

Making connections: We expect it of our packaging, we should expect it of ourselves



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As I step into my new role as Executive Director for the Institute of Packaging Professionals, I can't help but appreciate how the packaging industry has evolved and the amazing contributions that packaging professionals have made innovating packaging over the 25+ years that I've been privileged to be a part of the packaging community.

While it's always a valuable exercise to reflect on our industry's achievements and celebrate success, as a community, we also need to assure we are focused on the future.

The packaging community will continue to deliver innovations that provide more sustainable packaging solutions, develop ever expanding active/smart packaging applications while tirelessly reducing the cost of packaging, and improving productivity by focusing on the interaction between packaging and packaging equipment.

Emerging trends will continue to challenge the packaging community and require that we adapt technologies into the areas of e-commerce, food safety, and social connection.

The role of packaging in e-commerce is still being defined. While there are those who feel that the role of packaging is diminished because its role in commerce is not that of primary on-shelf decision driver, I would argue that its role is raised in that it will now need to be more flexible in application and still provide a customer experience that matches the consumer's expectations. E-commerce will challenge packaging professionals to provide cost-effective solutions to ship customized product in an efficient manner.

The challenge of providing food products that address the consumer's food safety concerns has been raised by new FSMA regulations and the intensified focus on eliminating food waste at every point in the food chain. Packaging will need to play a key role in reducing food waste not only through distribution channels, but in the manufacturing environment as well.

Brand marketers are constantly looking at ways to connect with their consumers, and the need to connect with them in a more personal way will have an impact on packaging. Packaging will need to provide the consumer not just more information but also a sense of connection to the brand and its social mission.

While these technical challenges will continually evolve and change over time—there are more annual trend studies done these days than

ever before—I believe we packaging professionals need to take stock of ourselves and make sure we are positioned to best deliver on those challenges.

Not only does the packaging that we develop need to make the social connection with the consumer, we need to make those connections with each other. I was reminded of this as I attended PACK EXPO Las Vegas in September, reconnected with colleagues, and met many of the next generation of packaging professionals. The traditional term for this would be networking—tried and true in ensuring career success. I strongly believe in the value of these connections, but I also believe we are selling ourselves short if we continue to think of these face-to-face interactions as the only way to connect. We need to redefine “networking.” IoPP is well positioned to facilitate these connections and is evaluating some exciting new ways to increase communication among its members and better connect them to industry.

The market for qualified packaging professionals is outpacing industry's demand for our services. The job placement rate for students graduating from formal packaging programs continues to be close to 100%, and the industry is in need of qualified individuals to fill the gap produced by professional retirements. To fill this gap, companies are looking to bring strong individuals from other disciplines to take on packaging

roles within their organization. While these individuals may not have college degrees in packaging, they bring a valuable perspective that complements those who do. The industry needs to provide educational opportunities for these individuals to join the packaging community as well as provide all packaging professionals ways of keeping up on evolving technologies. IoPP provides the most comprehensive and recognized educational programs available, and the Certified Packaging Professional designation is now internationally recognized through the World Packaging Organisation.

Looking to the future of IoPP and the packaging industry, I am convinced that IoPP is well positioned to deliver on industry's needs and has the tools in place to support a thriving packaging community as it takes on the challenges of the future. **PWW**

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The author, Jane Chase, is the Executive Director of the Institute of Packaging Professionals, and a Certified Packaging Professional and member of IoPP's College of Fellows. For further information on IoPP, visit www.iopp.org.