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[PAGE 18]

33 A SIMPLISTIC SUSTAINABILITY TRUTH

64 PROACTIVELY IMPROVING INDOOR AIR QUALITY

DEVELOPING TRENDS IN SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

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ARTICLE
Top Five Packaging
Trends for 2015

BY BRYON CRUMP

Shelf appeal has been regularly defined as the ability of a product and its packaging to entice the customer. Typically, this has often referred to the packaging's ability to "wow" the customer with an exciting array of specific colors or an eye-catching design. Customers want to buy products that "jump off the shelf" and give them the feeling that they are making a smart purchase.



The retail business is just as competitive as ever and creating compelling packaging that will further entice the customer to buy a specific product is critical. However, as consumers have become savvier with more information about certain products and companies at their fingertips, packaging has gone beyond the colors, design and flash. Consumers are now demanding more sustainability in the packaging of the products they buy and in the companies of the products they buy from.

Meaningful brands

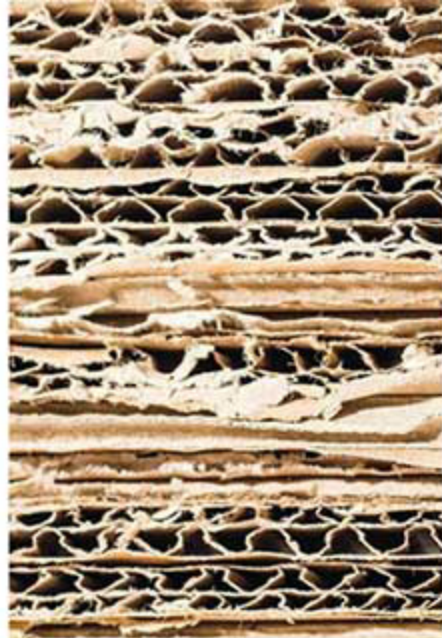
The sustainability culture continues to grow. As social media and the number of millennials in the workforce continue to increase, transparency and accountability is demanded by consumers. In a recent survey titled "Meaningful Brands" conducted by the global advertising agency Havas,¹ it is clear that a consumer will spend more money with a brand that "cares."

In fact, "meaningful brands" that integrate sustainability outperform the stock market by 133 percent. Social and environmental values are merging with consumer attitudes and are now as important as traditional features including quality and performance.

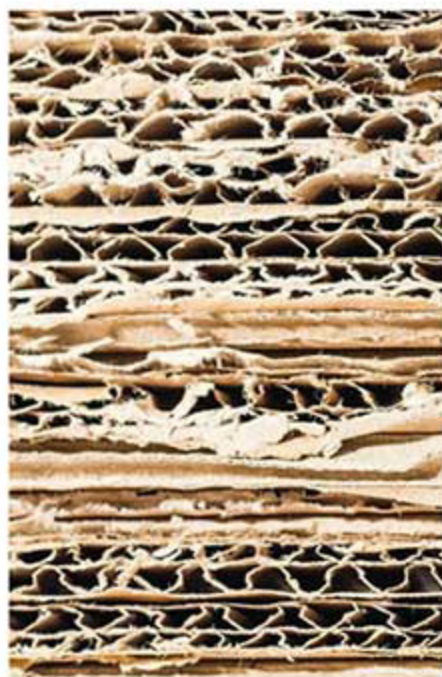
This shift in social responsibility is being fueled by a segment in society that has come to be known as the "aspirational." Aspirational consumers define themselves by the brands they purchase and believe that they have a personal responsibility to purchase products that are good for the environment.

For these consumers, sustainability and corporate responsibility are at the very top of their priorities list when making educated buying decisions. They want to purchase with a purpose. They are materialistic, but they are committed to promoting and supporting companies and brands that practice transparent sustainability.

Henry Ford said, "A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business."



APPLYING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES INTO EVERYDAY WORKFLOW MATTERS.



It is remarkable how a quote from so long ago is still applicable today. The world is more socially conscious. As manufacturers, suppliers and distributors have learned, applying sustainable practices into everyday workflow matters.

Sustainable packaging

How much do consumers care about the environment when it comes to packaging? According to recent survey data compiled at Packaging Europe.com,² the majority of consumers think instantly of issues such as recycling and disposal when they think of sustainable packaging. Consumers also value packaging with the lowest possible material input or a small packaging size in relation to the contents as well as the recyclability of the packaging.

Packaging suppliers are now well aware of this growing trend, and consequently, the green packaging market is continuing to rise. Market Research Reports, Inc. recently announced it has added a "Green Packaging Market in the US 2015-2019" to its website.³ In the report, the green packaging market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 6.16 over the five-year period. According to the report, innovation in green packaging materials is a major contributor to market growth. The report identifies the main driver as demand for innovation in green packaging.

