

Food Information Made Easy – QR Codes Paves the Way to Success

Comparing furniture with food products at IKEA, there are two main drivers in why food products are more challenging to make compliant on many markets: firstly, there are way more policies regarding food information requirements, and secondly a smaller package reduces how much information can be put on a product. This increases the number of product variations needed to reach all of IKEA’s 60 markets. In our thesis “Stickers of Food Products at IKEA – Improving a Process Through Learning from Others”, we found that this drives the need of stickering, which is a relatively easy and cost-effective way of reaching compliance at IKEA. If information could be condensed and made flexible for each market – using readily available technology, information could be presented in a more understandable and customer friendly manner.

There is no going around it – customers have to be informed about the contents of the food products, so that they can make informed choices based on diet, allergies or health. Government policies is a huge driver in this question, setting the standard for what is required in countries and regions.

A very limiting factor in how much information can be placed in a package, not too surprisingly, is size. The space available on the side of a taco spice mix is rapidly eaten up by fancy artwork, which serve to catch the eye of a hungry customer in the store. This leaves only a limited space on which all required information on nutrition, recycling and contents can reside. Trying to fit all market specific information, while keeping batches large enough that it is economically viable and keeping the information understandable is a tough job even for the most experienced packaging developer.

So, the burning question is - How can this seemingly impossible riddle be solved? The answer might be in our pockets.

According to Deloitte’s 2019 Mobile Consumer Survey, which maps how mobile technology is used globally, 90% of the adult

population owns a smartphone. 95% of user use their smartphones daily, indicating a massive spread of this technology.

In utilizing the vast accessibility to smartphones globally, there are many ways of accessing information adjusted to your region, and language. QR codes are especially interesting, as one quick scan with your smartphone camera could lead you to a website where product information is presented in an easy-to-read, compliant and inviting format. This information could be adapted to the customer’s location, e.g., to avoid the typical Norwegian/Danish/Swedish language mix found on a lot of food products.

Compliant

A product is compliant when it is legally salable and all required information is present according to local government policy.

With such technology, the amount of space required on each package would be reduced dramatically. It would leave room for only the most critical information, such as allergens and nutrition. Such information can be made generic through easy-to-understand symbols, creating a product that is compliant on many more markets without compromising on the available information on the packaging.

Utilizing technology like this would make a huge difference for food producers, as language clustering is a very complex and challenging issue. There are of course risks which are apparent, such as if a customer does not own a smartphone or other means of scanning a QR code. But as the world progresses, even more people will have access to smartphone and make it possible for food information to become even more accessible to customers.

References:

Deloitte (2019) *Mobile Consumer Survey*- Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/technology-media-and-telecommunications/articles/mobile-consumer-survey.html> Accessed on: 2021-05-14