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July 2009

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Bowled over!

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new products equipment

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NOTE: The photo on the cover of the Automation in Packaging special section that appeared in May's edition was provided by Flexicell, Inc.



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design trends

Garlic supplier gets fresh with flex-pack

Christopher Ranch is rolling out a new 6-oz, resealable, standup pouch for its peeled, California-grown garlic cloves. The new packaging is 100-percent-recyclable and uses 80 percent less material than the company's

6-oz jars. Christopher Ranch currently offers both options to consumers, it plans to move its peeled garlic product exclusively to the new eco-friendly pouch.

The HACCP- and Kosher-certified product is vacuum-packed in the bags, which the co. says extends the garlic's shelf life.

Made of a polyester film outer layer and a PE sealant inner layer, the new packaging is engineered to make the fresh, agricultural product more tolerant to temperature fluctuations.

To help existing customers who are looking for a jar, not a standup pouch, Christopher Ranch's in-house graphic design team ensured that the packaging

used elements from the co.'s corporate identity specifications.

A press-and-seal closure also brings forth the resealable properties of which regular customers of Christopher Ranch peeled garlic are accustomed. Explaining how the pouch is part of an ongoing program at Christopher Ranch, Patsy Ross from the co.'s marketing department states, "We are always looking at ways to improve efficiency, and more recently, we have added the focus of reducing packaging as part of our sustainability program."



New Product of the Month

Reusable bottle adds a pouch

The environment is a major focus in new products being launched right now, and Robert McBride in the U.K. is doing a good job creating eco-friendly cleaners. The i-Clean Multi-Surface spray cleaner is said to reduce bottle waste by containing the cleaning solution in a 500-mL, injection stretch/blow-molded PET spray bottle (with a lockable trigger closure) that can be reused when it runs out of cleaner. Attached to the bottle is a 15-mL refill pouch of concentrated cleaner that dissolves in water. The cleaner pouch comes in a blister card sleeve. The user places the pouch in the bottle and adds water, which dissolves the pouch material. The bottle, which is available in the U.K., is also recyclable.



Probiotic drink is packed with a smile

NextFoods USA, a Boulder, CO natural foods venture, has developed new GoodBelly probiotic drink, in a package with a smiley-faced opening.

Resembling cups for yogurt, the compact but attention-getting container, from **Greiner Packaging** (www.greiner-gpi.com), unites stability and creativity for the drink. Conical in overall

shape, the robust, 2.7-oz single-serve cup is sturdy enough for the functional-food category. The nestable cup resists breakage and is injection-molded and offset-printed. The unique smiley face drink, available in three flavors in the cups, contains probiotics and vitamins and minerals to promote healthy digestion and immunity. The smiley opening on the top adds a fun factor to a health-conscious product. The cups are available as a 4-pack in a paperboard sleeve.

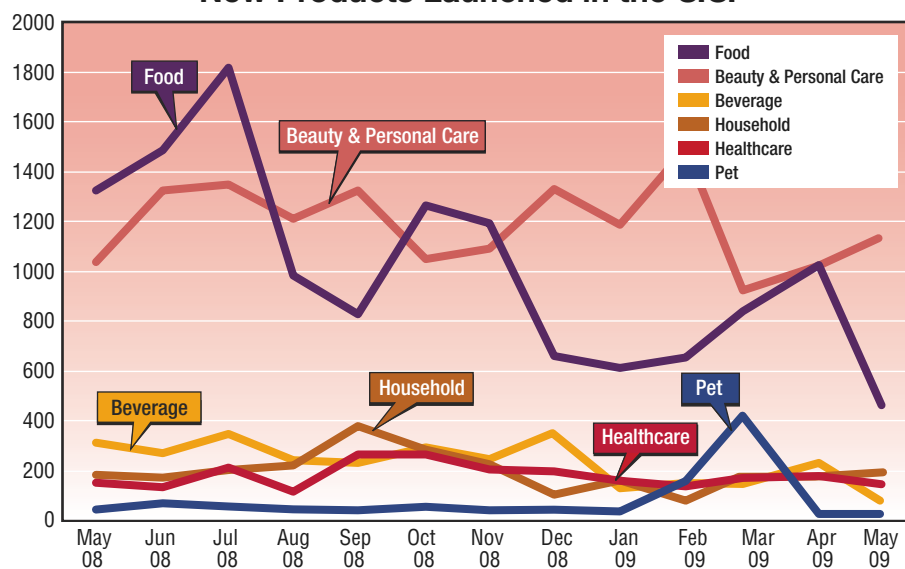
Starbucks ice cream debuts in canisters

Unilever, Englewood

Cliffs, NJ, and Starbucks Coffee Co., Seattle, join forces to deliver indulgent ice cream to consumers across the U.S. Launched in March, the super-premium ice cream line was inspired by some of consumers' favorite Starbucks beverages. Flavors include Caramel Macchiato, Mocha Frappuccino®, Java Chip Frappuccino® and Coffee. The ice cream is rolling into grocery stores nationwide, as well as in convenience stores and other mass retailers. Made with quality, all-natural ingredients, the ice cream is packaged in SBS pint containers featuring a packaging design created by Starbucks' Design Studio. The container graphics mirror that of the iconic Starbucks coffee cup served at more than 11,500 Starbucks stores in the U.S. The 100-percent-recycled paperboard pints are PE-coated two-sides and are topped with SBS-laminated overlids. Both are made by **Huhtamaki Consumer Packaging** (www.us.huhtamaki.com). Priced at \$3.99, the pint cartons and lids are offset-printed in three or four colors with graphics replicating those found at Starbucks coffee shops. Novelty ice cream bars are available at C-stores for \$2.49 each. Single-serve cups (3.6 oz) are \$1.29 each.

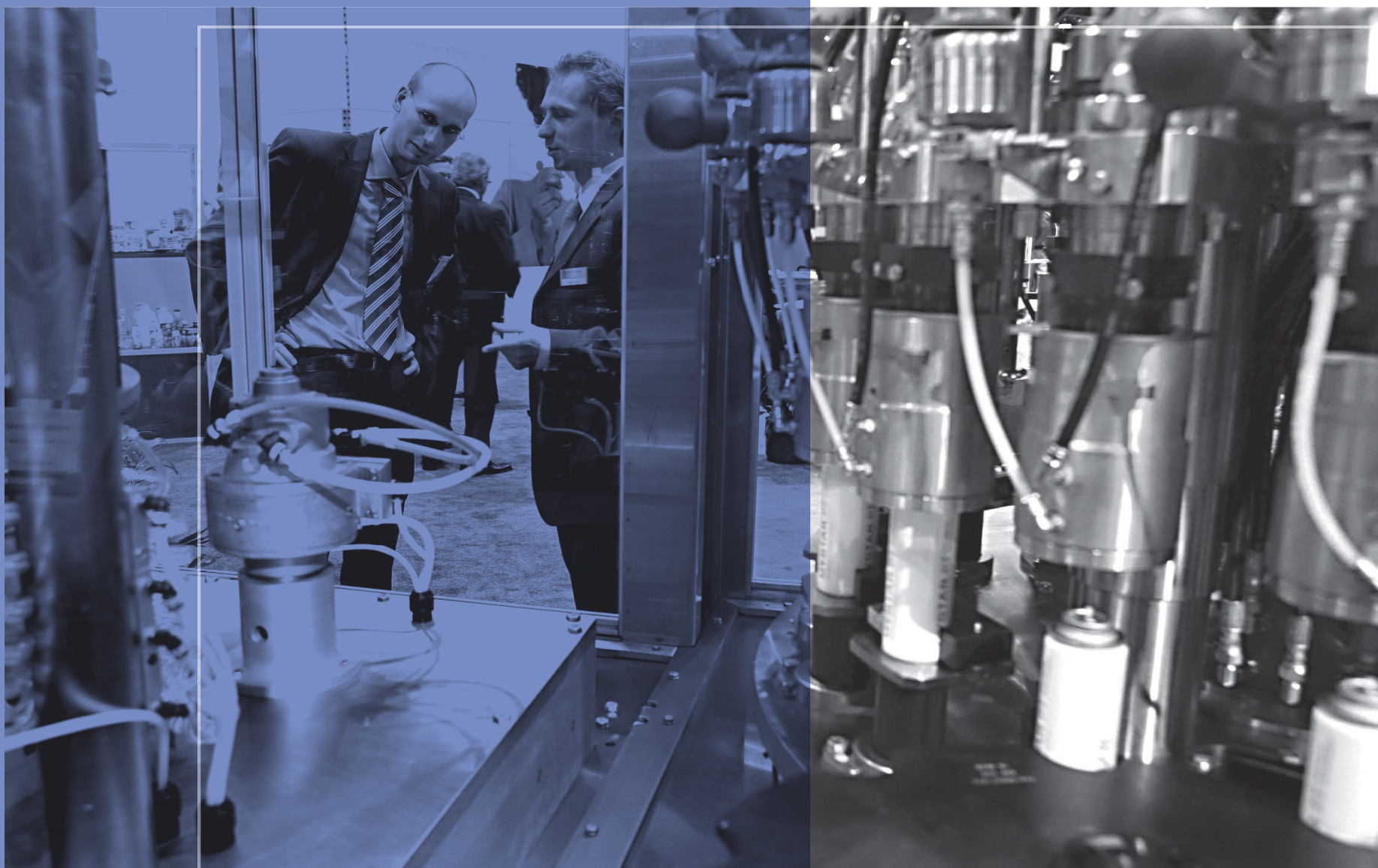


New Products Launched in the U.S.



Source: Mintel Global New Products Database (GNPD)

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design trends beverages



Oxygen-scavenging PET for Aussie wines

Taking a leading stance in innovation in the Australian wine industry, Wolf Blass Wines presents new packaging for its Green Label wine packaging with a low greenhouse footprint. Wolf Blass Green Label, in a 750-mL PET bottle comparative to an industry-standard glass bottle, appears to be the first Australian wine company to produce a wine with 29-percent less greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) than before.

