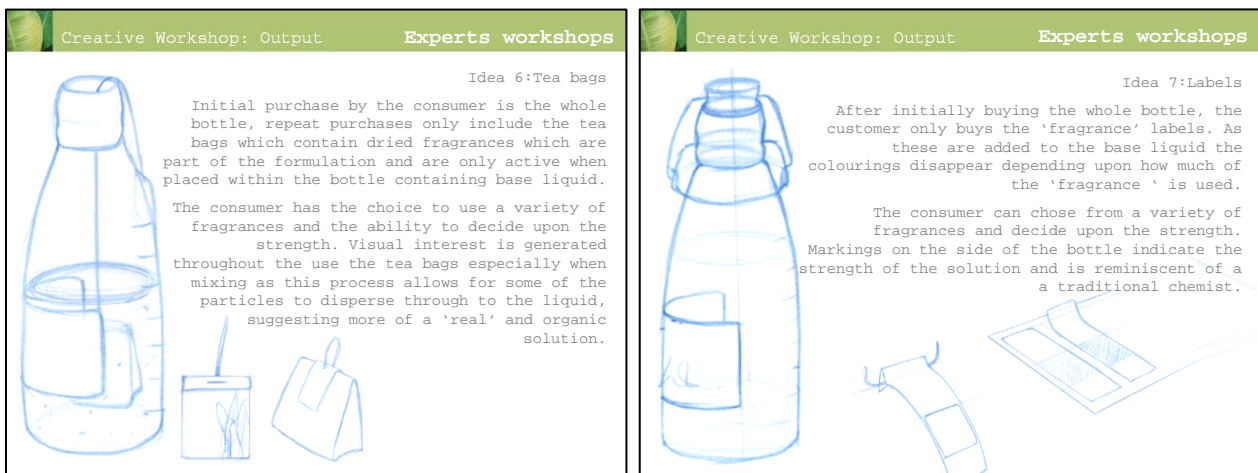


Figure 9. Outputs from the 'Experts' workshop

5 CONCLUSIONS

It is difficult to accurately 'measure' the success of activities like this. However there are a number factors which can be taken into consideration, that give an indication of success levels: did the activities work, did it achieve the original aim, was it enjoyable for the participants, was it enjoyable to run? Against these factors, which can all be answered with a yes, it was successful. The individual exercises all worked well. Helping the group to understand the problem before diving into the creativity session appeared to have the effect of aligning understanding before the idea generation exercise, which arguably led to the combined effect of the exercises having a greater impact than the individual parts. Informal feedback from the participants suggested that the over all effect of combining the different elements did have the desired effect of educating, informing and inspiring them to generate new ideas for body wash packaging and this did lead to the development of a number of innovative concepts for refillable packaging systems for 'body wash' which could be taken further and fed into the research process. Observations and discussions during and following the workshop suggested that participants enjoyed the experience and the author/ facilitator also found it to be a fun and interesting workshop to run.

Whether the workshops could have achieved even more/ better outputs with different activities, and different people is a question that can not be easily answered. The difference in the levels of idea diversity which came out of the two workshops was interesting and can be explained by the different ways in which the two groups worked, with the Boots/Loughborough group choosing to work together to develop ideas, and the Experts group opting to work in a number of smaller fragmented groups, to focus on different ideas. This appeared to happen because the Boots/Loughborough team all knew each other well, where as in the Experts group small clusters of people who had known each other for longer, tended to work together. There was also a character who clearly preferred to work alone. Whether or not this natural splitting up, was a good idea or not is a matter of opinion. Whilst it encouraged a diversity of ideas, it did not lead to the more detailed development which the Boots/Loughborough dynamic created.

Whether or not the outputs reported in section 4 adequately reflect the systems element of the brief is also a question which needs to be reflected on. An early expectation of the brief was that the outputs would involve flow diagrams to illustrate the systems which they fitted within, however this was not the case. The Boots/Loughborough group did specifically comment on how the refill would be purchased but opted to keep the process as simple as possible to make it more appealing to the consumer. Effectively this meant that the refill was bought over the counter in the same way as traditional body wash. Lighter weight elements was specifically recognised as being a positive environmental factor.

Although this workshop was not piloted (which is recognised as a risk and a weakness) it was developed in the light of quite a considerable back catalogue of experiences of running creative/ idea generation workshops.

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Contact: Dr Vicky Lofthouse
Department of Design and Technology,
Loughborough University,
Loughborough,
Leics.
LE11 3TU
England
Phone: 01509 222777
Fax
e-mail: v.a.lofthouse@lboro.ac.uk