



ARTWORK MANAGEMENT: COLLABORATION IS KEY

Streamline Review and Approvals by Providing Stakeholder
Transparency and Accountability





Introduction

Avoiding operational gridlock

Getting packaging artwork approved is not, historically, a quick or low-effort process. The review process entails many steps, in which a range of stakeholders including product management, graphic design, legal, compliance, packaging, marketing and branding, all provide feedback and direction. Even this is just a summary of steps—unpacking the total workflow process would be a paper unto itself. Suffice to say that reviews and approvals are a maze, and that designers and product managers need a solution to help navigate it.

This process provides many opportunities for organizational gridlock. To think of a simple example, let's say that the regulatory team needs to add a warning, or the branding team finds the logo on your pack isn't compliant with standards – this requires important changes. After making the change, the artwork needs to circle back around for another set of approvals. You circulate the physical job jacket with the revised artwork but now the process gets held up because someone due to review was out sick, another stakeholder missed their deadline, and now nobody seems to know where the job jacket is – putting time to market at risk.

Package design professionals may be juggling multiple projects and dealing with extreme communication gaps that produce so many edits that satisfying all of them risks time to market. In many situations it's not clear when edits were made and if all of the appropriate changes and signs off were made without error. Conversely, stakeholders themselves may not know which decisions require the most urgency, resulting in delays as important decisions sit on the back burner.

Email chains, pdf attachments, spreadsheets, point solutions and general-purpose communication tools are all workarounds that don't let package designers and other stakeholders work as a team with as much efficiency as needed. Important projects tend to get stuck in interdepartmental limbo, which can greatly delay the all-important time-to-market.

In order to improve collaboration, reduce pack design errors, and speed time to market and stay competitive, professionals need to look at automated and configurable that are designed for the industry.



Manual Collaboration Efforts Don't Work

Packaging design professionals need an automated solution designed for artwork management

Unless you find a collaboration solution that's custom-designed for artwork management – more on this later – package design professionals will find that they have a difficult time going through the approval process. Many things need to come into alignment during this stage – die-lines, marketing guidance, accurate copy for product variations, approved phrases from legal, and regulatory information from the compliance department. As shown, feedback from one stakeholder may invalidate feedback from another, leading to multiple revisions that become stalled as the project loses mindshare and eats up time.

Emails Are a Drag on Productivity

Nearly every industry – not just product design – has a problem with email as a collaboration tool. As an experiment, a company with over 70,000 employees in global offices decided to shave down their email use as much as possible. By the time email use was reduced by 60 percent, their earnings per share increased by 50 percent—because they were able to spend more time working and less time writing emails—and their administrative costs were reduced by 3 percent.¹

In the specific case of package design, email ends up getting used as a communication tool, a file storage system, and a version control methodology – and it's barely good for communication. Nobody enjoys the process of digging out an attached PDF from an email that arrived weeks ago, and it may be difficult to resolve the corrections made on that PDF against other changes made by other stakeholders. Instead, they need to view artwork in a centralized place, simultaneously, with correct versions, so they can quickly compare notes and revisions – something that email can't offer.



Apart from recording the call or taking notes, there's no good way of preserving revisions made to your artwork

Slack, Wrike, Microsoft Teams, and the Rest

So, instead of keeping the entire approval process inside of a several email chains, why not branch out to a newer workplace collaboration tool? You could do a screenshare and a video call on Microsoft Teams or start a new channel in Slack. Would that work?

Although these tools work better than email, they're still not as good as a purpose-built solution. Getting every stakeholder on the same schedule for a call may take weeks, and then there's the fact that many workers may be stymied by technical issues. Many users are still not very comfortable using videoconferencing technology as they do using traditional conference tools.

In addition to scheduling concerns and technical difficulties, there's also the fact that apart from recording the call or taking notes, there's no good way of preserving revisions made to your artwork. Depending on everyone's bandwidth, there's also the chance that not every stakeholder will be able to see the artwork at an appropriate resolution, which gives them the opportunity to miss important edits, or to provide revisions that aren't needed.

