



itsu [grocery] gains a personalised platform to obliterate time-consuming and manual artwork management inefficiencies – and paves the way for massive growth

CLIENT: itsu [grocery]

itsu [grocery] and its product range are expanding so fast it became impossible to manage accurate and perfectly branded packaging manually. It has streamlined artwork management processes with 4Pack.



Since taking its restaurant foods direct to shoppers in 2011, itsu [grocery] has been growing rapidly. Its multi-award winning, Asian-inspired chilled, ambient, and frozen foods are now available in all major supermarkets. It is now the 2nd largest frozen UK ready meal brand and the fastest growing in that category, according to The Grocer – and it is aiming to grow turnover from £60m to £120m by 2026.

This trajectory is multiplying its artwork and packaging design and management needs. As an innovator in a highly competitive space, itsu [grocery] is developing new products and adding new territories. Several European distributors and markets like the Netherlands are grasping every dish it can offer. Plus, new promotional partnerships, such as a recent Tesco Premium Meal Deal, are emerging.

Chloe Demetriou is Studio Manager in charge of design for itsu [grocery], and formerly its Artwork and Packaging Project Manager. She recalled that *“part of my role was to automate what was a largely manual artwork process. We had strong processes, and a huge project and task management spreadsheet – but it was easy for people to paste information in the wrong place. There was too much room for error. A decision had been made that we needed a better solution.”*

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Chloe Demetriou
Studio Manager, itsu [grocery]

Chloe set out to find the right artwork management platform: *“I spoke to several providers, but some didn’t offer strong enough project management or artwork review tools – plus we needed precise annotations to manage our branding. I also considered cost and, in the end, recommended 4Pack to our senior team.”*

An increasingly complex challenge

itsu [grocery] needed a single platform to manage an increasingly complex process that includes checking every facet of its artwork, so packaging and labelling is completely correct. Artwork for every product is managed on the 4Pack platform and, from a hundred or so artworks two years ago, the number now exceeds 200 and rising. *“With more artworks, having a smoother artwork management system is now more important than ever”* Chloe stated.

With international expansion, the number of language variants on products are also increasing. There are now six languages on the big'bao and frozen gyoza packaging. Chloe noted that *“we need our process to be slick to remove any possible misunderstanding for our translation services and other teams. Every check is now managed through 4Pack, to ensure that everything down to the cooking instructions is correct in every language.”*

Of course, package artwork requires constant updating. She stated, *“we need to respond to regulatory changes around allergens and nutritional information and are doing a lot of work on sustainability by changing materials and removing as much plastic as possible.”*

Lastly, no matter the product or market, the itsu branding is a constant, so every package must be perfectly on brand. *“We have clear brand standards and many guidelines to follow around how everything is used, like our pink brackets and apostrophes,”* Chloe said.

Clearer KPI visibility & control

The whole itsu organisation sets and monitors itself against KPIs to sustain operational excellence everywhere. Even as it becomes more complex, 4Pack now helps itsu [grocery] see and manage the status of its artwork versions and speed development through fully connected processes.

Reducing the number of artwork versions means reaching final designs faster. itsu [grocery] is committed to improve significantly on typical artwork cycle rates. Minimising the File to Print timeline helps ensure on-time packaging printing to meet fixed launch dates or production deadlines. With processes managed on the 4Pack system, both are more visible and controllable.

Chloe told us *“Many companies are happy for artworks to go through four versions, but since 2021 we have been working to reduce our artwork versions from four to less than two. We had to improve accuracy and leave less room for error. With 4Pack we no longer need to send information and links around in email chains. The process is less prone to error and the status of artwork is clearer. We can work faster and better to the critical path timings and deadlines of our product development team.”*

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Easier artwork administration

The introduction of 4Pack made an immediate difference, Chloe said, especially in terms of admin: *“As Artwork and Packaging Project Manager, 4Pack made my life easier straight away. It saves a lot of time and many emails. I used to send an email out for every single artwork version to ask our designers to view amends, then wait for one back from them – then email reviewers to check changes. Now, 4Pack does all that for us automatically. People just click a button to push the process forwards.”*

Finding artwork and supporting documentation to action a task is no longer time-consuming. She remarked, *“Nobody wastes time searching for things on different servers or drives anymore, because they can just click a link in 4Pack and go straight to the artwork. I remember spending so much time finding where things were stored, copying and pasting links into emails – not anymore.”*

Everyone responded slightly differently to the system because it changed their ways of working. Chloe recalled, *“It took a little time to go through user acceptance testing and training, but that’s completely normal. Our designers said they found it quick and easy. The technical team liked marking up PDFs, but they come at things from an accuracy and legal compliance point of view, so they quickly started to appreciate the auditability.”*

