

Practical solutions for retailers to embrace sustainable packaging

According to a recent Accenture global survey, 83% of people surveyed believe it's important or extremely important for companies to develop products that are meant to be reused or recycled and 72% of these same respondents said they are currently buying more environmentally friendly products than they were five years ago, while another 81% stated they expected to buy more ecologically friendly products over the next five years.

Consumer demand as seen from this research is resulting in consumer goods companies, not only embracing sustainable packaging, but also pushing boundaries in terms of both product and packaging innovation.

This brings us to the concept of sustainability and what we understand it to mean. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)...

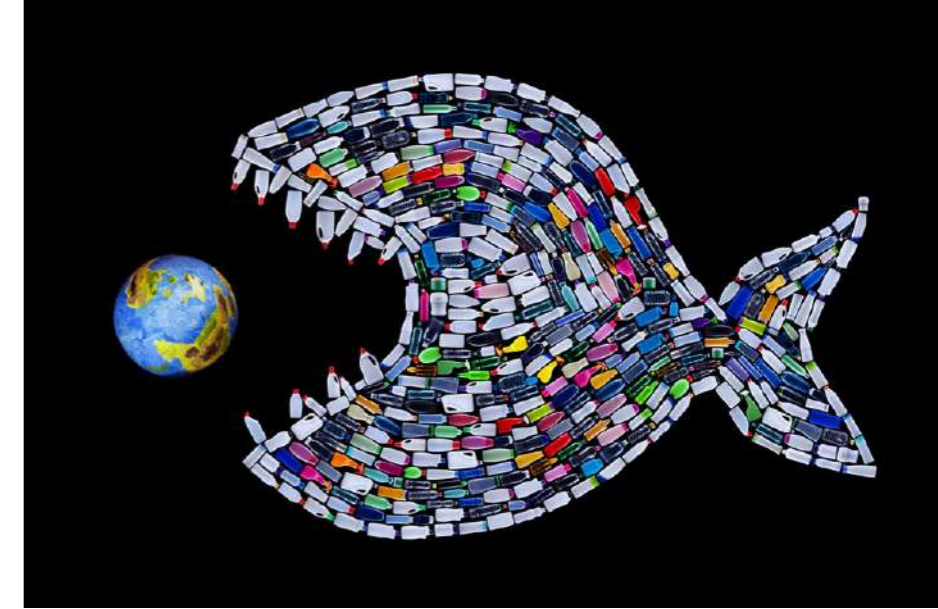
"Sustainability is based on a simple principle. Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations."

By Gerard Busse
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So, if we unpack this further, sustainability for an organisation should involve the responsible management of environmental, economic and social resources and impacts. According to the Fibre Box Association, sustainability should then become a business survival strategy driven by public opinion, government regulation, dramatic changes in major retailers' purchasing criteria and increased consumer awareness.

This in turn has profound implications for packaging in terms reviewing the current status quo and subsequently innovation. The world's leading retailers are now demanding measurable improvements in packaging sustainability for the product they both use and sell to consumers.

Consumers are becoming more aware of the implications on the environment of the packaging of the products that they are consuming, to the extent that they are willing to pay more for products with recyclable packaging or those produced from sustainable sources. This is also been driven, particularly in more developed countries, by the growth in online retailing or



e-tailing where the sustainability message is being driven on these e-tailers' websites and on their social media platforms.

The USA Environmental Protection Agency says that a critical measurement for sustainable packaging is the recovery rate in recycling:

- Paper and Paperboard: 73.3%
- Steel: 73.1%
- Glass: 33.9%
- Aluminium: 32.8%
- Plastic: 13%

In a report by The Association of Packaging and Processing Technologies, the global sustainable packaging market is estimated to be worth US\$ 220 billion in 2018 and forecast to reach US\$280 billion by 2025; this is an estimate compound annual growth rate of 6%. Consumer goods companies were asked how they were achieving more environmentally friendly packaging options:

- 36% implementing re-use/return/refill packaging
- 89% designing recyclable packaging



- 80% were minimising packaging to reduce waste through initiatives such as using lighter weight material and reducing what goes to landfill
- 56% redesigning packaging using more sustainable materials
- 27% choosing renewable sourced material, for example, using more bio-based material.



Bio based packaging – corn packaging

Corrugated cardboard

With more sceptical Generation Z and Millennial consumers, it entails more than just ‘slapping’ a label on a product listing the use of recyclable materials, but extends to doing something different, the bar is being made higher.

