

Packaging with punch

Packaging continues to evolve, creating an exciting shopping experience for consumers.

By Richard Turcsik

Brown paper packages tied up with string just do not cut it anymore.

Packaging today has to entice consumers by jumping off the shelf with vibrant colors and graphics. It has to make their lives simpler by being easy to open or lighter and it has to appeal to their sense of environmental responsibility by being easy to recycle or made from renewable sources.

Packaging manufacturers are addressing these issues by updating tried and true packaging options and creating new ones for both consumer packaged goods and in-store service departments. One of the newest innovations is flexible packaging.

“Flexible packaging provides retailers with an opportunity to reduce weight and costs, enhance cube and improve the consumer experience,” says Roman Forwoycz, CMO/group president, at Clear Lam Packaging, an Elk Grove Village, Ill.-based flexible packaging manufacturer.

Clear Lam’s newest creation is Prima Pak, billed by the company as the first stackable, sturdy and recloseable flexible packaging made from a roll of film. It can be used to hold pretzels, nuts, candies, cookies, dry meat snacks, sliced fruits and vegetables, cereals and other items, say officials.

“It’s literally a pop up box on a roll of film,” Forwoycz says. “It replaces heavy pre-formed jars, cans, bottles and trays and saves millions of pounds of plastic.”



Officials at Tetra Pak also tout the source reduction created by their paperboard-based boxes that often hold aseptic juices, but are increasingly being discovered by manufacturers of soups, broths, tomato sauces and other center store staples. “A package should save more than it costs,” says Suley Muratoglu, vice president, market and product management, at Vernon Hills, Ill.-based Tetra Pak.

Forty percent of the weight of a typical can of soup, he says, is the packaging, but

if manufacturers switch to the Tetra Recart container, packaging becomes only 4% of the total weight.

“This is a major impact. You can ship 15% to 20% more in the trucks, which means you can reduce the number of trucks on the road and their environmental impact,” Muratoglu says.

“Also, the brick shape of the package makes such a difference,” Muratoglu says. “If you replaced the current canned soup set with Tetra

Pak packaging, keeping the same products, brands and number of facings, you would actually open up about 40% more shelf space. That turns back to the retailer as additional

selling space that could be utilized for additional products and be a revenue builder.”

Flexible film is also being used in the stand-up pouches housing a wide range of products,

including soups, granola and cereals.

“While consumers still see many tin cans, cardboard boxes and glass jars on the grocery store shelves, the evolution of the industry

Awarding packaging innovation

PACKAGING HAS TO BE UPDATED from time to time, and so do packaging competitions.

DuPont has updated the criteria for its annual DuPont Awards for Packaging Innovation contest, an annual global event now celebrating its 26th year.

“The last few years focused heavily on sustainability, but what we’ve done this year, which is really exciting, is that we are changing the criteria for judging,” says Yasmin Siddiqi, global marketing director, DuPont Packaging, based in Wilmington, Del.



The new judging criteria include Technological Advancement, examining new and/or clever use of materials, new technological integration, creative configuration and/or assembly and increased production and/or distribution efficiency.

Also being looked at is

Responsible Packaging, which examines the responsible use of materials, clean and efficient energy consumption, reduction in product and package waste and how the packaging benefits the greater good.

The third judging criteria is the Enhanced User Experience, looking at how the packaging fulfills a user need

and/or provides an enhanced experience, aids product merchandising and motivates purchase, enables greater product accessibility and establishes a preferred price/value equation.

Three levels of awards are presented: Diamond, Gold and Silver. Entrants do not have to use DuPont products.

“The awards are about recognizing innovation,” Siddiqi says. “Hopefully that is a way to enable knowledge sharing amongst the winners, but more importantly among the industry. When you share your knowledge with the industry that serves as a catalyst to spark future innovation.”



now includes various types of flexible packaging,” says Cheryl Miller, director of operations, at Flair Flexible Packaging Corp., based in Appleton, Wis. “While the traditional types of packaging still have practical applications, flexible packaging offers many advantages.”

Miller says those include lower costs than traditional options, lighter weight and smaller package size, re-sealable options, appealing graphics, various shapes, barrier properties and valving capabilities.

