

Offer progressive packaging

To keep customers coming back to private brands, retailers would do well to offer packaging that does more than just protect the product.

By Michal Christine Escobar

All packaging is meant to fulfill two purposes: to house and protect a product. However, today's consumers want packaging that offers significant functional benefits as well.

And packaging companies are responding to this trend. At the Global Food & Beverage Packaging Summit, held in Chicago in July 2015, product innovation was "a core theme" of the event, said Eric Penicka in a blog post for London-based Euromonitor International titled "Recap of The Global Food & Beverage Packaging Summit 2015."

"To succeed in the face of mounting competition, standing still is not an option," he said. "It is important to identify consumers' struggles, and packaging innovation offers a great opportunity to attend to them."

And consumers are not just looking to national brands for functional innovation. Increasingly, they are expecting retailers' private brand packaging to be just as innovative and functional as any national brand's.

Luckily, packaging companies are able to offer retailers insights about how to package their private label products to meet consumer demands.

And packaging companies also are able to work with retailers to offer innovative functional benefits that will please consumers.

Why innovate?

Innovative packaging is often specifically designed to perform in an outstanding way for the consumer, and therefore it is thought to be of high quality.

While consumers continuously look for ways to save money on their purchases, quality is still important to them, says Quresh Sachee, vice



The ZipBox is a carton that incorporates a resealable closure, enabling consumers to securely seal and reseal products and promoting freshness by limiting exposure to air and other contaminants.

Photo courtesy of Zip-Pak

president of global sales and marketing/packaging for Aplix Inc., which has its U.S. headquarters in Charlotte, N.C. For example, while a graphic on the package might help to sell the product initially, if the packaging itself performs poorly, consumers will be unlikely to repurchase that product.

"Packaging is an experience where your product and your brand physically reach consumers," says John White, marketing, Zip-Pak, Manteno, Ill. "[It] must be enticing enough to stand out on the store shelf and then serve as a quality reminder to the consumer" when he or she is at home.

Innovative functional packaging also solves consumer needs.

"Functional packaging is a direct response to seeing where consumers are ready to change and adapt their behavior to better incorporate products into their home and lifestyle," says Steve Callahan, general manager, Perimeter Brand Packaging, Northborough, Mass.

Unfortunately, private brand packaging often emulates the visual graphics of national brands but lacks the functional innovation that consumers are looking for, he continues.

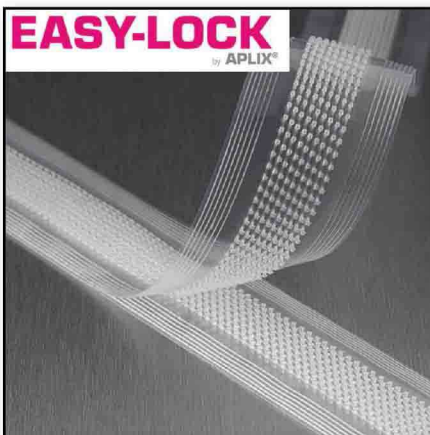
Functional packaging can also serve as a means to differentiate.

The marketplace is "ever evolving," and store brands "need to stay relevant" if retailers want to remain successful in competing against national brands, Callahan adds.

"By incorporating new packaging trends into private brand products, retailers are able to increase product offerings and stay competitive in the market," Sachee agrees.

Fortunately for retailers, a number of packaging companies have developed functional packaging innovations that could boost the appeal of store brand items.

Photo courtesy of Aplix Inc.



The EASY-LOCK hook-to-hook closure system eliminates the need for precise alignment during closing, offers audible and tactile feedback and continues to seal even with contaminants in the track.



Resealable solutions

Zip-Pak works hard to offer consumers functional packaging with an original twist. The company recently introduced ZipBox, a carton that incorporates a resealable closure.

"The resealable ZipBox enables consumers to securely seal and reseal products, promoting freshness by limiting exposure to air and other contaminants," White

says. "The resealable feature also eliminates the need to transfer contents into a separate container and dispose of the original packaging."

Zip-Pak also offers retailers Fragrance-Zip, a zipper closure designed to emit a custom aroma each time a flexible package is opened.

"Our sense of smell engages memories, stirs emotions, alerts us to dangers and creates a heightened awareness," White notes. "With Fragrance-Zip, we've opened the door to a completely new dimension of interactive consumer packaging."

The company recently introduced Sensus, too, which is a sensory feedback fastener developed in response to global consumer trends. It offers both audible and tactile feedback to assure the consumer the package is firmly sealed, White says.

Functional drinking pouch

In the past year, Perimeter Brand Packaging also introduced a few new packaging solutions that aim to benefit consumers. One introduction is BlenderPak, a single-serve stand-up drinking pouch with a rigid fitment within the pouch that acts both as a gripping structure and mixing ball. The pouch comes pre-filled with one serving of powder. To use, the consumer fills the pouch with water and shakes. The pouch uses its patented MixingMesh technology to break up clumps of powder and deliver a smooth beverage to consumers, Callahan says.

BlenderPak was designed to make it easier for consumers to use powdered beverage products on the go and away from home. To ensure the packaging design fulfilled its mission, Perimeter Brand Packaging made it a point to listen to consumers, he says.

"If we listen closely, consumers will tell us everything we need to know about creating great packaging," Callahan says. "That's why we work with consumers throughout our packaging development process."

While developing BlenderPak, Perimeter Brand Packaging worked with consumers during every step of the process — from brainstorming to in-home usage testing with prototypes to one-on-one interviews with the final solution, he adds.

"By involving consumers in the development of BlenderPak, we were able to solve for unmet needs in the marketplace," Callahan states.

For example, the company learned that powdered beverage products often require one container to mix the powder with the liquid and a separate container from which to drink the beverage, which ultimately creates a mess. And those separate containers are difficult to use on the go or away from home. By introducing a single-serve format, BlenderPak was able to solve those issues, he says.

"But consumers aren't the only ones who benefit," Callahan adds. "Functional packaging that meets consumer needs creates new usage occasions and increases consumption and, therefore, sales of product."

Unique closure system

Aplix is another packaging company working hard to improve resealable packaging. It recently developed the EASY-LOCK by Aplix closure system for flexible packaging. The hook-to-hook closure system offers consumer an easy solution for resealing packages containing products such as dried fruit, snacks, pet food, flour and even cereal, Sachee says.

Aplix designed the EASY-LOCK closure with multiple hook rows to eliminate the need for precise alignment during closing. The closure offers audible and tactile feedback and will continue to seal even with contaminants in the reclose track, unlike press-to-close zips. And the hook-to-hook design allows for repeated seals, long beyond the life of the package, Sachee notes.

The common denominator

Unsurprisingly, the common denominator of all three packaging companies' innovations is convenience.

"Convenience is a major selling point for food and beverage packaging," states Packaged Facts, a division of Rockville, Md.-based MarketResearch.com, in its August 2015 report titled "Food and Beverage Packaging Innovation in the U.S.: Consumer Perspectives."

"Features such as ease of opening, resealability, portability, lighter weight and no-mess dispensing are packaging benefits that influence consumers' purchasing decisions positively."

When retailers work with packaging companies to offer private brand products that are pretty, practical and convenient, it's almost certain to be a packaging home run. **SB**

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Photo courtesy of Perimeter Brand Packaging