The Green Label wines were launched Down Under in May following a 12-month trial, development and analysis with bottle supplier **VIP Packaging** (www.vippackaging.com.au). The PET bottle features DiamondClear™ active oxygen-scavenging material, available through an exclusive licensing agreement with **Constar Intl.** (www.constar.net).

The technology's oxygen-scavenger activation is assisted by the presence of moisture introduced at the time of filling. The active monolayer materials absorb oxygen, not only limiting the amount of oxygen that ingresses into the bottle, but also assists with the removal of oxygen from the headspace, ensuring that the wine delivers the same quality, taste and fresh fruit flavours within a best-before date of 12 months.

The PET material is about 90 percent lighter than glass, which makes the new bottle easier to transport, handle and pour. The PET container is also shatter-resistant, which makes it a good alternative when glass is less than ideal. The packaging can easily be crushed and folded, minimizing household waste. The new Wolf Blass Green Label wines are the first released in Australia to use DiamondClear technology. VIP Packaging offers a stock 750-mL Burgundy style bottle and 750- and 187-mL Bordeaux style bottles. It's also compatible with Novatwist closures.

Vitamin-enhanced water gets super-light bottle

There's a good way to remember the name of TalkingRain Beverage Co.'s new sustainable, 20-oz stock, hot-fill bottle PET from **Graham Packaging Co., L.P.** (www.grahampackaging.com). Just say, "Gee, it's light." Indeed, it not only is light, it's called the "G-Lite™" bottle. Doug MacLean, CEO of Preston, WA-based TalkingRain, will certainly tell you about light. TalkingRain is moving to the G-Lite™ bottle for the vitamin-enhanced flavored waters it produces as a cobrand with one of its major customers. MacLean says the reduction in plastic resin used in the bottle equates to a cost reduction of nearly 5 percent, which he called a "meaningful savings." This equates to 250 lb per truckload in weight savings. The bottle is also recyclable. MacLean says, but the switch to the new bottle is part of the commitment to sustainability that both Talking Rain and Graham Packaging are vigorously pursuing. "We're looking at every avenue we can to cut down on the packaging we use," MacLean explains. "We have been very pleased that Graham Packaging is taking a proactive stance on reducing packaging and improving sustainability. This especially helps with customers of ours like Costco that have deep-seated environmental goals." Until now, plastic bottles used in hot-filling had to have a substantial amount of material in their base to stand up to the rigors of the process. Graham spent two years developing the new bottle using a proprietary technique called HOB (Highly Oriented Base), which increases crystallinity in the plastic at the molecular level.



Vitamin water drops into aluminum bottles

Live Young Forever Health and Wellness (LYF), Edmonton, AB, Canada, is rolling out Live Young Forever Citrus, a vitamin-enhanced water, in 16-oz Alumi-Tek® aluminum bottles from **Ball Corp.** (www.ball.com).

According to LYF, the water is blended with vitamins, and the antioxidant, EGCG, which stimulates thermogenesis, a process critical to weight loss and fat burning. The beverage is 100-percent-natural, incorporating fruits and vegetable juice for color. Says Gwen Miles, CEO of LYF, "This bottle provides a perfect vessel for these products because it has a very distinct and premium image that is consistent with the benefits the beverage offers, and it's reclosable, tamper-evident, chills quickly and is 100-percent-recyclable."



This is the first enhanced water product packaged in Ball's Alumi-Tek bottle, which is currently used for a wide variety of beverages including beer, energy drinks, coffee drinks and nutraceuticals. Ball uses its two-piece aluminum can-manufacturing expertise to produce the bottle because the manufacturing technology for both packages is so similar. Ball makes the bottles in eight-, 12- and 16-oz sizes at its aluminum beverage can plant in Monticello, IN.

PepsiCo releases easy-grip, light bottle

PepsiCo is hoping its new eco-friendly version of the Propel fitness water bottle will make an even bigger splash in the market. Designed for active lifestyles and those who drink water for better hydration, the vitamin-enhanced, noncarbonated water is available in eight flavors. Now, Propel comes in a newly launched PET bottle designed by **4sight inc.** (www.4sightinc.com) that uses 33 percent less plastic than the previous 500-mL bottle and 30 percent less label material. The slim bottle also has a handy sport grip. Cold-filled using new, proprietary technology developed for manufacturing primarily in the U.S., the bottle has a bold design that conveys a dynamic brand image with the look and feel of a much more rigid container. To appeal more to core female consumers, the bottle was redesigned with a smaller opening, as 4sight says women prefer a smaller bottle opening when working out to reduce spills.

A groove under the label and pinched sides on the lower third area of the bottle gives consumers a sense of security while drinking the beverage during exercising or walking.



design trends

Shrink sleeve label protects nutrition powder

A combination shrink sleeve PVC label equipped with a tamper-evident feature helps Nutrex Research Inc, an Oviedo, FL sports-nutrition marketer, show off the three flavors of Pro-Gram protein drink powder, available in Vanilla Bean, Chocolate Mousse and Strawberry Cream flavors, while protecting the product from pilferage.

The dietary supplement comes in a 2.48-lb, proprietary silver HDPE jar, covered with a glossy film label from **Printpack, Inc. (www.printpack.com)** that displays dynamic, gravure-printed graphics in 7 colors. The clear sections of each of the labels allow the silver color to show through, providing an eye-catching metallic look. The label covers the bottle from the top of the cap to the jar base and offers a 360-deg image area for ingredients, bar codes, graphics and other pertinent information. Seth Reese, operations manager at Nutrex, says, "Security is critical to the product, so the inclusion of the tamper-evident band as part of the sleeve made this a perfect component for Nutrex." The tamper-evident band also allows for critical point-of-purchase details to attract consumers. A horizontal perforation allows the band to be removed while the label stays put.



Bottle showcases rainforest water from Eurofusion

Eurofusion, Panama City, introduces Aquaçaí, a bottled water that will initially roll out in the Middle East and Latin America. Panama has more than 125 sources of natural spring water, in three bottles sizes: 1 L; 591 mL; and 354 mL. A combination of minerals and natural fluoride gives the water its own distinct character. The Aquaçaí name comes from the combination of Aqua—meaning water and Acai—a delicious fruit from the rainforest—to reflect the water source's purity and the lush region.

Says Michael Horth, CEO of Eurofusion, the company wanted a brand identity that's both visually appealing to high-end consumers in a global marketplace and conveys the purity of the water source. To graphically communicate these attributes, Eurofusion turned to design and development firm **Moxie Inc. (www.moxietm.com)**, which selected a deep, rich blue PET bottle in a color with hints of cyan to enhance the appearance of the bottle label. Adding silver foil label elements and an upper case serif typeface for the brand name on a blue band, the design incorporates the image of an aquifer. An illustration of a butterfly completes the design. The bottle is produced by **San Miguel Industrial S.A. (51 01 336 5428)** in Peru, which makes the preforms and blow-molds the bottles.

"Working with Moxie has been rewarding," Horth says. "Their creativity and original ideas for the design of the brand have provided us with a multi-culturally elegant brand identity that enhances the attributes of the product."



Southern Comfort launches premium, ready-to-serve drinks to meet growing demand

Research by Nielsen finds that the premium ready-to-serve category is growing more than 72 percent compared to 3.4 percent for the overall ready-to-serve category. To meet consumer demand for premium, premixed drinks, Southern Comfort launched two ready-to-serve cocktails—Hurricane Cocktail and Sweet Tea Cocktail.

"Whether it's for an indoor or outdoor party, for a big or small group of friends, these cocktails take the hassle out of mixing cocktails all night," says Campbell Brown, vp, director Southern Comfort Americas. "They're simple and delicious. All people have to do is grab a glass of ice, pour and enjoy."

Both flavors capitalize on Southern Comfort's origins. The Hurricane

is an iconic cocktail that shares a long tradition with Southern Comfort, and brings a little piece of New Orleans and Mardi Gras to any occasion. Hurricanes can be daunting to make at home because of the many ingredients and recipe variations. The Southern Comfort Hurricane Cocktail is as delicious to drink, but much easier to make, than the original party blend.

Sweet Tea originated at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis; the same fair where New Orleans bartender M.W. Heron won a gold medal for his Southern Comfort. The mix of the lighter taste of Sweet Tea with Southern Comfort delivers an extraordinary drinking experience for any at-home entertaining experience.

The Southern Comfort ready-to-serve cocktails are available in the U.S. in a 1.75-L size with a suggested retail price of \$19.99. Bottles for the new cocktails are supplied by **O-I (www.o-i.com)**. Labels are supplied by **Fort Dearborn Co. (www.fortdearborn.com)**, and closures are supplied by **Berry Plastics Corp. (www.berryplastics.com)**.



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comment

John Kalkowski, Editorial Director

Investing in innovation can set stage for growth



A recent press release from Silgan Containers put forth the common-sense idea that if a company invests in innovation, even during tough economic times, its efforts are likely to drive immediate growth or help position the company for a stronger recovery. While this may seem to be stating the obvious, the fact is that many companies do quite the opposite. They cut back so deeply that they may be hamstrung for years to come—if they can survive the downturn.

The Silgan release pointed to a recent Frost & Sullivan survey that says major factors shaping innovation and product-development strategy include the global economic downturn (33 percent of survey respondents) and the increasing need for innovation (48 percent). Meanwhile, survey respondents identified two pressing challenges they face as generating and maintaining a pipeline of commercially viable innovations (21 percent) and identifying and developing breakthrough innovation ideas (13 percent).

In an analysis of the 1990-1991 recession, Penton Research Service, Coopers and Lybrand, in conjunction with Business Science Intl., found that better-performing businesses focused on a strong marketing program. "Manufacturers can drive growth by continuing innovation efforts," says Carolyn Takata, director of marketing, Silgan Containers.

Jay Gouliard, vp of packaging at Unilever, says: "Packaging innovation is a tool that can be used to both re-energize existing brands or bring new brands to life. Packaging should be seen as an investment in a brand; not just a cost to business. In some cases, a packaging innovation can drive additional value while actually costing less to produce."