Then there is the convenience factor.

“As consumers are on the go more than ever, convenience in food packaging is important,” Miller says. “Placing food in microwavable pouches that self-vent or retort pouches where the food can be re-heated within the package is an attractive option for today’s time-constrained consumers.”

Many consumers also put the environment front and center. That is why old-fashioned



packaging options, like steel cans and glass jars are still going strong.

“Steel cans have a 71% recycling rate, which is the highest of any food packaging,” says Sherrie Rosenblatt, vice president, marketing and communications, at the Can Manufacturers Institute, based in Washington, D.C. “Aluminum cans have a 65% recycling rate—the most of any beverage container—and each can contains an average of 68% recycled content.”

Rosenblatt says 122 billion cans are generated annually in the U.S., and studies show that cans outperform alternative packaging two-to-one in sales per item. “The canned food category exceeds the grocery category average

margin of 32.1% vs. 27.5%,” she says.

There is good news for glass too.

“We are holding our own when it comes to packaging and have actually seen some uptick in a return to glass for some non-alcoholic beverages, like sodas and teas,” says Lynn Bragg, president of the Glass Packaging Institute, based in Alexandria, Va.

“As companies look into sustainability, they will see that glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled over and over in perpetuity,” Bragg says. “A key advantage of glass is that it is widely recognized as being a totally safe packaging medium and is ideal for storing foods.”

And glass is being made even more envi-

ronmentally friendly as manufacturers move to lighter weight bottles to reduce shipping costs, Bragg says.

Packaging for foodservice products in the deli, bakery, produce and grab-and-go cases also continues to evolve. Placon Corp., a designer and thermoformer of custom and stock food packaging products, is introducing a slew of new products at this year's NRA and IDDBA trade shows.

"We've been seeing this growing trend with customers and prospects, using stock food packaging in slightly unexpected ways," says Jeff Lucash, director of sales—stock products for the Madison, Wis.-based company. "We found that they either purposely displayed the product in a different way in order to create some shelf disruption or they didn't quite find a stock solution that met their particular need so they manipulated a package to serve their purposes," he says.

Based on this feedback, Placon officials designed their newest packaging lines to capitalize on showcasing customers' food products in slightly different ways that will have consumers stop and take notice, Lucash says.

In addition to traditional PET thermoform plastic bakery and deli containers, Baxter, Minn.-based Lindar Corp. has introduced its line of IN-GEO packaging that is non-petroleum based and made from cornstarch.

"With sustainability issues, there is more dialogue with retailers about this type of



container," says Dave Fosse, director of marketing at Lindar. "IN-GEO is compostable in industrial composting sites, and will break down in a home composting bin."

INGEO's oxygen and water transmission rates are similar to PET and the containers have become popular with retailers for merchandising cupcakes and cookies, Fosse says. "We probably have one of the largest cupcake stock offerings of anybody in the marketplace," he adds. "We offer from a single all the way up to 24-count."

WHOLE WHEAT PIZZA PAN

Ultra Green Packaging has carved out a niche in the packaging field by manufacturing fiber molded foodservice packaging and take-and-bake pizza pans made out of wheat straw fibers. "Business is growing dramatically because of the demand for green packaging," says Cal Krupa, president and co-founder of Ultra Green Packaging, based in Minneapolis. "From a durability standpoint it is as good

as any plastic container; from a heat standpoint it is the equivalent to foam," Krupa says. "You can microwave in it and you can put it in the oven up to 400 degrees. It is oil and moisture resistant."

Not all packaging innovations are for the direct consumer benefit. The Cryovac Cook-in Bag product line recently introduced a wider range of Grip & Tear bags that allow deli clerks to open hams, turkey breasts and other products without having to use sharp knives that are not only dangerous but can be breeding grounds for listeria and bacteria.

"Our Grip & Tear bags are extremely tough to puncture, but they have a unique property of easy tear propagation," says Mike Rosinski, marketing director for smoked and processed meats, Sealed Air Food Care Division, based in Duncan, S.C. "We preserved all those nice attributes of our regular barrier bags, but they now tear easily and in a straight line." **GHQ**