



# BRIDGE TO TRANSPARENCY

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VALUES TRANSPARENCY AND EMBRACES TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE SERVICE.



Not only is molded pulp packaging made from recycled newsprint, it also can be recycled.

# What's **OLD** IS **NEW** AGAIN

BY CHRIS MIGET

**A**s demand for sustainability grows among consumers and manufacturers, packaging has had to evolve. To meet this growing demand, consumer goods companies have had to produce more sustainable products and to incorporate more sustainability and transparency into their supply chains.

#### DEFINING SUSTAINABILITY

According to a 2014 Nielsen survey (<http://bit.ly/1lGyCmb>), global consumers are willing to pay more for products and ser-

vices provided by companies that are committed to positive social and environmental impact. The survey polled 30,000 consumers in 60 countries to understand how passionate consumers are about sustainable practices when it comes to purchase considerations and which consumer segments are most supportive of ecological or other socially responsible efforts. According to the survey, 52 percent of global respondents say they have purchased at least one product or service in the past six months from a socially responsible company. With this in mind, for a company that produces

consumer goods, the package sustainability in is a critical factor.

In 2005, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC), Charlottesville, Virginia, released a definition of what allows a packaging material to be labeled "sustainable." According to the SPC criteria, sustainable packaging is beneficial, safe and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle and it meets the market criteria for performance and cost. The packaging must be sourced, manufactured, transported and recycled using renewable energy. It must optimize the use of renew-



able or recycled materials and be manufactured using clean production technologies and best practices. It must be physically designed to optimize materials and energy. It also must be effectively recovered and used in biological and/or industrial closed loops.

When discussing package sustainability, two main factors must be considered: What kind of sustainable practices go into producing the material and how easy is it for the packaging to be recycled after use.

#### GOING TO WASTE

Although the average consumer is becoming more socially conscious, a level of convenience still needs to be provided when it comes to recycling packaging. If it cannot be recycled within a curbside recycling program, it is less likely to be recycled. The packaging typically will be placed in the waste basket and make its way to a landfill.

The New York City-based Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC, [www.nrdc.org/business/consumer-goods-packaging.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/business/consumer-goods-packaging.asp)) says recyclable postconsumer packaging with an estimated market value of \$11.4 billion is thrown out annually and less than 14 percent of plastic packaging is recycled. Why is this? Some point to the fact that not every curbside recycling program takes every kind of recyclable plastic. Many community curbside recycling programs lack sufficient funding to expand and modernize recovery facilities. Additionally, certain kinds of plastics that are found in packaging simply cannot be recycled. If a consumer is unsure about the recyclability of a product, they will typically throw it in the trash.

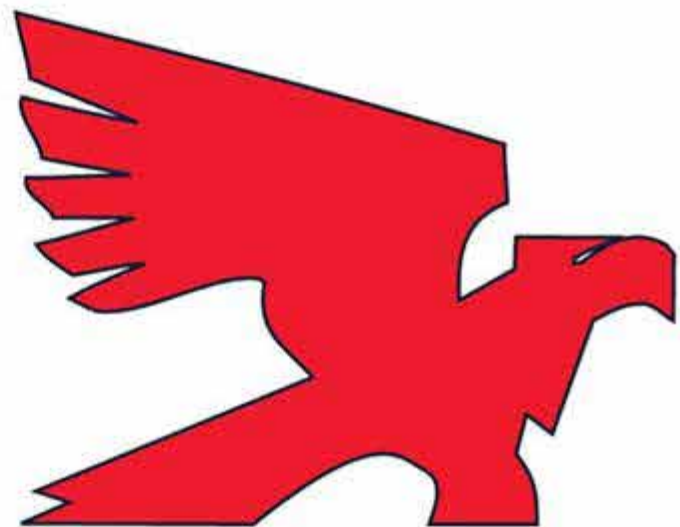
#### GETTING THE WORD OUT

Making sure consumers are well-aware that a specific packaging material can be recycled is a key challenge for producers of consumer goods. According to the NRDC, the United States has an overall recycling rate of 34.5 percent and an estimated packaging recycling rate of 51 percent. Although consumer demand for sustainable packaging is growing, recycling of packaging in the U.S. is falling behind that of other countries. How are product manufacturers bucking this trend? Many are turning to packaging materials that meet consumer demands for not only sustainability but also for recyclability. This is why paper-based packaging continues to grow.

