

A trio of topics trending in packaging



JIM GEORGE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

As IoPP has interacted recently with thought leaders among our members about topics they see as “hot buttons,” three areas emerge:

Packaging continues to become more complex, and technical challenges aren't getting any easier. The trick is to become smarter about managing them. With either new or exist-

ing packaging, says Rob States, CPP, Principal at Stress Engineering Services, “You make the most expensive decisions with the least amount of information.”

As one idea, he suggests using an appropriate level of engineering that balances reasonable amounts of budget and time—but to avoid the mistake of not doing sufficient homework in this process. States adds, “If you cut this process short, you will leave money on the table.” A good/better/best approach might work for you here. Each level requires more effort and resources, but also delivers more payback.

You've heard this before: Margin management has become a significant packaging driver, especially when innovation is considered. Beyond innovation, consumer-centric decisions, or decisions related to sustainable packaging issues, any breakthrough efforts of the packaging department also have to be business-driven to get the boss to buy in.

E-commerce is expanding, and newcomers want to be much more than just a me-too. We're hearing that more food and beverage companies are looking to up their online presence in a big way. Statistica, an online statistics and business intelligence portal, provides some scope behind this trend, reporting that food and beverage retail e-commerce revenue in the U.S. will nearly double between 2015 and 2021, to \$15.25 billion.

The e-commerce challenges newcomers will face aren't new, but they need to be brought into focus. Any e-commerce strategy should place three things front and center: the branding experience, product protection, and sustainability. It starts with understanding there are significant differences between delivering products in traditional stores and through the online fulfillment channel. Consumers pan shipping containers that are far too large for the items being shipped as an egregious waste of space and materials. Poorly packed items can result in damage to the shipping container and also the product.

As big an e-commerce player as any, Amazon provides some good insight. Amazon encourages that those engaged in e-commerce understand the differences in the package's “journey.” The company reported, in a recent IoPP webinar, that whereas packages for brick-and-mortar stores are handled at least five times in their journey to consumers, packages shipped through Amazon are handled a minimum of 20 times.

Beyond all the extra packaging “touches,” engaging customers in this environment also means minimizing Amazon's pain. Amazon

Certified Packaging requires frustration-free design (minimal Amazon packaging prep work, ships without an Amazon overbox are two examples) and curbside recyclable packaging materials. Be sure to see page 68 for more on e-commerce.

Millennials are changing the nature of how we work in all industries—including packaging. At a time when all packagers are operating under an edict of “do more with less,” millennials are coming of age in the workforce at a rapid clip—and their perception of work differs from their older colleagues. In recent months, we at IoPP are noticing a significant uptick in the frequency of open and frank discussions on effectively inserting young professionals into packaging teams. That's smart, because according to Jeff Fromm's estimate, millennials will account for about 75% of the workforce by 2030.

Fromm's business is interacting with these young adults as President of FutureCast, a millennial marketing consultancy. The average tenure of millennial employees, he says, is just two years, far less than baby boomers or Gen X employees, and millennials want to continually grow.

“At a time when all packagers are operating under an edict of “do more with less,” millennials are coming of age in the workforce at a rapid clip—and their perception of work differs from their older colleagues.”

Furthermore, one millennial IoPP member tells me, they're multi-faceted. They might be part-time in the packaging industry while also spending other portions of their time working elsewhere. They might even operate their own drone business on the side.

Whatever their background, if your company—your department—is not invested in their personal growth, they may perceive you're slowing them down, and they may bolt for the next opportunity. Offsetting this development is a pair of ironies. First, millennials are in need of interest and investment in their growth at a time when many companies have scaled back in areas such as professional training. Second, some companies that have downsized their packaging departments have put people in leadership roles within the department who have marginal or no formal packaging training. Are you willing to entrust the future success of your packaging operation to “On the Job University”? **PW**

The author, Jim George, is the Director of Education at the Institute of Packaging Professionals. For further information on IoPP, visit www.iopp.org.