Scott Young, president of Perception Research Service, says that potentially valuable packaging innovations often aren't implemented. These missed opportunities stem from the fact that marketers and engineers often approach packaging from nearly opposite perspectives. Young says engineers tend to consider packaging in terms of functionality and rational benefits (easy opening, etc.), while brand managers think primarily about return on investment, incremental costs and sales revenue.

In another study, Kent St. Vrain of Paxonix, a division of Mead Westvaco, says lack of innovation does a disservice to the company, its investors and most of all its customers. "Innovation has to be part of the overall process of delivering products to the market," he says.

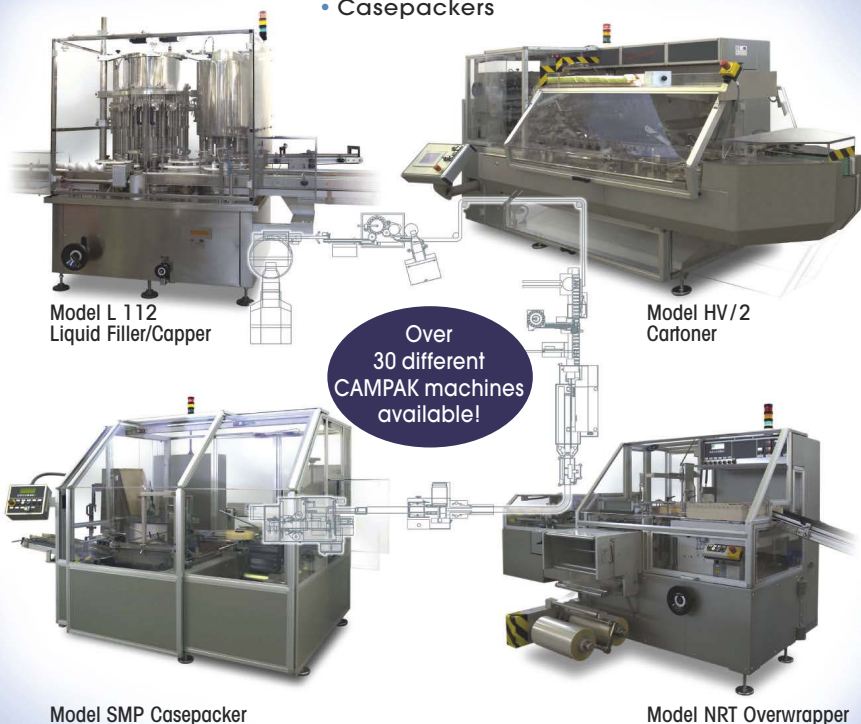
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Optic sensor The D2RF series dual-digital display fiber amplifiers are designed with an advanced user-friendly programming format offering six teaching modes selected based on application requirements. Some of those teaching modes are automatic and used for quick setup when the equipment is operating. A zone-teaching mode creates a selectable high/low window that can be used for sorting parts or detecting objects on a vibrating conveyor. A glass-teaching mode is designed for detecting transparent film, glass and PET bottles. Two 4-digit displays allow for simple verification of the light-received level and threshold level while the 2-digit displays aid in setting up and programming the fiber amplifier. The amplifiers are available in two output configurations: Two independently settable digital; or one digital and analog of 4 to 20 mA, and they feature digital outputs that can be set to 60 micron/sec response for high-speed applications.

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Mini sensors The new PD30 Series sensors feature pushbutton programming, eliminating the trial and error setup required with potentiometer-based sensors. Many models also allow remote teaching options, allowing setup and programming of the sensor to be done away from the application. These same models also provide an option for locking the sensor settings, giving a tamper-evident setup that allows for more secure operation. A muting version provides various benefits, including mutual interference protection, sensor alignment aid and the ability to verify the sensor's proper operation remotely, via a PLC. A dust-alarm output alerts operators when the sensor lens needs to be cleaned, reducing downtime and improving sensor performance. The series is available in six sensing technologies, several with advanced ranges previously unheard of in sensors this size, including through beam (15 m) and polarized retroreflective (6 m).

Carlo Gavazzi Inc., 847/465-6100.
www.gavazzionline.com



MDrive controls The new AccuStep motion-control technology prevents the loss of synchronization due to transient or continued overload, extreme acceleration or deceleration, or excessively slow speeds when applied to stepper motors. The system offers point-to-point positioning, conveyor control, web handling, drilling, rotary and linear positioning to torque specification and low-end camming. With the addition



of torque control, rotary and linear positioning to torque specifications are now possible. By enabling variable current control, motor heating and energy consumption can be greatly reduced, the co. states.
Intelligent Motion Systems Inc., 860/295-6102.
www.imshome.com

Infeed system for meats An independently-driven belted infeed system to accurately weigh fresh products easily conveys hard-to-handle/sticky products including poultry (boneless, bone-in and marinated), seafood, meats and more. The belts are easily removed without tools for quick clean-up. This system reduces labor, increases efficiency, decreases giveaway and is built to USDA washdown standards, the co. states.

Triangle Package Machinery Co., 800/621-4170. www.trianglepackage.com



Photoelectric communication sensor The patented SMARTEYE X-Pro Model XPC photoelectric communication sensor provides users with complete remote control from an onboard HMI or from a central plant control station. The sensor is designed for applications where it's critical to monitor and configure machines for local or plant-wide automation. It's suitable for companies that require multi-drop sensor feedback for overall process control in the packaging, material-handling, food and beverage, automotive, entertainment/gaming and pharmaceutical industries, the co. states. Features RS485 or RS232 communication, five onboard memory locations, digital changeover and control and remote sensor monitoring.

Tri-Tronics Co. Inc., 800/237-0946.
www.ttco.com/xpc



Wrapping carriage gate The No-Thread® powered prestretch wrapping carriage has been modified with a spring-loaded gate, the co. states. This improved carriage-loading gate eliminates maintenance required on the carriage to ensure the proper stretch level at all times, the co. says. The spring-loaded rollers ensure optimal contact with the pallet-wrapping stretch film without involving maintenance. The carriage is also equipped with warranted prestretch rollers. The new gate is standard on all automatic and semi-automatic machines (excluding the Value Line).

Wulftec/M.J. Maillis, 877/985-3832.
www.wulftec.com

Industrial processors In order to increase PC-based control performance with flexible, user-friendly hardware, the new C66xx Series industrial PCs are introduced. The series offers high processing power and compact device dimensions and includes two versions with either the powerful Intel® Core™2 Duo or Core™2 Quad processors on the co.'s ATX motherboard. The control cabinet PCs are equipped with top-performance components and are available in two versions: The C6640 has a more compact design, and the C6650 has up to two hard drives built into removable frames, making the PC suitable for computer data storage applications.

Beckhoff Automation LLC, 952/890-0000.
www.beckhoffautomation.com



Servo wrapper The inverted-revolution full-servo wrapper is designed to package "difficult-to-handle" products. Transfers products directly onto the film web presented to the film-forming plow from beneath a product-infeed conveyor. The configuration provides the ability to handle a wide variety of products that could not ordinarily be controlled on a conventional upright horizontal flowrapper. The inverted revolution also provides the ability to load products directly onto a moving web of film, thus eliminating any transfer points. The machine features a sanitary modular design with cantilevered components and is designed to operate at speeds up to 200 ppm with a standard sealing head.

Campbell Wrapper Corp., 920/983-7100.
www.campbellwrapper.com

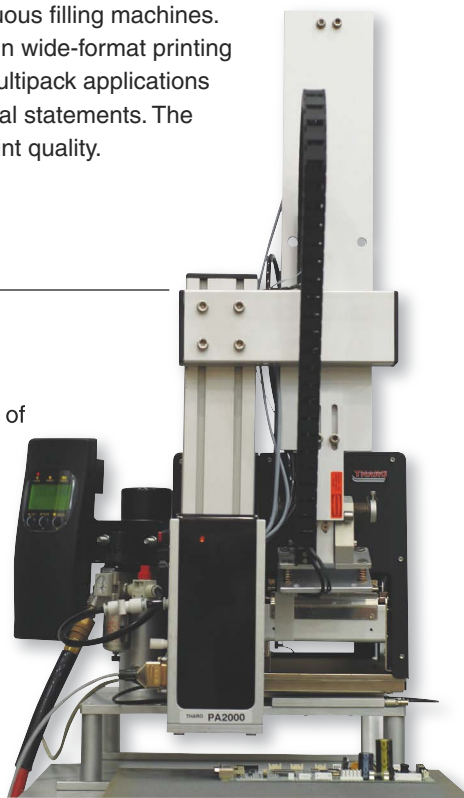


Thermal-transfer coder The SmartDate® 5/128 thermal-transfer coder prints large amounts of complex information on flexible packaging films. Its extended print area is up to 128 mm wide and 75 mm long on intermittent-motion filling machines, and up to 150 mm long on continuous filling machines. The coder delivers efficiency in wide-format printing of information ranging from multipack applications to ingredient lists and nutritional statements. The product also offers up to 300-dpi print quality.

Markem-Imaje, 866/263-4644.
www.markem-imaje.com

Label applicator The PA2000t/b tamp/blow label printer/applicator is an accessory for the co.'s H-Series thermal-transfer bar-code label printers. The printer/applicator features a footprint of 16.5x30 in. for the H-400 and 19.5x30 in. for the H-600 Both have a remote front panel for easy access, regardless of the orientation of the applicator. The PA2000t/b has an all-metal construction and can print and apply labels with or without a computer attached. The adjustable product sensor stops the tamp pad between ½ and 2 in. from the product; from there, the label is blown on.

