Expressease was distributed through boutique shops and online. The brand had been on sale for approximately ten years, and become extremely successful. This informed the rationale for this new line of premium chocolates, as the chocolates were “an important opportunity, by creating a link to the established and successful coffee brand” [BA20].

The project brief focused on developing six types of pure, unflavoured chocolates, each of which was tailored to accompany one of six varieties of coffee. This would be marketed around “the perfect experience” for the consumer, and “giving coffee a perfect ‘partner’” [BA20].

The development of the product, or its actualization, was undertaken outside of Expressease, by the confectionery PTC. The technical team worked with specialist testers to develop the flavours, undertaking extensive taste tests using a range of chocolate sources from different origins, to deliver the appropriate matching flavours. A great deal of attention was given to creating “the appropriate size and amount of chocolate, and whether it should be a one or two bite chocolate” [BA18], which critically affected how the product would be consumed. The key question was whether “the consumer bites a bit off and consumes the product slowly, or if it is all consumed as one….. [creating]…. different experience for small and large chocolates” [BA18]. Based on the testing, and a number of focus groups run by an external market research agency, the chocolates were designed to be held for an initial bite, and the remainder put into the mouth as a second bite or to melt.

The development of the packaging was outsourced to a design agency. As the project was focused on developing boxed chocolates, the manager gave no attention to formats other than a traditional paperboard box. The decision to outsource the design of this box was based on the Expressease category manager and team’s preference for agencies, as they believed these “provide creative solutions” [BA16]. As there was not considered to be a particular technical challenge with “putting chocolates in a box” [BA14], this also seemed the logical approach. Underlying this was a consideration that the confectionery PTC packaging team was employed to work on its own range of projects; outsourcing would thus not create additional workload for an already busy team without good reason.
The initial boxes to be sold in the boutiques were small, and common for each of the six chocolate varieties. Whilst the product was not yet to be sold online, the long term plan for online distribution was built into the brief. Thus the total size of the box was established, based on the existing packaging used for distributing the coffees. Three small chocolate boxes would be packed together in a shipping box, with a combined length and width equivalent to the coffee's shipping box, thereby saving on postage costs. The box format and size were, in consequence, largely predetermined; so the design firm largely focused on the colour, finish and graphics. Each had to broadly fit with the existing Expressease range (Figure 8.4.6), but the team still felt there was “some freedom for creativity” [BA19].

Figure 8.4.6: Example of a Expressease box

The agency's designers created a box to match the brief, undertaking customer focus groups to aid in designing the appearance of the packaging. This was subsequently approved by Expressease. The next stage was the 'development of the concept', when equipment was procured and the project moved towards production. The chocolates were produced on a semi-automated production line, which the Expressease SBU invested into, whilst the boxes were outsourced to a manufacturing firm. Buyers contacted a number of potential suppliers for tendering, and a European firm, which had provided a tender with the lowest cost, was selected.

At this stage, production was relatively limited, as the chocolates were only to be sold in the boutiques at the outset to test market them. Once stocks were built up, the company began distribution. Over the following months, the marketing team monitored success, which was “at a level that matched or exceeded our expectations” [BA20].
After several months, the second project was initiated: to develop a larger box that could hold a mixed variety of chocolates, as well as redeveloping and refining the existing box as required. This second part of the project is summarised in Figure 8.4.7.