

A GRO BRAND & PACKAGING CASE STUDY

The Salsita Label, Rebuilt With Data.

How Tio Pelon's Salsita went from invisible on the H-E-B shelf to a label defended one square inch at a time — by coding 47 competitor labels across 14 variables and moving every element on evidence, not taste.

26

competitor
brands

47

labels coded,
one per SKU

14

variables scored
on every label

4

corrections the
data forced

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A method you can defend square inch by square inch.

This is a packaging case study, but the operating model is the one gRO runs for growth: measure the whole market, find the space no competitor occupies, and move every element on evidence. Read it front to back, or jump to the exhibit you need.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A great product that disappeared on the shelf.

Tio Pelon's Salsita makes some of the best salsa in San Antonio — and was invisible on the one shelf that mattered. The salsa was never the problem. The jar was.

The brand is built on Grandma Emma's recipe and a face customers already know: Tio Pelon, bald head, red glasses, a grin that says **sit down, eat, I made this for you**. But on a busy grocery aisle the current white-label mason jar did nothing. It read homemade in the way that means invisible, not artisan. From ten feet away it produced no color block at all. The heat level lived nowhere on the front. The San Antonio origin — the most valuable thing the brand owns — was buried on a side panel. And across the line, ten products looked like five different brands.

That is a marketing problem before it is a design problem: a strong offer the market never gets a fair look at. So we didn't start with a mood board. We started by measuring the shelf, the same way we'd instrument a funnel before spending a dollar on it.

10 ft

the distance at which the old jar produced zero color block

O

front-panel heat indicators on the original label

10 → 1

SKUs that looked like separate brands, unified into one system

THE REFRAME

A shelf label is a landing page made of glass and ink. It has a headline, a hero, a trust bar, and a call to action — and it lives or dies on the same rules. So we read it like one.

TURNING AN AISLE INTO A DATASET

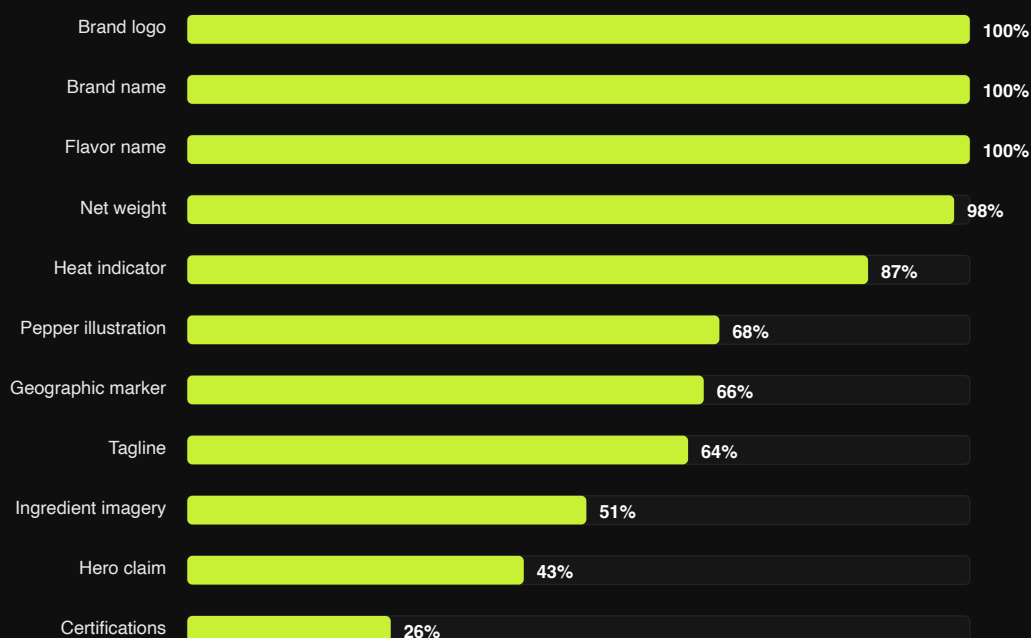
We coded the whole category, not a mood board.