Tharo Systems Inc., 800/878-6833.
www.tharo.com

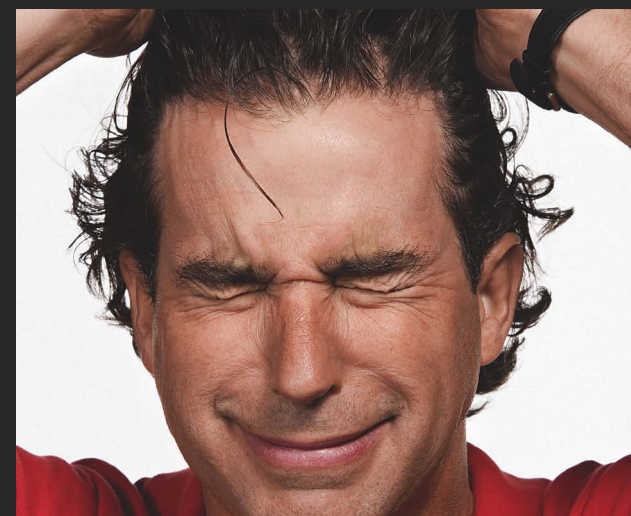


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new products equipment



Motion microscope

The VW-6000 Series motion-analysis microscope features high-speed motion recording of up to 24,000 fps and enables accurate filming of failures in moving targets that cannot be captured by conventional microscopes. Its space-saving size, portability and all-in-one design make recording simple for R&D on the factory floor or on a production line. The built-in light source and LCD monitor mean that setup takes just minutes. A macro-zoom unit with built-in lighting allows great flexibility of light coverage and observation at any angle. A time-advance function allows users to record video at fixed intervals for targets that move continuously, and recorded footage can be edited and analyzed directly on the controller. The co. says the microscope's compact design contains the functionality to perform magnified observation and record still images.

Keyence Corp. of America, 888/539-3623.
www.keyence.com

Scara robot The RS3 robot, a zero footprint system, saves valuable floorspace and can be integrated into compact assembly cells. Has more than 360 deg of axis rotation for omnidirectional access. The robot is suitable for lab automation and other process-heavy applications where large quantities of parts are presented to process or testing stations. Features a Micro PowerDrive RC180 controller that provides the user with RC+ controls software and many fully integrated options such as vision guidance, .net support, Profibus, DeviceNet, EtherNet/IP and more.

Epson Robots, 562/290-5910.
www.robots.epson.com



Bag caser The bag caser provides fast and smooth case loading for both liquid and powder-filled bags. Capable of loading 80 bags/min in either plastic dairy cases or corrugated cases, this compact caser is available in two models to handle either 4 or 6 bags/case load. The caser is available with a touchscreen operator HMI able to swivel 300 deg and PLC controls with Nema 4/4X stainless-steel panel. It can easily be installed over existing conveyors. The equipment's stainless-

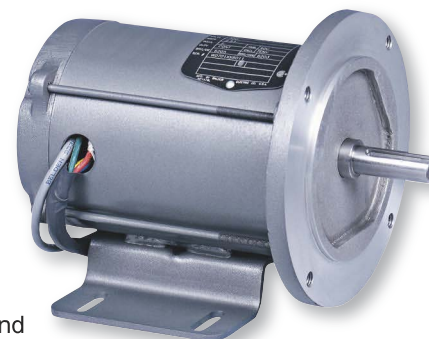
steel construction makes it appropriate for the wet conditions of dairy, juice and other beverage facilities, the co. states.

Westfalia Deam Systems, 800/673-2522.
www.westfaliaUSA.com

Brushless motors

A new family of BSM25C and BSM33C brushless motors features high torque and power in small packages, reduced maintenance and quiet operation. These motors are available from stock with a standard NEMA face/foot-mount, ranging from 0.18 to 2.2 kw. The new controls are simple to operate, as no programming is necessary; they provide a tight speed regulation better than 0.5-percent; and use the industry standard input command (+/- 10Vdc) or optional pot input for speed control, the co. reports. Also uses standard 115/208/230 v and is available from stock.

Baldor Electric Co., 479/646-4711.
www.baldor.com



Robotic safety controller The SafeMove is a software and electronics-based safety controller integrated into the IRC5 robot controller. Provides safety-rated supervision of robot motion, enabling leaner robot cell solutions and more collaborative applications where robots and operators can work more closely together. Offers various safety functions and reduces the need for traditional safety equipment such as light curtains, safety relays, mechanical stops, mechanical position switches and protective barriers. This allows organizations to save money on installation and maintenance, the co. states. The controller also enables more compact cells by restricting robot motion to precisely what is needed for a specific application, instead of relying on more inflexible mechanical stops.

ABB Robotics, 203/750-2200.

www.abb.com/robotics



Thermal-jet printhead

The TJ500 thermal-jet printhead, a reliable ink-jet system for one- and two-line marking and coding, offers reliable thermal-jet technology, high-resolution printing, an easy-change ink cartridge and a wealth of industrial-grade performance features. The printhead is constructed of a sealed, industrial-grade housing with a stainless-steel faceplate and built-in photo sensors to detect product speed and direction. Its Smart Level ink-detection system provides the user with low-ink and ink-out status of the ink cartridges. By lifting the hinged cover of the printhead, the user can find a disposable ink cartridge that is simple to snap-in and snap-out for easy ink replacement.

Diagraph, 800/722-1125.

www.diagraph.com

Glue valves



New 524 series glue valves feature advanced solenoid technology for short glue patterns at high speeds. The valves can easily convert between noncontact and contact glue patterns by changing the output nozzle to the pattern desired.

Valco Melton, 515/874-6550.

www.valcomelton.com

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new products equipment

Recaser The PakTek recaser features a stainless-steel washdown construction and PLC controls with an optional touchscreen. The recaser is an economical and convenient solution for those lacking space or funds for a new packaging line, the co. states. The recaser automatically removes various products from a plastic dairy case and recases them into a corrugated container, eliminating the need to add a second line. Capable of running a variety of pack patterns, the recaser also features quick changeover heads for greater efficiency and an improved bottom line.

Thiele Technologies, 800/932-3647.

www.thieletech.com



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Measurement sensors

The DT50 family of distance-measurement sensors features a new, high-definition distance measurement platform that provides greater precision at longer sensing distances, an industry-leading operating temperature range and ambient light tolerance. The sensors can help decrease operating and manufacturing costs by reducing scrap and increasing throughput. These lightweight, compact sensors feature an intuitive display and keypad with an easy-to-use pushbutton for simple teach-in and programming. The sensors can be used in applications, such as for elevator car positioning; for level detection in hoppers, bins, silos, and chutes; and for pre-process and closed-loop feedback in metal-forming applications.

SICK USA, 952/829-4728

www.sickusa.com



Pressure sensor

The compact SPAB pressure sensor features ease of operation and a compact size. It's simple to set up, install and commission. Designed for use with medical and semi-conductor applications, the sensor features NPN or PNP switching outputs, digital and analog outputs and M8 or cable electrical connections. The sensor also features a clear-cut switching status display, two-part, three-color display and easy transfer of the program to all other SPAB pressure sensors.

Festo Corp., 800/993-3786.

www.festo.com/usa



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new productsmaterials

Flexible packaging

Surface-protector film Novacel 9230 is intended for smooth, shiny laminate protection. The transparent, colorless polyester film is 25-microns thick and is designed to resist high-temperature post forming. The product's innovation in its solvent-free adhesive mass stems from a more environmentally friendly manufacturing process. As long as the film has not been soiled during use, it may be incinerated or recycled. In the same way, all packaging and cores are recyclable or reusable. The films can be applied to a variety of surfaces including stainless steel, pre-coated metals, glass, aluminum, plastics, profiles and high-pressure laminates. The film acts as a barrier against surface damage at every stage of the transformation process (folding, stamping, forming) as well as during handling, transport and finishing, preventing scratches and dirt.

Novacel, 33 0 2 32 82 72 33. www.novacel.fr



Energy-efficient liners Kemiart corrugating liners provides energy efficiency benefits as they reduce carbon emissions, claims the co. The liners consist of Graph, Lite, Ultra and Brite liners. The liners use less energy in corrugating due to their high heat conductivity. Their consistent quality guarantees low waste in corrugating and printing. Lite and Ultra liners are



also designed to require less energy for drying during the printing process, with no drying required at all for Ultra liners.

M-real Consumer Packaging, 203/434-5217. www.m-real.com



Vented films Viking vented films can stretch up to 250 percent and provide excellent strength in pallet-wrapping applications, the co. states. Large vents allow for exceptional air circulation, eliminating frequent breaking; the bands provide superior strength. The vented films can be used for hand or machine applications and they can be used to ship produce, flowers, hot items, cold items and can be color-coded.

Precision Film & Tape, 510/636-9654. www.precisiondiecutting.com

PLA shrink sleeves EarthFirst® PLA shrink film is claimed to reinforce product qualities through the selection of an environmentally friendly, compostable and sustainable substrates. The shrink-film technology features precise placement of the label onto assorted container shapes, including large ovals, with a snug, "no-frown" fit that effortlessly matches bottle contours without distorting, pulling or sagging. Different shrink-sleeve designs can be produced with color variation backgrounds to signal shelf variety, flexibility and economy in meeting product demands, the co. says. The sleeves are suitable for petfoods, personal care containers, HBAs and much more.

Gilbreth USA, 800/630-2413. www.gilbrethusa.com



Desiccant blanket New Absorgel™

blanket is a desiccant designed to provide effective moisture control in tightly packed dry-box marine containers in which there is no room between the cargo and sidewalls to hang desiccant products from the panel loops. It is also suitable for trailers and reefer units that have no wall loops from which to hang desiccants. The blanket measures 24x59 in., with an effective absorption area of 24x48 in. Has a large surface area that ensures fast-acting, substantial moisture absorption during voyages lasting up to 40 days. In a fully-loaded, 20-ft container, two or three desiccant blankets can do the work of 30 to 60 traditional desiccant pouches (120 to 200 g), the co. states. The desiccant blanket can be used with various dry or moist cargo in the form of bulk or packaged goods. The main absorbent material is calcium chloride with starch and gelling agents that hold moisture in nonliquid, brine form.