There are certain materials that are now banned from specific geographic areas due to their lack of sustainable qualities. For example, recently, New York City has increased its social awareness. As of July 1, 2015, single-use expandable polystyrene foam (EPS) products are not allowed to be possessed, sold or offered in New York City. It is estimated that Americans throw away 25 billion polystyrene coffee cups per year.

This is a very disturbing trend as EPS waste will often leak into marine environments and contaminate the water. Additionally, it is very difficult to recycle EPS. This is the biggest reason for

the recent ban. Sustainable packaging materials should be easy to recycle and turned into other sustainable materials.

In 2005, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition defined what makes packaging sustainable. According to the criteria, sustainable packaging is beneficial, safe and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle and it meets the market criteria for both performance and cost.

The packaging must be sourced, manufactured, transported and recycled using renewable energy. It must optimize the use of renewable or recycled source materials. It must be manufactured using clean production technologies and best practices and made from materials healthy throughout the life cycle. It must be physically designed to optimize materials and energy and be effectively recovered and utilized in biological and/or industrial closed loop cycles.

What varieties of materials are considered sustainable?

Many plastic-producing companies are moving to what's known as post-consumer resin (PCR) as a sustainable solution. PCR plastic contains a blend of recycled plastic resins that would have otherwise been headed to a local landfill. Less petroleum is used to create PCR than a new resin, leaving a smaller carbon footprint.

Corrugated cardboard is another popular material that can be considered sustainable in the packaging world. It is a widely used packaging material that can be customized to ship and protect a long list of products. According to the Corrugated Packaging Alliance,⁴ the corrugated industry significantly reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 32 percent between 2006 and 2010. Additionally, the effects of nutrient releases on receiving waters and soils decreased by 22 percent, and effects of

particulate matter emissions decreased by 14 percent.

One of the biggest issues that manufacturers are running into when trying to make their products' packaging more sustainable is that it generally sacrifices other critical elements, namely cost of materials. What companies are now learning, however, is that it is still possible to remain sustainable without raising the cost of materials. For both environmental and economic factors, more companies are beginning to use molded pulp in the packaging of their product.

Used for more than 100 years to make egg cartons, molded pulp can now be found across a broad range of industries. With sustainability's demand in packaging, suppliers are seeing benefits to this material in the packaging of a wide variety of different products. Unlike EPS, which is mostly petroleum based, molded pulp can be made from 100 percent recycled newspaper. The material

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THE GREEN PACKAGING MARKET IS CONTINUING TO RISE.

is cost-efficient, time- and space-saving and offers a solution to companies that are trying to meet the growing demand for sustainability in packaging.

Molded pulp is also one of the easiest materials to be recycled by the consumer. Nearly all curbside recycling programs will accept molded pulp alongside the recycled newspaper it's made from; this is once again a major difference between a sustainable material like molded pulp and a product like EPS.

The custom-designed nature that molded pulp possesses is also a strong selling point for the material. The material can be molded in a fairly short amount of time into a custom shape that fits the needs of any particular product. During transportation and warehousing operations, the custom-molded clamshells and trays are designed to easily nest when stacking, ultimately saving space.

With growing consumer demand, the influence of "aspirational" and an increased sense of corporate responsibility among businesses, there is more collaboration going on in the industry. Manufacturers of different kinds of sustainable materials are collaborating on projects that they had not done in the past.

For example, a particular product may need several different varieties of materials to complete the package. In order to fulfill the order, two materials manufacturers must work together to design a package that meets the required price point and satisfies the sustainable requirements the product may have. Molded pulp packaging manufacturers have teamed with corrugated cardboard packaging engineers in order to deliver optimal sustainable solutions.



The demand for sustainability is only going to grow more among both consumers and corporations. It used to be something that a company would try and do if it were cost effective, as benefits to the bottom line were not always apparent.

Today, it is clear that sustainability is not only a good idea, it is absolutely critical as a part of a company's reputation and social awareness. The fact that the packaging on a particular product is sustainable is just as important as its overall appearance. Consumers are willing to pay more for sustainability in packaging and perhaps more importantly, ignore those products whose packaging is not. **FMJ**

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Bryon Crump is the vice president of EnviroPAK, a premier manufacturer of molded pulp packaging for the protection of a wide range of products. Founded

in 1995, the company's central U.S. location allows it to produce protective molded pulp packaging for electronics, computer, beverage, medical and telecommunication markets. Its award-winning in-house design team has been recognized for their packaging including an Institute of Packing Professionals AmeriStar Gold Award and a Technology and Innovation Award from the St. Louis Economic Council.