We photographed the salsa and hot-sauce set at H-E-B and built a corpus of **62 label images across 26 brands**, from mass-market Pace and Tostitos up through premium craft names like Siete, Ancira, and Desert Pepper. Then, instead of eyeballing them, we coded them. Every usable front label — **47 in all** — became one row in a dataset scored across **14 variables**, and every front panel was split into a **3×3 grid of nine zones** so we could record the primary zone of each element.

ELEMENT PRESENCE · 47 COMPETITOR LABELS

Which elements a salsa label carries

Share of the 47 coded labels that carry each element at all. The rarely-used ones are where a differentiator hides.



Source: gRO analysis of competitor_label_data.csv.

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Exhibit A — What a salsa label actually carries. Logo, brand name, and flavor name are universal. But a hero claim appears on fewer than half of labels, and certifications on only a quarter. The rare elements are where a differentiator hides.

WHERE THE CATEGORY CROWDS

Everyone shouts from the same square inch.

Aggregated, the data reads the category as a system. The logo lives top-center on 51% of labels; the brand name on 64%; and the flavor name sits dead-center — zone 5 — on a remarkable **72% of labels**, the strongest single pattern in the set. Break those and a scanning shopper can't find you. But the center is also brutally crowded: zone 5 carries the flavor name, the heat indicator, a tagline, brand names, pepper art, and ingredient photos, all at once.