Lastly, newer tools like Slack may offer the ability to provide asynchronous edits, but the same ease-of-use principle applies – older or untrained users may have difficulty with the application. In addition, research suggests that Slack and other newer collaboration tools may sap productivity as much as the emails that they're supposed to replace.ⁱⁱ

Additionally, none of these existing options offer a centralized content or phrase library so final artworks could be end up being stored in multiple locations. Some packaging professionals may find themselves forced to go to the store and purchase the product to make sure they have access to the final version of artwork. Then there's ensuring that you're using approved content and phrases for packaging variations. Not to mention the fact that none of these options track decisions or provide the opportunity to collaborate thru the process.

ii ReCode, "[The productivity pit: how Slack is ruining work](#)," May 2019

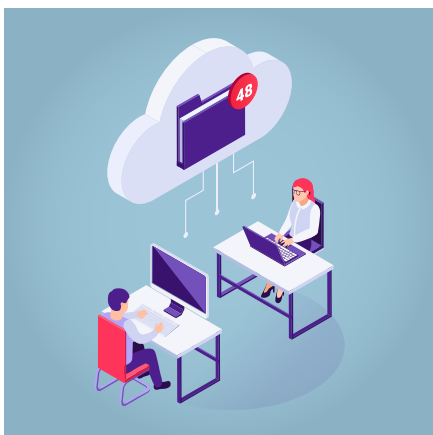


As a general rule, an organization's primary project management tool...are not purpose built to manage artwork

Dedicated Project Management Tools

One final note – you may be tempted, perhaps as a last resort, to make do with your organization's dedicated product lifecycle management or project management tools. There are a lot of these, so it doesn't make sense to run down each of them, but as a general rule you'll find that these tools are not purpose built to manage artwork and are not made to easily adapt to existing artwork management workflow processes which enable efficient collaboration between relevant stakeholders. That's because they typically don't allow for easy collection of content in the schedule – most PM tools are built for a scheduling expert who may not be in marketing or packaging.

In addition, these tools tend to be both entrenched and expensive – package designers may spend a lot of money obtaining a license for these products, and if they don't meet their needs, the expense of the initial investment may make it difficult to justify moving away and trying something else.



What Are the Effects of Poor Collaboration?

Operational silos result in a lack of accountability and impact speed to market

Packaging artwork needs to be circulated to many key stakeholders for approval throughout the product lifecycle. However, manual solutions which may even involve circulating artwork PDFs via email don't provide the type of collaborative platform needed for efficiently managing the process. Stakeholders are not able to simultaneously view, annotate, and automate comparison of versions on digital media. That approach, along with disconnected software solutions, results in operational silos and doesn't encourage accountability while also being slow, cumbersome and error prone.

Increased Errors and Revisions

Packaging artwork approval processes that rely on email means that forgetting to open an email – or finding an email stuck in the spam filter – can potentially lead to weeks of delays which in turn can cascade and result in more delays. Worse, there's the chance that your product might receive final approval without incorporating critical feedback. This doesn't just mean that the packaging doesn't look exactly right – it may mean that it goes out without the correct critical legal phrases or regulatory information.

In the pharmaceutical industry, about 50 percent of recalls are due to incorrect labeling data.ⁱⁱⁱ Meanwhile, inaccurate labeling – mostly related to undeclared allergens – was related to 46 percent of recalls in the food and beverage industry.^{iv} Recalls are expensive, embarrassing, and have the potential to make customers sick or worse – they should be avoided at all costs.

The key to fixing this is to implement an artwork management solution with efficient workflows and accountability that ensure deadlines are met. It should

iii xTalks, "[Pharmaceutical Packaging: What You're Doing Wrong](#)," Jan 2016.

iv Food Safety News, "[Food recalls in final quarter of 2018 reveal problems with bacteria, labeling](#)," Feb 2019.