Pairing up to perfect processes

Chloe worked with the 4Pack senior team to identify requirements and work through implementation, establishing a strong relationship. She commented, *“Helen and Jeremy have been really accommodating and the relationship is great. Working with 4Pack is a good partnership and pairing, and I like that we can grow and evolve together. We have learned a lot from them about the system, and they have learned about our needs from us.”*

She particularly appreciated their understanding of the importance of personalising the platform, explaining, *“We have a very strong brand presence and personality – so it is really important to us that everything feels like it belongs to us.”* 4Pack tuned the platform to the itsu brand, from a branded login screen to category tags that mirror the company’s colour palette – with the company’s trademark pink featuring strongly.

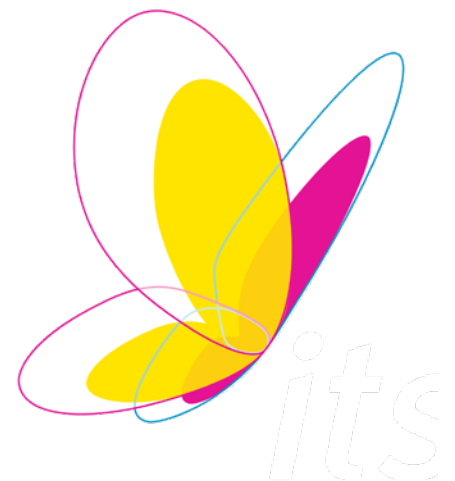
This early attention built a solid foundation. Chloe said, *“Whatever happens, we know that 4Pack are helpful, attentive, and we can count on them to be reactive as our needs change. We can go to them with new ideas or to raise concerns and know they will put in time to address them.”*

Taking the next steps together

Chloe passed the artwork management to Vicki Helm in 2022 confident that the platform was operational but with further potential. She reflected, *“We built the system around what I needed in my role – but ultimately you have to build processes that work for the whole business, and that’s where the development tweaks come in.”*

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Vicki picked up the bulk of the project management swiftly and easily, gathering information from teams to create artwork briefs and then managing reviews, annotations, and rework using 4Pack. She observed, *"It's great to have all the artwork and archives on one system. The annotation tool is one of the best features of 4Pack – instead of marking up changes on offline PDFs people can comment on the system, and we have full traceability."*

4Pack is now working with Vicki on the next aim, which is to build KPI tracking into the system so it can generate a weekly management team report covering the status of every artwork item, related document, or outstanding task. Vicki said, *"4Pack is now building on the platform's reporting function, which will mean no more spreadsheets and save up to an hour completing each report."*

Onboarding external providers such as translation services and printers onto the system is another goal. Vicki noted that *"4Pack is flexible, open to discussion and change requests, and communicates well with us. If there are any day-to-day issues, I simply log a request for support, and they are really responsive."*

Enjoying the efficiencies

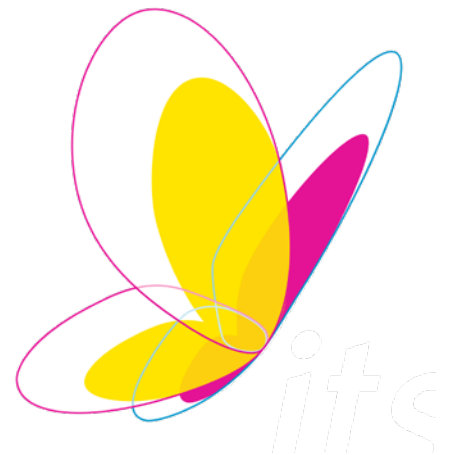
4Pack has already supported positive change, improving accuracy and timelines through a streamlined and collaborative artwork management process. Chloe said, *"There is no question that artwork project management is now a lot easier and far smoother, with activity more streamlined between teams. 4Pack has made life easier for everyone and reduced email traffic considerably."*

She can already see that more of the design process could benefit from dovetailing into the same system as the artwork management. *"It's important to find a provider that can grow with you and offer what you need as you evolve"* she said.

Vicki concurred: *"4Pack seem really willing to make changes and adaptations specific to our needs. They understand that everyone has different ways of working and are learning from us as well. It's been a two-way street."*

Chloe seemed optimistic as she contemplated what is to come: *"We aren't quite yet at the point of letting go of everything we were doing manually and that is the next big step. When we can use 4Pack for everything including our KPI reporting it will be a dramatic change for us, and saying goodbye to the last of the manual tracking will be a very happy day."*

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