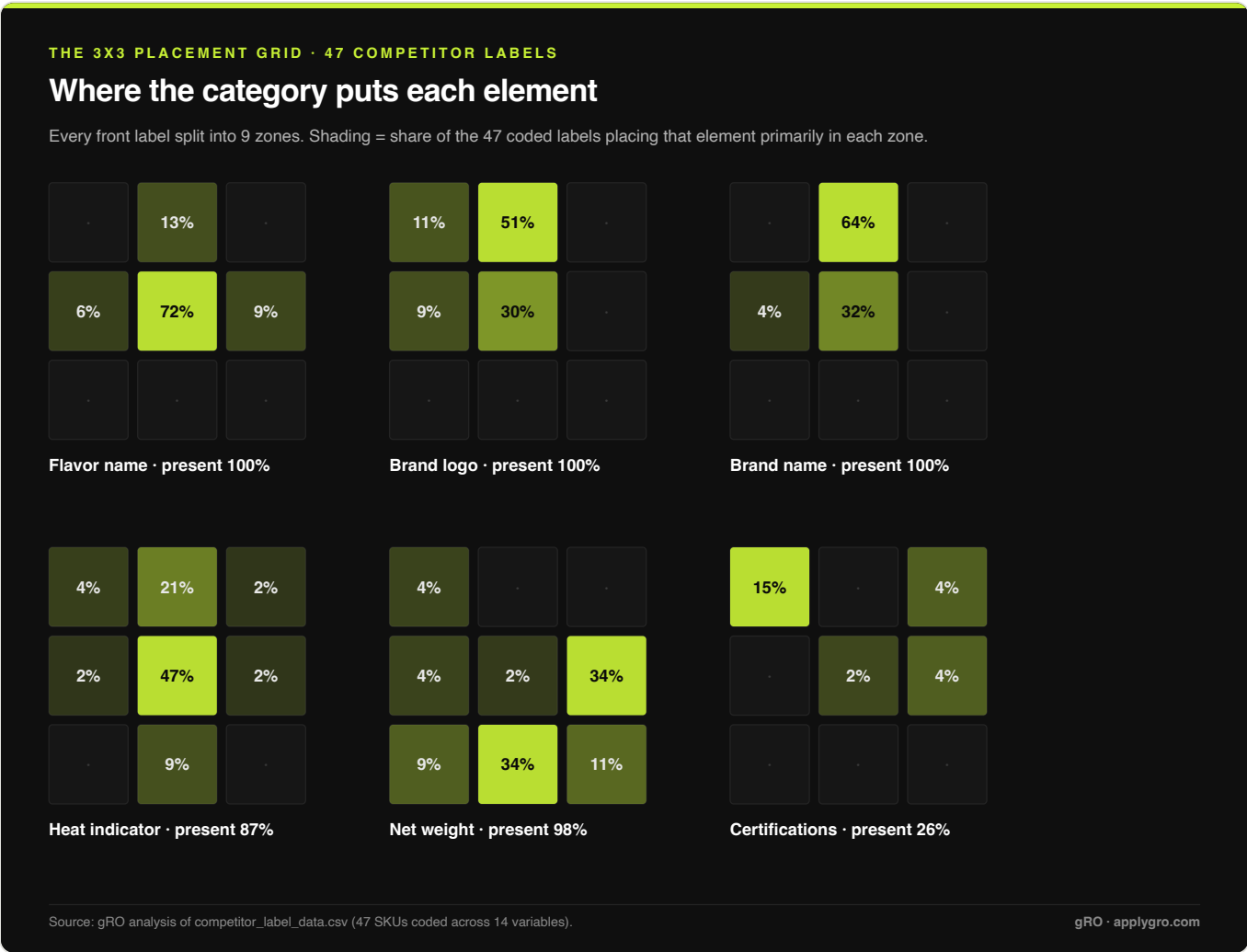


Exhibit B — The placement heatmaps. Each grid is a label; each cell a zone, shaded by how often the category puts that element there.

THE OPENING

Three zones sit nearly empty across all 14 variables — bottom-left, bottom-right, and top-right. The brand that lets one element own the center and pushes its differentiators into the empty corners looks calmer and more confident than the whole shelf.

BEFORE → AFTER

What actually shipped.

Before the specifics, here is where it lands. The old white-label jar disappeared into the shelf. The redesign puts the heat level and the **"No Tomatoes"** claim on the front, owns the San Antonio heritage, gives the face and the recipe their due, and reads as one confident brand — a bold block where there used to be none.

BEFORE



AFTER



Before → After — the real product on the shelf. Left: the old white-label jar that vanished at ten feet. Right: the shipped redesign — heat badge on the front, the No-Tomatoes claim up top, San Antonio heritage owned, clean hierarchy.

THE TWO TELLS THAT SIGNAL PRICE

A label announces its price before you read it.

Because we tagged every label by price tier, two categorical variables revealed how a brand quietly signals what it costs. **Using cap color to signal heat** is a mass-market habit — 92% of mass labels do it, versus 44% of mid and just 6% of premium. Running the other way, **hand-drawn craft styling** climbs with tier, from 15% of mass labels to 50% of premium.

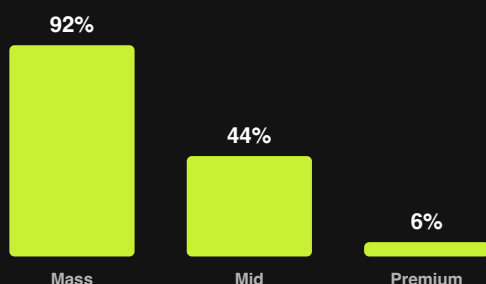
TIER TELLS · MASS VS MID VS PREMIUM

Two variables signal price tier on their own

How the share using each device changes as you move up the price ladder. Toggle these and a label self-signals its tier.

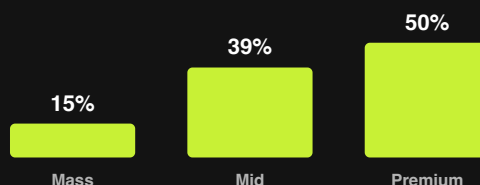
Cap color used as heat signal

a mass-tier commodity cue



Hand-drawn / craft markers

a premium register



Source: gRO analysis of competitor_label_data.csv (13 mass · 18 mid · 16 premium).

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Exhibit C — The two tier tells. Tio Pelon's already keeps caps uniform (premium behavior) and leans hand-drawn (premium behavior) — the label just wasn't cashing in on either signal.