When most people think of paper-based

packaging materials, they tend to think of corrugated cardboard. This popular packaging meets the criteria of a sustainable material and, more importantly, can be recycled in nearly every curbside recycling program. According to the Corrugated Packaging Alliance, Elk Grove, Illinois, the

corrugated industry significantly reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 32 percent between 2006 and 2010. In addition, the effects of nutrient releases on receiving waters and soils decreased by 22 percent, and effects of particulate matter emissions decreased by 14 percent. From an environ-



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mental standpoint, packaging that incorporates corrugated cardboard is a positive.

A challenge for companies creating packaging that sufficiently satisfies consumers' demand for sustainability is not to let it cut too deeply into their business models. In many cases, using more sustainable packaging could hurt the bottom line. Sometimes the cost of materials can significantly increase.

Companies are now coming to find out, however, that alternatives enable sustainability without incurring price increases. For economic and environmental factors, demand is growing for molded fiber, also known as molded pulp.

This technology is not exactly new. Molded pulp has been around for more than 100 years and has been used to make egg cartons since that time. Only recently, however, has molded pulp been used as a packaging solution across a broad range of industries. Consumers are beginning to become more familiar with the material.

Many electronics are now housed in some form of a molded pulp tray inside standard exterior packaging. Unlike less sustainable materials, such as expanded polystyrene (EPS), which is mostly petroleum based, molded pulp is made from 100-percent-recycled newspaper. This makes it ideal for today's socially conscious consumer. Instead of newspaper heading to a landfill, it is broken down and turned into packaging.

Most importantly, this packaging material is easily recognizable to the consumer as "recyclable." When consumers understand that the packaging consists of 100-percent-recycled newspaper, they put together fairly quickly that it can be recycled in most any curbside recycling program. Consumer convenience is the key.

From a business standpoint, molded pulp is growing as a packaging material of choice. In addition to the sustainable qualities associated with it, molded pulp offers economic benefits. The material is viewed as cost-efficient and time- and space-

saving. Molded pulp trays and clamshells can be custom-designed to fit any specs manufacturers desire. They can be nested together, or stacked, for storage. This is something that other sustainable materials cannot always boast. Nesting can save valuable space in shipping and warehousing.

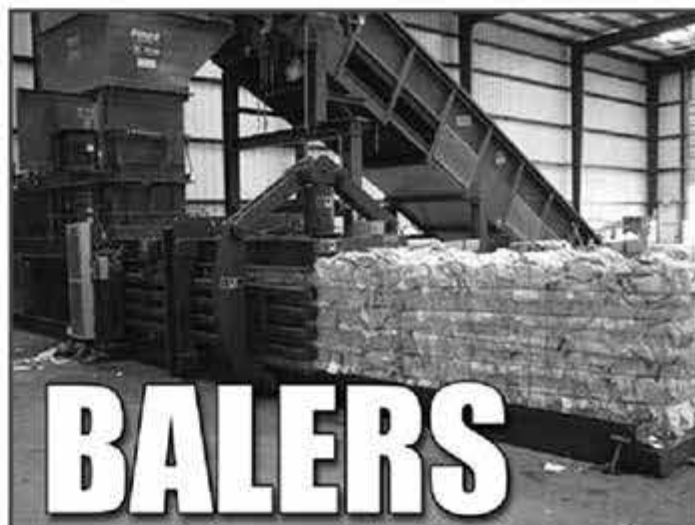
The economic benefits of molded pulp allow companies to incorporate it into their packaging without hurting their bottom lines. In fact, in most cases, making the switch may improve profitability.

With molded pulp's economic advantages catching up with its ecological benefits, it is reasonable to believe its use will grow. It is one of the most attractive forms of packaging to consumers not only because of the process involved in its production but also for the ease and convenience associated with its recyclability. **▶**

Chris Miget is president of EnviroPAK, a St. Louis-based maker of molded pulp packaging for a wide range of products.

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