In her article, *Three Trends to Watch in Sustainable Packaging*, Pamela Webber mentions trends to watch out for:

- **Plant based packaging:** We’re seeing products presented wrapped in banana skins, corn starch or bamboo. Iconic furniture brand Ikea is now replacing styrofoam packaging with a compostable mushroom-based packaging material called MycoComposite.
- **Re-usable packaging** is another option growing in popularity. Loop, a start-up backed by Unilever, will deliver some Unilever products in re-usable

containers. Products ranging from soft drinks to washing powder and shampoo will be delivered in refillable containers to your front door. Borrowing on the bygone era of the milkman delivering your dairy products to your doorstep.

- **Edible packaging** may not be a mainstream packaging but is certainly appealing to the more environmentally conscious, for example edible drinking straws and edible cutlery.

As public awareness around the environmental impact of plastics reaches new heights, businesses, organisations and the government have announced ways in which they have committed to change and innovate, in order to counter the tidal wave of waste.

In addition to reduction and reuse initiatives, the movement away from plastics is likely to mean a step towards customer-favoured renewable and recyclable materials: paper and cardboard.



South African retailers are doing their bit

In 2018, Woolworths set themselves a vision of working towards zero packaging waste to landfill. To achieve this vision, they articulated a clear set of targets and commitments, underpinned by two key public-facing goals. The first was to ensure that all their plastic packaging is either reusable or recyclable by 2022; and the second was to phase out single-use plastic shopping bags from their stores by 2020. According to Woolworths, they recognise that their vision and goals...

“...can only be achieved through collaboration and innovation, by working with a range of stakeholders including suppliers, packaging producers, the recycling industry, government, and other role players.”

Further demonstrating their commitment is the fact that they were the first African head-quartered company to sign *The Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s New Plastics Economy Global Commitment* in 2018 and also became founding members of the South African Plastics Pact this year.

In addition, they continue to work towards using only sustainably sourced or recycled wood and paper products throughout their operations. Where they use forest products like wood, paper, and board for packaging, they aim to ensure that they are sourced from sustainably managed forests and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).



The Shoprite Group recognises that, packaging, while useful as a “primary protector and preserver of food products and protector of non-food products, is a key driver of environmental degradation on land and in marine environments when not handled responsibly.” A coordinated and collaborative response with stakeholders is needed. We support a circular economy approach to packaging, incorporating all aspects of the value chain, adopting a design-for-sustainability approach to packaging based on life-cycle thinking and innovation and promoting and supporting local community recycling initiatives. In line with United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal 12.4, we aim to substantially reduce waste generation by 2030 and have set our objectives accordingly.

Shoprite has partnered with the Packa-Ching initiative, which ‘buys’ recyclable materials from communities, starting in Langa in the Western Cape in 2017, in exchange for credits which can be used to buy goods at many supermarkets, including Shoprite, Usave and Checkers stores.

The Shoprite Group, in its 2019 financial year, also recycled 3 995 tons of plastic waste, 33 658 tons of cardboard and through its distribution centres re-used 2 781 tons of cardboard packaging in partnership with another retailer.



Trends

In a nationally representative survey of 500 UK adults, respondents were asked which packaging material they preferred – glass, metal, paper & cardboard, or plastic – based on a number of different reasons. The findings were that paper & cardboard were the most preferred packaging material in terms of environmental-friendliness, recyclability and practicality. They received the highest score as being better for the environment as easier to recycle and, in terms of practicality – easier to open and close, easier to store, lighter weight, safer to use and more practical.

As this renaissance takes hold, it is important that organisations making the transition to paper and card consider its environmental impact. Switching

from plastic to cardboard packaging can be a positive move. However, if this packaging is not responsibly sourced, it can still have a detrimental impact on the environment.

Packaging made from forest-fibre has the potential to be both renewable and recyclable or biodegradable, but only when it is responsibly sourced and sensitively processed. Forest Stewardship Council certified packaging can help to demonstrate a commitment to responsible sourcing using FSC certified materials and the application of the FSC labels.

Packaging can carry the FSC label if it is produced using FSC certified materials under a valid FSC chain of custody certificate. Including the FSC label on packaging is a great way to demonstrate sustainability, alignment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and supply chain integrity which are independently verified.

In the next two articles we will find out more about providing practical solutions for the supply chain to embrace sustainable packaging, and how to further communicate commitment to sustainability. **SR**



The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is a global not-for-profit organisation dedicated to promoting environmentally sound, socially

beneficial and economically prosperous management of the world’s forests. It helps consumers and businesses identify products from well-managed forests and sets standards by which forests are certified, offering credible verification to people who are buying wood and wood products. For more information visit www.fsc.org