THE READ

Toggle those two variables and a label self-selects its shelf tier before a shopper reads a single word. Tio Pelon's was already behaving like a premium brand and pricing like one; the packaging simply had to say so.

DESIGN IT, THEN PROVE IT

Every element got a verdict.

We had already drafted a redesign on instinct — a clean field, a bold color band, a papel-picado border, the heat level on the front. Good instincts, but instinct isn't a defense. So we ran every element back through the 47-label data and gave each one a verdict: **conform** to the norm, **differentiate** into open space, or **reconsider** because we'd placed it wrong.

LABEL ELEMENT	WHERE WE HAD IT	CATEGORY NORM	VERDICT
Logo lockup	Top-center (z2)	Zone 2 · 51%	CONFORM
Flavor name	Center (z5)	Zone 5 · 72%	CONFORM
Heat indicator	Top-right (z3)	Zone 5 · 47%	DIFFERENTIATE
Usage tagline	Top-left (z1)	Zone 5 · 43%	DIFFERENTIATE
Certifications	Bottom-left (z7)	Zone 1 · 58% of cases	MOVE → Z1
"Born in San Antonio"	By the barcode (z6/9)	Zone 4 · 26%	MOVE → Z4
Net weight	Center-ish (z5/8)	Zones 6 & 8 · 68%	LOCK → Z8
Signature tagline	(none on label)	63% carry one	ADD → Z5

THE HUMBLING PART

The heritage stamp — the brand's crown jewel — had been sitting next to the barcode, while the data showed shoppers hunt for provenance on the middle-left. That was the single biggest mismatch in the draft. We moved it. Four corrections, all forced by evidence.

ONE OWNER PER ZONE

Before it did six jobs. After, one each.

The rebuilt front panel lets a single element — the Tio Pelon face and lockup — own the center. The two differentiators claim empty space: the heat meter sits in the top-right, where **zero percent** of competitors put heat, and the usage tagline sits top-left, protecting the center for one job only. The four corrections put every trust signal where the shopper already looks.