Buffers USA, 904/696-0010. www.buffersusa.com



Bar-code labels NFi serial number bar-code labels can be produced on a wide variety of substrates that can include variable data identifiers such as sequential or random numbers and single or 2D bar codes, detailed images and color graphics. Featuring subsurface printing to protect the data and images, they can be produced in multiple colors, shapes and sizes to reinforce product branding. Engineered with constructions to match customer application requirements with respect to solvent-, moisture-, UV-resistance and adhesion to smooth or powder coat surfaces, the labels can be produced from materials such as polyester, PC, Mylar®, Lexan®, PVC and more. The labels are supplied on strips.

Nameplates for Industry Inc., 800/999-8900. www.nfi.name



new products materials

Repulpable coating The co. offers repulpable coatings for meat packaging customers that want to convert from waxed boxes to coated boxes. The selection of barrier coatings is repulpable and can be custom-formulated to meet the requirements of a wide range of fresh and frozen meat products including burgers and patties, ground meat, bulk meat, cuts and trimmings. Bag-in-box designs, deli, fresh and sliced meat versions are also available. Michem® Coat is used primarily for water-resistance, but also resists grease and oil. Provides release, cold-set and hot melt gluability as well as FDA and BfR compliance. Coating X300™ AF combines two properties critical to packers of perishables: Water-resistance; and release. It's hot-melt-gluable and FDA-compliant.

Michelman, 800/333-1723. www.michelman.com



ADVANCING

Sustainable Packaging

Ball Corporation has adapted to many changes – social, economic and environmental – to survive and thrive for 129 years. In June, 2008, we issued our company's first sustainability report and formally stated our sustainability approach and specific goals.

A major sustainability focus for us is to advance sustainable packaging through innovations in the products we make, the processes we use in our operations and our advocacy for sustainable principles within the supply chain that includes our products. This is good for Ball, good for our stakeholders and good for the planet.

Ball is uniquely positioned among packaging companies to offer true packaging innovation because we serve multiple end markets with multiple substrates. Our recent innovations combine sustainability benefits with consumer appeal.

Alumi-Tek® Bottle:

- Reclosable
- 50% lighter than competing bottles
- 100% recyclable
- 8oz, 12oz and 16oz



Peelable Ends:

- 40% lighter than metal ends
- Easier-to-open solution
- No sharp edges
- Long shelf life



PET Wine Bottles:

- 100% recyclable
- Light weight
- Shatter proof
- Low greenhouse gas emissions vs. glass



Clear packaging tubes

Ultra-thin-wall, clear plastic tubes and containers are recommended for high-volume applications where minimal protection is required. Some applications include calendars, apparel, wall graphics, candy and confections, art and craft goods or any other products that require a package that has a customized look while remaining low in cost. Various styles of closures are available that feature standard or hanging capabilities. The ultra-thin-wall, clear plastic tubes are also available as sealed-bottom version tube, where a clear bottom is permanently adhered into the tube. The co. offers numerous tube configurations in several diameters and are produced to length for specific customer applications.

Cleartec Packaging, 800/817-8967.
www.cleartecpackaging.com



PET environmental packaging

New EnvironSeal is a family of sustainable, sealable, polyester packaging products designed to replace clear, rigid PVC packaging. The co. reports that the packaging has comparable physical performance properties similar to PVC and is available with pre- and post-consumer-recycled content. It can be RF-welded and heat-sealed to film or cards and is suited for use in food and nonfood consumer packaging, electronics, warehouse club packaging and more. Designed for the production of blister-packs, clamshells, produce containers and display boxes, the packaging is FDA-approved for food contact and is recyclable in the PET waste stream, says the co.

Spartech, 888/721-4242.
www.spartech.com

Ball Corporation • www.ball.com • Eat. Drink. Imagine.



Metallized PET film

Lumirror® MK61 metallized PET film is manufactured with the co.'s in-chamber metallization process and is designed for foil replacement and high-barrier applications. Excellent metal adhesion in wet and caustic environments and high OTR and MVTR values are reported. Other films include Torayfan® OPP and Lumirror matte.

Toray Plastics (America),
401/294-4511.

www.torayfilms.com



PE air pillows

The EP-Flex™ Renew™ is a high-performance, low-density PE air pillow film that is made with up to 50-percent less resin than competitive, inflatable void-fill products, according to the co. The new film structure also contains a proprietary organic additive that accelerates microbial biodegradation without compromising recyclability, the co. states. The film uses a water-based ink and is tinted green with an organic colorant to provide consumers with a visual cue. Complete biodegradation of the product typically occurs within one to five years, depending on conditions, says the co.

Pregis Corp., 800/834-9441.

www.pregis.com



Spiral-ham packaging Flavorseal® spiral-ham packaging for processors and retailers include bone-guard shrink bags, treated tight weave and hanging netting for cooking and smoke penetration, glaze packets for powders and liquids with new glaze sheets and more. The tight weave netting controls the diameter of the ham to yield more center slices, while metallized vacuum bags, foils and decorative colored wrap in red, gold, bronze and silver help preserve freshness and flavor.

CMS, 866/769-1500.

www.cmsflavorseal.com



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The new Kitchens of Sara Lee in Downers Grove, IL, left, is a 120,000-sq-ft R&D facility that houses the North American food and beverage operations, a product-performance kitchen where new products are tested, a beverage lab, foodservice areas and a packaging innovation lab that helps solve packaging challenges and creates prototypes in minutes.

Sara Lee's sustainable mission

PD speaks with Glenn Ventrell, Sara Lee's director of packaging innovation, who shares goals for sustainable packaging, talks about trends and the company's new Innovations Center.

Lauren R. Hartman, Senior Editor

In April, Sara Lee Corp., Downers Grove, IL, opened its new North American innovation campus, The Kitchens of Sara Lee, a 120,000-sq-ft research and development center located at the company's headquarters. The campus houses more than 100 research and development professionals, including chefs, engineers, scientists and packaging designers and for the first time, has all of its North American food and beverage R&D capabilities under one roof.

The state-of-the-art facility features packaging labs with rapid prototyping capabilities

insights into product attributes. With brands such as Hillshire Farms, Ball Park, Ambi Pur, Jimmy Dean, Kiwi, Sara Lee and Senseo, the company generates more than \$13 billion in annual net sales and covers approximately 20 countries.

Dedicated to innovation and increasing consumer and customer value and distinguishing the company's products in the market, Sara Lee is moving in new directions and implementing many sustainable and environmental packaging programs and initiatives.

Instrumental in Sara Lee's new packaging developments as well as its sustainability efforts is Glenn Ventrell, director of packaging innovation and development. *Packaging Digest* recently talked with Ventrell to discuss all things packaging

Packaging personnel are very much involved cross-functionally in all parts of the business.

to shape plastic and paper prototypes in minutes, package-testing services, product-formulation labs designed to simulate

production plant processes to test product and packaging components before they enter full-scale production, a bakery pilot plant that helps translate product formulas into commercial scale, foodservice kitchens equipped with plug-and-play systems that replicate a quick-service restaurant and sensory/product performance labs to help turn consumer

and find out how the company is achieving its sustainability goals.

What is your role as director of packaging innovation?

For North America on the food side of the business, I head up packaging innovation and development R&D across all of our brands and business units.

How important is packaging to Sara Lee?
Very important. Like a lot of companies,



probably there was a time when it wasn't very important. Everyone thought that the product was what did the selling, but things have changed in the marketplace. Packaging has become not just graphically better but functionally better. It has features and attributes built in that consumers can see on-shelf. And packages have to have that same level [of quality] when consumers bring them home to use and dispose of.

Tell us about the new Innovation Center Sara Lee opened in April, and the new tools that you're using for testing and evaluating packaging there.



It's light years away from when I started at the company about two years ago. At that time, we had a fairly old facility and some testing equipment. Now, we have a brand new, research and development facility devoted to innovation and more testing equipment than before—but more importantly, we have product and package development equipment that allows us to create effective prototypes and folding cartons, shipping cases and rigid and flexible plastic packaging. We can now do a lot of things in-house, but we can remove all of the time we'd normally have going back and forth with suppliers, trying to explain what we're looking for.

How is the new facility affecting new-product development?

We have much more consumer focus on what we're doing, and are going to be able to deliver more options more quickly. The right package and products will be going into the market more cost-effectively and certainly much faster than they could before. With folding cartons as an example, by getting the same carton-converting equipment that our suppliers have, and by linking everyone electronically, we can take two months out of a converting process.

As one of the nation's largest food processors and merchandisers, can you estimate how many packages and package designs Sara Lee produces in a given year?

Excluding graphics—because there are a lot more changes done on the graphics side—on the structural packaging side, an example would be a die-cutting table we have had in place since September of last year. We have made 1,500 carton samples just from this equipment alone, in that period of time. We had a learning curve, but going forward, I'd expect that in a year, we'll make about 3,000 to 4,000 carton samples.

What are some of your latest packaging and packaging-equipment developments?

There's a resealable rigid deli meat tub for Hillshire Farms that we made sustainable. We took $\frac{3}{16}$ in. of material out of the container. Making the packaging more sustainable was the driving force behind the project—it wasn't for any other reason. But people looked at the primary package from a



traditional standpoint, and most said there's not much we can do to change the package.

So, we re-evaluated it and had the engineers on the job evaluate it and try to find out what it would take to get another layer of packages on a pallet and on a truck. That's where the $\frac{3}{16}$ in. of material came in.

We redesigned everything—the bowl, the shipping case, the deli tub, the pallet pattern—and removed about 900 trucks from the road to ship it. When we first started this project, however, it seemed like a fairly small issue, but it's a much

bigger issue, because the product is a big seller, so we pack millions of the tubs. Consequently, it became a big sustainability story. When we went to our major customers who are also very much involved in sustainability, and told them what we did, it became a big story.

Are these changes being made to new products or to existing products, or is it a mix of the two?

It's a mix. The involvement of packaging for new products (I can't discuss what's not on the market yet) we're working on today has grown exponentially, compared to just two years ago. We have packaging people who are not only participating on every project team, but in some cases, they're leading the teams, and driving work if it's particularly about the package more than the product. We have packaging personnel working on research plans, so they're very much involved cross-functionally, in all parts of the business.