Reducing time to market by just a few weeks may result in significant improvements in brand equity and revenue

function similar to a wiki – approved stakeholders are allowed to make changes, and everyone else can see those changes and look at previous versions. This means no more hunting around in email threads for the most recent approved version of an artwork – and it means that when a piece of artwork gets final approval, everyone knows.

Accelerating Speed to Market

Poor communication in the package design approval process can cause unnecessary revision cycles which both consume scarce resources and delay the readiness of packaging artwork. Not everyone who's involved in package design also knows when the finalized package design is due – which means that the legal department, for example, might sit on your request for approval for weeks while they work on their other priorities.

Since it's hard to sell a product without packaging, approvals can be a serious brake on speed to market for an organization. Research from the Boston Consulting Group shows that:

- 46 percent of executives believe that product development time is too long
- 42 percent of companies with faster development cycles are considered strong innovators. Only 10 percent of slower innovators can say the same)
- 35 percent of innovators generate at least 30 percent of their revenue from new products – compared to just 11 percent of slower innovators. ^v

However, when you have visibility and can collaborate more efficiently than time goes down and you may see as much as a 50% reduction in time to market with a configurable, automated workflow system. Even reducing time to market by just a few weeks might result in significant improvements in brand equity and ultimately revenues, while maintaining a competitive edge. What might that entail?

^v Boston Consulting Group, "[The Rising Need for Innovation Speed](#)," Dec 2015



How to Fix Collaboration with Automated Artwork Management

A configurable, automated process offers transparency, accountability and access

Succeeding at package design collaboration means implementing an artwork management process that achieves transparency, accountability, access, and speed.

To achieve transparency, first eliminate email to coordinate project activities, eliminate unnecessary phone calls, and eliminate PDF attachments to collaborate. Instead, focus the approval process on the artwork itself. Instead of sending the image from place to place, stakeholders must go to the image – hosted in the cloud – and annotate it directly. Every annotation should be time-stamped and attributed to the person who left it. This offers true transparency and accountability when it comes to managing your workflow.

Designers need easy access to all of the necessary data and content required to create a successful artwork. They should be able to immediately pull up any relevant, up-to-date materials needed to create a successful pack design – the latest approved images, marketing phrases, legal copy, regulatory information, and so on. This will make it possible to manage multiple SKU variations with fewer revisions and with accuracy and consistency.

Speed arises out of both transparency, accountability and access. It should be easy to see who's left revisions, who's approved an image, and who still needs to contribute. Also, you should be able to see that from basically anywhere, without searching from the right email, the right link, the right folder or network drive. If



Approval processes can be changed from a frustrating headache to a truly liberating experience

multiple people have left contradictory feedback, it should be easy for them to see this and then resolve the situation. There's no waiting for emails, because there aren't any emails, and there's no way to lose attachments either. With repeatability, it becomes possible to minimize the review process even further – the package design process will need less review time before approval and it will be easy to finalize any artworks in real-time.

With these improvements, package design professionals can turn the approval process from a frustrating headache into a truly liberating experience involving real-time collaboration. What's more, this refinement can improve efficiency, time to market and competitive edge.



About Loftware Smartflow

The industry's most powerful artwork management solution

Loftware's configurable and automated Artwork Management software, Smartflow, lowers costs, reduces mistakes, improves collaboration and reduces time to market. Smartflow transforms project management, streamlining the packaging concept to shelf process by bringing accountability and structure to the process. Loftware's comprehensive Smartflow platform enables you to manage packaging artwork and the end-to-end business processes, mitigating risk, improving control, compliance, traceability and reducing the overall complexity of the artwork management process.

Loftware developed Smartflow from the ground up in the Cloud in 2007. The solution is used by over 65,000 users in over 80 countries and is used for brands of all sizes and needs across Consumer Goods, Life Sciences, and private label and retail. Loftware is the global market leader in Enterprise Labeling and Artwork Management Solutions with more than 5,000 customers in over 100 countries. Offering the industry's most comprehensive digital platform, with SaaS, cloud-based and on-premise solutions, Loftware redefines how enterprises create, manage and print complex labeling and packaging artwork and scale across their operations.



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