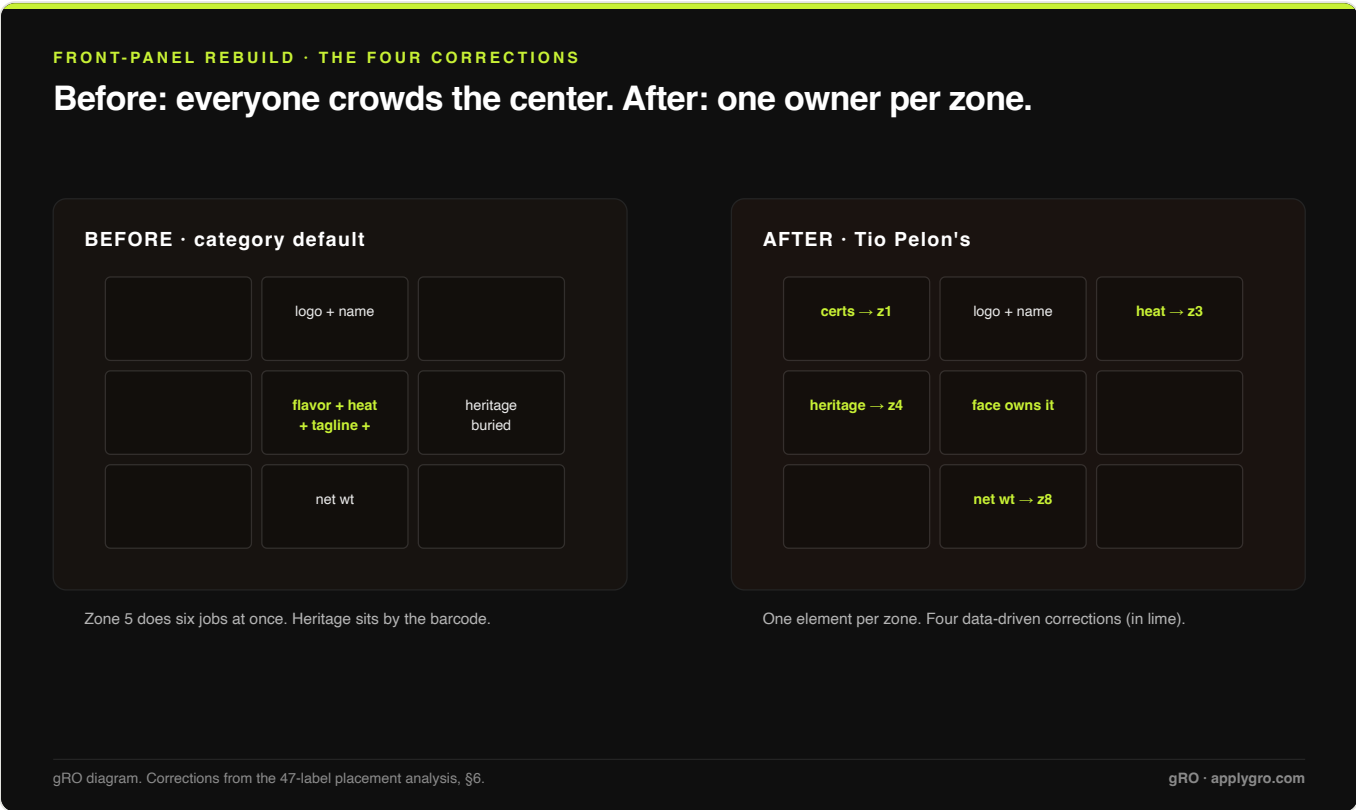


Exhibit D — The rebuild, zone by zone. Corrections in lime: certifications → zone 1, heat → zone 3, heritage → zone 4, net weight → zone 8. The face owns zone 5.

LEGIBLE AT THREE DISTANCES

Color at ten feet. Story in the hand.

A shelf label has to work at three ranges, and each has a job. Color does the work at distance; craft and story do the work in hand. Every placement decision had to earn its keep against this ladder — a label that only looks good at eighteen inches never gets picked up.