How does the company approach the packaging-development process?

Well, in a couple of ways. One is that we use the Five Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle, etc.) from a sustainable standpoint of the 7Rs total, and we're also part of the SPC. We follow its guidelines. Then we're looking at point of differentiation, consumer and customer input and the competition. So put all that together and the idea is to come up with a winning package that others can't easily replicate.

How long has Sara Lee been working on sustainable packaging and sustainability efforts?

For at least two years—certainly under the name of sustainability—the two years since I came on board. I was here a week when I asked to be put on the global sustainability team. Prior to that, it was called an environmental team, and there were Continued on page 22



New packaging and processing equipment installed at the Kitchens of Sara Lee R&D/Innovations Center allows the company to get new products and packaging to market more quickly and easily, at less cost.



a lot of things Sara Lee has worked on for a long amount of time that had the same effect on what was happening with the environment. Today, we have a very active global team. The packaging team that I represent is to the point where it lives and breathes sustainability.

How long has Sara Lee had an established or formal sustainability policy?

About a year and eight or nine months ago, we formed our mission sustainability statement as a company, and from there, each group worked on its deliverables and in packaging. Part of our deliverables are that every new package has to go through a process of checks. One check is how sustainable the package is versus other options possible. If another option is picked, then we have to check on why that option was picked over the more sustainable option. And sometimes, the more sustainable option isn't as feasible or as cost-effective or isn't available within a certain amount of time, or the materials may not be totally evolved at that point.

What are some of Sara Lee's goals for the coming decade?

We have an internal goal of reducing the amount of packaging we use with our products. For example, if I was to look at a Jimmy Dean's sausage sandwich, and it has X amount of packaging around it today, we might ask how we can make it more sustainable in different two ways, which at the end of the day, is what really counts for the consumer. We have to look at the total tonnage of source reduction we can achieve and also look on the particular product line to see how we can actually reduce the amount [of packaging] that affects the consumer units.

Do you apply sustainable goals for all of the company's packaging or just some of it and how do you select which products will have it and which won't?

I work very closely with our business unit leaders for the different brands. With some packages, there's not a lot of material that you can take away and still have product protection, for example, and that's key. We won't sacrifice product protection for source reduction or new materials or things like that.

For example, it's difficult to make a bread bag any thinner and still make it through the distribution channel. That doesn't mean we're not looking for an alternative, but it wouldn't be the same priority as, say, a foodservice shipping case that we can reduce the size of to make it more sustainable. So it's working across our retail and foodservice businesses and then we highlight certain areas where we want to focus on. In the last year we did a lot of work in the area regarding retail

packaging, and now we're looking at those in the foodservice business.

What are some of the company's plans for new packaging for foodservice applications and how many are developed each year?

Foodservice has more packages than our retail environment because there are so many different customers. It does become more of a challenge. Say, for example, that I'd like to reduce a shipping case [size] for bulk turkey that goes to 50 different customers. We have to get a lot more buy-in from foodservice customers. The good news is that like us, a lot of our customers are also thinking more sustainable. I have talked to some of them about working closer together and we have sat down with business leaders in foodservice to identify where the new opportunities are and to define those opportunities to work on sustainable projects.

Do you have any metrics or guidelines for sustainable new-product introductions?

It's not so much a guideline as it is more of a discipline on how we would approach it. If it's a new product that was never on the market before, it's hard to measure in those terms.

But we do know what materials are more sustainable than others and what designs can be more sustainable than others. We are still trying to achieve the top shelf impact and get consumers to buy the product.

There are many things you can do in the material arena. Some materials are much more recyclable than others. Those are our starting point. Then, we try to determine if they function under the same conditions, and find out if the product still works the same way in a sustainable package as it did before. So we might have to rule out one plastic over another because of its recyclability. And we try to avoid materials that have negatives.

How much do consumers and retailers drive Sara Lee's business? How much do they affect your sustainability practices?

It's much more from the retailer standpoint than the consumer standpoint. Retailers have been a driving force and an ally in the sustainability journey. Certainly as a company, we meet with retailers and they come through the Kitchens of Sara Lee [here at the new facility], see our new packaging lab, and learn that we can do things for them that they may not have

Continued on page 24

Jimmy Dean Breakfast Bowls move to 30 percent PCRPET

Sara Lee Corp. is also developing proactive environmental programs within its sustainability framework. One example of its packaging that's being updated with a "greener" twist is for Jimmy Dean microwavable Breakfast Bowls. The frozen eggs and breakfast meats or pancakes combination meals have been packaged in crystallized PET bowls covered with a polyester film membrane. But soon, the bowl will be replaced with a PCRPET-containing structure, thermoformed by **Associated Packaging Technologies** (www.aptechnologies.com). It's one sustainability move that Glenn Ventrell, director of packaging innovation, hints about in his interview with PD (see main article).



Applied to the seven SKUs in the Jimmy Dean Breakfast Bowl lineup, the new black bowl is 0.1 in. shorter than the previous one and has a 1.8-in. draw depth. Made of 30-percent PCRPET, primarily derived from used PET beverage bottles, it's the same 6.3-in. diameter as the virgin CPET version (but without the side handles). This allows Sara Lee to also downsize its corrugated shipping cases holding eight Breakfast Bowls.

Cutting the case footprint and height results in a case-weight savings of 3.2 percent, or a savings of 0.015 lb per case. The changes also include reducing the size of the paperboard carton in which each bowl of frozen product is merchandised. The carton, provided by **Graphic Packaging Intl.** (www.graphicpkg.com), was reduced by 5.3 percent in weight.

All of this translates into an annual estimated corrugated material savings of 75,460 lb and an annual carton material savings of 163,116 lb.

Says Jeff Czarny, senior engineer of packaging innovation and development, "Manufacturing capabilities along with the ability to add PCR content to the bowl drove our decision to update it. We also wanted to maximize the amount of product we could get on a pallet. Ultimately, this will deliver an extra layer of 18 cases per pallet load."

A major transportation savings also comes into play with the changes made to the bowls, cases and cartons. The new bowls went into production in early June, Czarny points out, and should be appearing in stores by the end of June or early July.

"Using production volumes in the costing model, we determined we could eliminate 236 truckload shipments," he says. "We multiplied the number of shipments by average length of deployment line haul to find the food miles reduction and divided that by an industry standard of five miles per gallon, to calculate a diesel fuel reduction of 42,752 gallons per year."

"This supports more use of recycled beverage bottles," Czarny adds. "The handles were removed from the bowl to accommodate future automation needs and will allow us to gain a more efficient, high-speed production process. Consumer testing showed that removing the handles from the bowls didn't affect product usage."

More information is available:

Associated Packaging Technologies, 484/785-1120.

www.aptechnologies.com.

Graphic Packaging Intl., 770/644-3515. www.graphicpkg.com.



Before Sara Lee's new products hit grocery store or warehouse shelves, they stop at the new, state-of-the-art, Kitchens of Sara Lee R&D center, which opened in April, above.

known about before. That has been a very big advantage in the short time the facility has been open. So we can show them how we can make things more efficient within their system using less packaging materials. We show them how they may have to handle fewer pallets in the system, but there is still the same amount of product in the package and less packaging to make that happen, works well.

On the consumer side, consumers aren't yet that educated about the word sustainability. They know the word recyclability, but they don't always know what is recyclable. That's because there could be some 8,000 different local recycling facilities in place in the U.S., and each one has a totally different program than another—even in the same state.

Where are the biggest environmental strides being made?

Some companies have gotten some great press on the work they've done, whether it's setting up recycling facilities or source reduction projects and size reduction of packaging for liquid concentrated detergents, for example. It was very obvious when companies went to a concentrated detergent and there was downsizing of bottles. That was a big risk and they should be applauded for what they did.

Consumers very often buy on size. They look at value as an equation of size and money. Putting a concentrate on the market and bringing all of their products to market in a concentrated form was a great source reduction of the packaging and a positive action.

We get a lot of letters from consumers asking questions. If the question relates to sustainability, they come to my desk. Quite often, it seems people are confused about

how they can recycle things and where it can be done. Can they recycle things in their community? And I'll check on where they can recycle the container [in question] or how it can be taken back to a facility for recycling. There's a lot that needs to be done in this area.

One thing we're trying to do is to help educate consumers more through our website, where we are finding consumers are going to find answers about packages and products. It has a sustainability section that lists different programs in our business. For example, our Continued on page 24

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cartons are certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative and we explain what that means. So it's a grassroots movement of getting consumers to better understand not only what we're doing but what sustainability is about.

R&D is obviously a big reason the company opened the Innovations Center. Do you depend on your partners or suppliers for new developments?



We really need to delve into the components of packaging and how they affect consumers.

We depend on them an awful lot. There isn't a company around that can have the amount of R&D people on staff that it would take to come up with all of

the new developments that happen, especially if the development isn't core to you. So irregardless of the material, we still depend heavily on suppliers and partners and design firms to help

us know what we don't know. Because we'll never know everything.

Is this how Sara Lee is carrying out its vision of being the most innovative and disciplined food company in your operating categories?

Yes, it's certainly part of it. One thing we've moved to recently is being more open to innovation, which, for us, is to not be so secretive about things. So if we're looking at a new material that might be biodegradable (at the end of life) or sustainable, we make no secret about being interested in this area, so we've gotten lots of companies seeking us out that we may have never done business with. They either have a point of view or have a way of doing something with regard to biodegradable materials technology. So while we're looking at that long and hard, we haven't made a decision on whether to use biodegradable technology or not yet because the science is still inconclusive for our

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Some trends have changed because of the economy, but consumers are still looking for the same things as before and even more so.

types of products.

Are you currently evaluating post-consumer-recycled content packaging materials or nano materials?

We are looking very closely at PCR content materials and the next time we talk, I can tell you more about that [see sidebar].