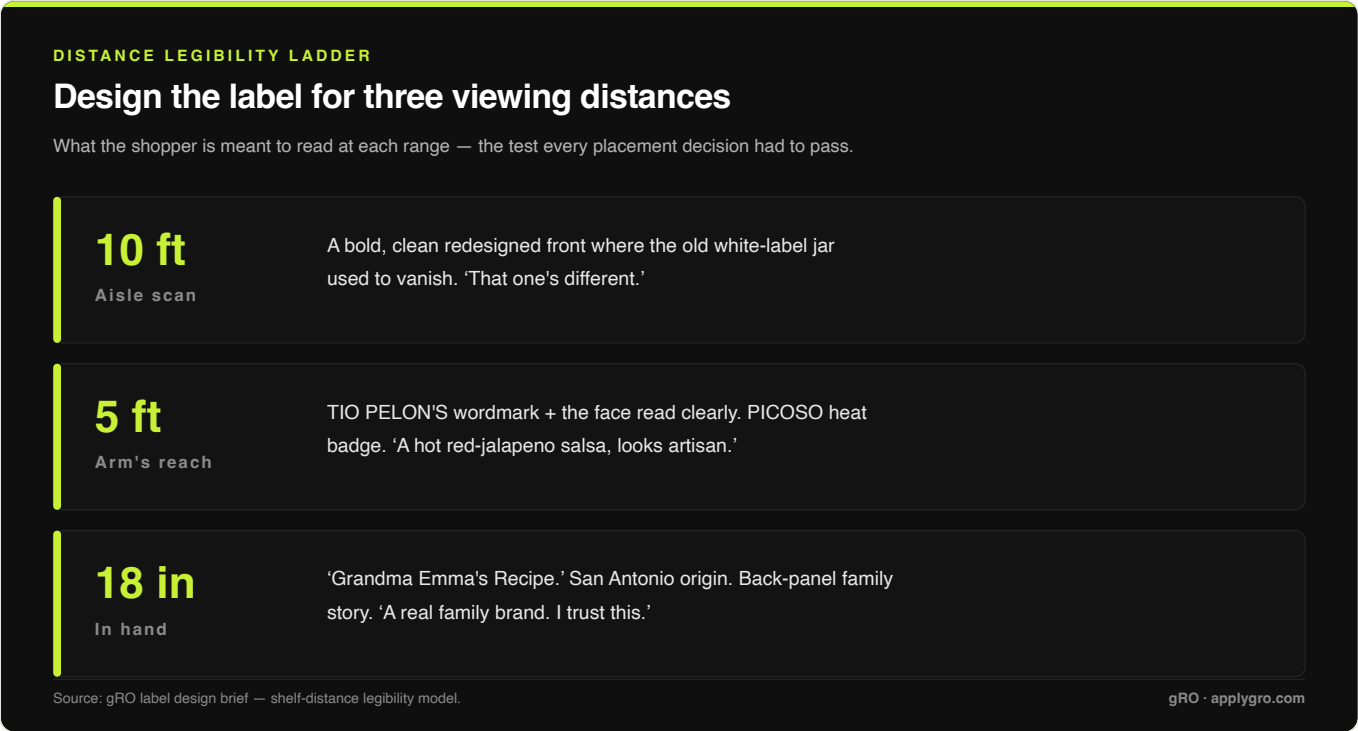


Exhibit E — The legibility ladder. At ten feet the bold redesigned front stops the eye; at five feet the wordmark, face, and heat badge resolve; at eighteen inches the recipe, origin, and family story land.

CLAIM DISCIPLINE

A label that overclaims builds returns, not brands.

One more discipline mattered — the same one we bring to a growth claim. An earlier creative pass had floated front-of-jar badges like "gluten free" and "zero sugar." When we reconciled the design against the brand's actual recipes, Salsita Emma's ingredient deck includes a chicken-bouillon complex that carries **milk, wheat, and soy** — so those badges would have been wrong on Emma. We pulled them.

What Emma **can** own — truthfully, and alone on this shelf — is a claim no documented competitor makes:

EMMA'S OWNABLE HERO CLAIM

"Pure Red Jalapeños – No Tomatoes."

The genuinely clean, allergen-free products in the line — the Salsa Macha and the chipotle glazes, each three or four ingredients — get the clean-label treatment where it's actually earned. Truth on the label isn't a constraint on the brand. It's what makes the brand repeatable.



"We check a front-of-label claim the same way we check a pipeline number — against the source, before it ships. A badge that isn't true is a return waiting to happen."

RO MALDONADO · FOUNDER, gRO

THE DELIVERABLES

Read the shelf. Rebuild the label. Ship it.

☐ COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

A **coded dataset** of 47 competitor labels across 14 variables, with placement heatmaps and tier analysis.

☐ POSITIONING

The **"family heritage + clean where it's true + Texas pride" lane** no rival owns, expressed as a bold, unmistakable shelf presence.

☐ LABEL SYSTEM DESIGN

A **flagship Salsita Emma front panel** plus a repeatable template built to carry all ten SKUs with one variable — the accent color — changing per product.

☐ PRINT-READY SPEC & CLAIM DISCIPLINE

Dimensions, bleeds, substrate, color build, and regulatory copy — with every front-of-label claim reconciled against real ingredient decks before print.

PRINT SPEC — SALSITA EMMA (SKU 4432)

Label size	9.0" × 2.5" trim · 9.25" × 2.75" bleed · wrap on 16 oz mason jar
Substrate	2 mil white BOPP, permanent adhesive — waterproof, oil- and refrigeration-safe
Color build	CMYK + 1 spot (PMS 874C metallic gold) · 280% max ink density
Finish	Matte laminate overall + spot-gloss UV on logo and product name
Est. cost	\$0.14–\$0.18 / label at a 5,000-unit run

Is your best product invisible to the market?

The gRO Growth Audit is a written diagnosis of how the market actually sees you — positioning, message clarity, and where you're leaving the shelf empty — delivered in five business days with fixes ranked by impact.

Positioning

Packaging

Creative

Growth

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