What trends do you see developing in your market segments? What are consumers looking for from packaging?

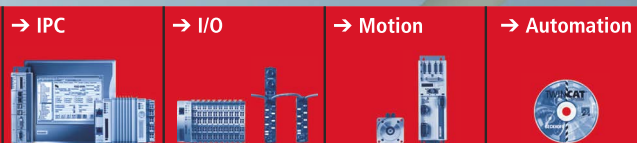
I think some of the trends have changed a bit because of the economy right now, but certainly they're still looking for some of the same things as before and even more so. One of the benefits to us is that more people are eating at home. A lot of our product sales have gone up and we have more consumers talking to us about package functions and features.

We really need to delve into the components of packaging and how they affect consumers instead of the overall package. Freshness features are critical. In difficult economic times, people don't want to throw away food. And food in landfills is a major issue, so we're trying to find new ways to keep foods fresher longer to reduce food waste that ends up in landfills.

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Private labels are booming

Retailers go head-to-head with national brands by developing private brands with variety of products designed to attract consumers who seek **VALUE AND QUALITY**.

John Kalkowski, Editorial Director

On retail shelves everywhere, private brands are making their presence known. In fact, according to a recent study by the **Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA)** (www.plma.com), products sold under the label of retailers themselves now account for more than 22 percent of all unit sales.

While many of us might think of private labels as the bare-bones, black-and-white boxes of generic products that appeared in the 1970s, private labels have been used by retailers for decades, according to Brian Sharoff, president of the PLMA. He explained that department stores first started using their own brands for clothing and housewares more than 100 years ago. Supermarkets began developing their own brands with the founding of Kroger and A&P at the beginning of the 20th Century.

"The last thirty years reflect the evolution of private labels from a purchase of last resort to what are brands in their own right sold by retailers," Sharoff says.

In many respects, he says, private brands surpass national brands in categories where national brands might not even exist. "At retailers like Wegmans and Safeway, you see categories where there is no national brand. There are only the retailers' brands that are pioneering in those categories."

"If you are making a product with someone else's label—Kraft, Procter & Gamble or a retailer's label—then you end up with a product being fundamentally the same as what they produce in their facilities," says John Riley, chairman and CEO of Rapid Air Systems and president of the **Contract**

by commodities, like milk and bread, for instance, you have some categories where name brands have very small shares. In most categories, you see a healthy balance, but the growth of private label is by no means over in most categories."

Private-label share increasing

According to **Mintel USA** (www.mintel.com), the long-term trends in food retailing have been toward increased share of private labels at least since the early 1990s. In an updated forecast released in April, Mintel states the recessionary collapse in 2008 accelerated this trend, with private-label share growing by 9.3 percent compared to 4.5 percent for branded sales. The study forecasts that growth will continue in 2009, with private label sales up 8.1 percent versus 2.6 percent for branded sales.

Riley attributes the growth of private labels to the economics of the market. If you look at Top 10 consumer brand companies and asked what is their

a private label to the market for significantly less than a national brand."

Historically, private labels have signified value for consumers, while national brands have attempted to occupy the premium rationale for purchase.

Sharoff says this is no longer true once you go beyond the basic products. "Trader Joe's is not a value proposition. Whole Foods is not a value proposition," Sharoff explains. "They have premium products just like the national brands. Value is no longer the only way in which private labels define themselves."

Opportunities for packagers

These trends point to growing opportunities for packagers. Riley says packaging is becoming more important than ever for private-label brands.

Christopher Durham, author of the blog myprivatelabel.com, points out that packaging is the face of brand marketing. "Very few retailers have a marketing spend for their private brands," he says. "The vast majority of the experience from a private brand is at the store shelf. How the packaging conveys the message is key."

Good packaging sells products

Sharoff says packaging was recognized in the 1990s as the first frontier in making store brands more successful and more popular with consumers. He says the primary reason private-label share has risen from 16 percent of unit sales to 22 percent today is the recognition of the importance of competitive and attractive packaging, adding he refers not only to design but everything that makes the packaging, including its functionality.

Continued on page 26



Safeway has recorded such success with its O Organics line that it is selling these products to other retailers.

Packagers Association (www.contractpackaging.org). "Private brands have emerged to the point where leading retailer brands have very full private-label programs. If you look at shelf categories

The last 30 years reflect the evolution of private labels from a purchase of last resort to what now are brands in their own right sold by retailers.

marketing spend or what they spend to build brand equity, Riley estimates those numbers are around 25 cents out of every dollar.

"If you're a contract packager making a private label, you don't necessarily have any of those costs," he says. "Other things being equal, you buy a high speed line and you buy the same film from the same supplier. There's not much else you can't get that isn't exactly what the national brand has. Except you don't have the brand equity costs. You can deliver

Packaging plays the same role for retailers as national brands, Sharoff says. “Good packaging helps to sell products and bad packaging helps to doom products. If you are a national brand and you’ve created an extraordinary product and you select bad packaging it could doom the product. The same is true on private label side.”

Packaging for private brands is produced by manufacturers who fall into four classifications:

- National brand manufacturers who utilize their expertise and excess capacity to supply store brands.
- Small, quality manufacturers who specialize in particular product lines and concentrate on producing store brands almost exclusively. Often these companies are owned by corporations that also produce national brands
- Major retailers, wholesalers or cooperatives who own their own manufacturing facilities and provide their own store brand products.
- Regional brand manufacturers who produce private label products for specific markets.

Much of the private-label production is done by thousands of companies, Sharoff says, explaining that these companies, based on contracts, also produce the product, not just the packaging.

“In private labeling, there are hundreds of companies in more than 2,000 categories that produce the products on an ongoing basis in partnership with the retailer,” Sharoff says. He places the amount of such companies between 10,000 and 20,000 in the U.S. alone, not including manufacturers from overseas.

Providing extra services

The definition of contract packaging depends on exactly what services a company provides, says Riley of the Contract Packers Association, whose organization has grown rapidly from 30 to more than 150 members in the last four years.

Some companies are purely private-label manufacturers that sell their products almost exclusively to retailers, he says, and there is a blend of companies also making products for the national brands.

Contract packagers specialize because of their equipment sets, their geography and their historical relationships, Riley explains. “The packagers have a customer base they can address, and they tend to stick with it. It might be pet foods or pharmaceuticals, but you won’t find those crossing over in the same plant,” he says. Packagers will also specialize by distribution channel, Riley says, and will build their facilities and systems around around their links in the supply chain.

Once a contract packager gets an equipment set,

he’s more likely to try to leverage that into as many end products as he can, Riley says.

Packagers keep running

Flexibility is key to a contract packager, Riley says. They must balance capacity and they don’t want downtime. Seasonality becomes an issue. He also says picking up products to run in the off-season is very preferable. “Contract packagers who can run at high capacity rates do quite well and, in the long run, end up being the ones who are more successful and have more facilities.”

Increasingly, contract packagers offer additional services, such as processing, package design and logistics management.

“I think there is a trend for branded customers to shift the inventory liability to the contract packagers,” Riley says. If the contract packager is prepared to take the investment risk in the commodity—whatever the raw material is—as well as in sourcing the packaging, then that is becoming more preferred by the brand owners for economic reasons, especially in this downturn.

Providing these services makes the relationship more “sticky” and helps the brand owner deal with a project in a compressed timeframe, Riley says. “Due to their size, many brand owners will have lots of projects going on at the same time. It’s not necessarily the key projects that are being outsourced. However, packaging is key to anything that’s outsourced.”

Many services, but packaging is focus

Packaging is the focus for a contract packager. “Picking up on this situation and running with it is where the contract packager’s opportunity lies,” Riley says. “It’s a little difficult to trade out a supplier if they’re buying your inventory, specifying the packaging and, in a lot of instances, helping you design the packaging.”

More contract packagers are getting into packaging design, Riley says, depending on their relationship with the customer.

While many private labels have been developed by large, national retailers, there are also many owned by smaller regional retailers, Riley says, especially in sectors such as food.

Ultimately, the contract packager competes to be the best to stay engaged by brand owners, Riley says. “Depending on the product category, a contract packager will have other packagers to compete with, but the contract packager’s limit is itself. The contract packager sets its own limits.”

Many large brands have very developed contract-packaging guidelines and certification systems managed by the brands. The brands may have a



Retailers have built a strong portfolio of private brands at various price points, including Walmart’s Great Value brand, Target’s premium Archer Farms products, a broad line from Trader Joe’s and Costco’s Kirkland brand, which aims to exceed national brand quality at lower prices.

pool of perhaps 30 contract packagers they deal with every day or every week. Riley says that relationship will be very different than one where it’s a new product from a customer who doesn’t even know if he has market for the product, and he’s asking someone to make a limited run and can’t guarantee them volumes. “The way those two customers behave will be quite different even though it’s the same co-packer. Co-packagers often are dealing with both of those situations at the same time.”

Sharoff says a packaging specialist’s ability to make a product successful is worth a great deal. “I think where there is a problem is that the specialist in the packaging company has to understand the differences between private labels and national brand packaging. They are not the same.”

“If you are making packaging for national brands—including the design, materials, and closures — the packaging needs to scream out at the consumer, ‘Look at me.’ You have an important creative challenge.”

The packaging specialist must understand the role of private label in the retailer’s mind, Sharoff points out. “Adopt and adapt the packaging to that role. Some retailers have created a single look that is similar in any number of SKUs throughout the store. They offer 50, 80, 500 SKUs to accomplish that incrementally.”

Packaging is just first step

While packaging is the consumer’s first image of a product, Sharoff notes, once past the packaging, ingredients and quality of product become the most important element. “Good packaging notwithstanding, nobody is going to buy garbage a second time,” he says.

According to Sharoff, innovation is what makes private labeling exciting. He says private branding has built a reputation to the point where most major



retailers use their own brand, and consumers are accepting the trend. He points to a recent Roper survey in which nearly three quarters of consumers say private-label products are as good or better than national brands. "When you have that level of acceptance, the next step is for private-label brands to be more innovative," he says.

Private-label brands have attempted to stay current with what brands are doing in packaging and are not falling behind, Sharoff says. Outside the center store is where more innovative products such as fresh-frozen products in groceries or off-patent medicines in drugstores provide an opportunity for innovation, he says.

Brands offer tiered products

One area of innovation for private branding is the development of multiple tiers of products targeted to different audiences.

National brands have often had multiple tiers in a variety of price points depending on what the customers were willing to spend. The notion of multiple tiers—branded or private label—is quite the prevalent norm in merchandising, he says.

Producing tiered levels of packaging often depends on the contract packager's machinery, Riley says. Quality issues run more to the blending and raw material. Often, the packaging can distinguish the product and give the impression that the product's quality is remarkably higher than it actually is, Riley says.

"Those are functions of the equipment set. They either make the products or they don't. Then they'll manufacture up and down the quality chain and across as many packaging forms as they can."

Riley says while private labeling has contributed to the growth of contract packaging, other factors include outsourcing of entire product lines by the national brands or the customization of packaging for different retailers.

"The brands run the product in high volumes and then outsource the assembly into two-packs, three-packs or end-caps. So labor-intensive, shorter-run business can also be outsourced, even if the national brands have the best equipment sets making the finished product."

SKU proliferation has been great for contract packagers, Riley says, as long as you don't carry the inventory. Many of these packages have a shelf life and a seasonality. "Retailers want to be able to differentiate themselves

from the guy across the street, but you don't want to be caught carrying too many packages."

The Mintel report says the current economy and consumer mindset is "a golden opportunity for private-label manufacturers to gain new customers. The goal will be to ensure that they are sufficiently impressed with the cost/quality that they continue to come back once consumer confidence

returns."

Durham sees the changing retail patterns between private labels and national brands as a shift, not as a giant battle. "If you view it as a battle, it's a civil war. Do national brands really want to battle with the people distributing their products? At the end of the day, we all just want to drive sales," he says. "Private-label growth may slow, but it won't stop."

More information is available:

Private Label Manufacturers Assn.,
212/972-3131. www.plma.com.

Contract Packaging Association,
630/544-5053.

www.contractpackaging.org.

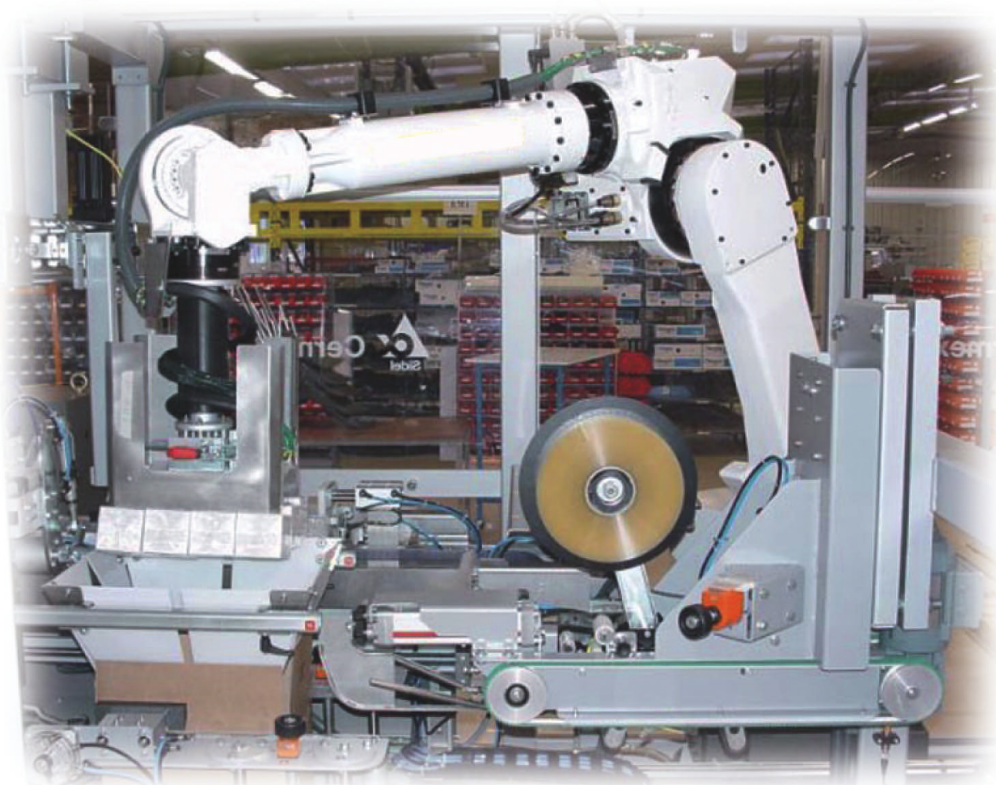
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The Visual Pak Cos. began as the thermoforming business Blisters Inc., left, in 1980. Right, another company in The Visual Pak Cos. group—American Blending and Filling—offers liquid goods manufacturing and rotary, in-line and tube filling.

Change agent

ADAPTABILITY AND CONTINUOUS INVESTMENT

are key to the success of contract packager.

Headquartered in Waukegan, IL, The Visual Pak Cos. is a privately owned group that includes its core contract business—Visual Pak Co.—which offers contract packaging services; Bolke-Miller Co., which specializes in secondary food packaging; Blisters Inc., which thermal-forms blister-packs and clamshells; Trifinity Distribution, which offers pick, place and shipping services; and Norka Inc., a specialty commercial printing and custom paper converting company that was acquired less than a year ago.

Perhaps, what is most impressive about The Visual Pak Cos. growth is that it comes at a challenging time. “Multiple contract packagers have closed their doors in 2009 because of the economy,” Dan Brosseau, vp of sales for The Visual Pak Cos. remarks. “We’re not experiencing that same trend, and I think it’s because we’ve positioned ourselves ahead and down the road. It’s all about having integrated services that customers demand and staying ahead of that curve.”

‘On-demand’ growth

An overarching theme to The Visual Pak Cos. history is investment and adaptation in response to customer needs. The group began as the thermoforming business, Blisters Inc., more than a quarter of a century ago. As Brosseau

explains, Blisters’ customers wanted more from the thermoformer—specifically customers wanted help placing product into the thermoformed packages. In response to this demand, the contract packer Visual Pak Co. was formed.

In a similar fashion, American Blending and Filling was started in response to demand from existing customers for liquids manufacturing and filling. After customers expressed a desire to offload shipping and distribution of packaged products to the service provider, The Visual Pak Cos. started Trifinity Partners Inc.

In addition to its logistics expertise, Trifinity brought manufacturing capabilities when it was purchased from Shell Oil in March 2006. Trifinity’s specializes in making items with high alcohol content, and its website cites Paint Away hand-cleanser wipes, After Craft hand-cleanser wipes, Tahitian Blend sunscreen wipes and Visual Home storage bags among its private and control label products. Distribution services clients listed on site include major retailers such as Walmart, Sam’s Club, Target and Costco.

Earlier this year, Trifinity moved its East Coast manufacturing facility and its Lake Forest distribution center to 19.75-acre location in Waukegan. The company’s growth hasn’t been limited to the Midwest, though. Brosseau explains:

“A customer came to us and said, ‘We really like what you do for us in Waukegan. We have a major warehouse and distribution in Atlanta, and we’d like you to be there.’ So that’s exactly what we did. We started a facility in Atlanta, right by the airport—right next to their facility.”

Investments both inside and out

The group’s investments also take place within the businesses’ walls. In December 2008, Visual Pak Co. powered up a new steam-heat shrink-labeling line. This line augments existing shrink-labeling capabilities at the company headquarters and was custom engineered by in-house mechanics to specifically sleeve a product that is 11.5 in. tall.

The **Axon** (www.axoncorp.com) tunnel can accommodate packages that are up to 6 in. wide to 12 in. tall. Both the pucks that hold the containers as they travel and the conveyors that the containers travel on are custom fabricated in The Visual Pak Cos.’ shop, where in-house mechanics custom configure or manufacture nearly every piece of

“People always say, ‘Can you automate it?’ Well, we can automate it. But, the interesting thing about our business is that every day you come in here, we’re running different products,” says Dan Brosseau, vp of sales for The Visual Pak Cos. The businesses employ a large labor force to ensure quick changeovers between jobs.





Canisters, above, enter the company's new steam shrink tunnel. The Visual Pak Cos.' fabrication and tooling shop, below, was expanded in May 2009 in anticipation of future growth and the fabrication demands of this growth.



equipment installed their locations.

The company boasts that its mechanics are so good that they were able to custom fabricate air knives that cost 10 percent to 20 percent of commercially manufactured models and removes 70 percent to 80 percent of the water off products.

Mechanics also built a cartoner that enables quick and easy changeover. The design incorporates a rail system with hand-level screws. The Visual Pak Co. says that its home-grown cartoner has a changeover time of less than a half an hour, while other machines can take up to three hours to changeover.

Explaining why changeover is very important for the Visual Pak Co., Brosseau states: "Unlike a manufacturer, where they make one product really well a zillion at a time, we specialize in the smaller runs that they don't do as well with."

Serving up real-time data

Part of the challenge associated with short-run jobs is keeping track of where the multitude of products are in the manufacturing and packaging processes. To ensure that each customer has personalized service for any of its vertically integrated offerings, The Visual Pak Cos. assigns a project manager to each account.

The project manager has access to real-time data from a **Microsoft** (www.microsoft.com) Navision MIS system in addition to data collected by the companies' many enterprise applications software programs that connect to the database (Microsoft

Navision has since been rebranded to Microsoft Dynamics NAV).

According to Brosseau, The Visual Pak Cos.' customers can find out where their products are at any point in the manufacturing, packaging and distribution cycles at any time.

Taking it to the road

The group plans to further capitalize on its logistics knowledge by launching a trucking service. At time of publication,

the new company's name has not been finalized. The strictly logistics-and-distribution service is referred to as simply Visual Trucking. Trucks are expected to hit the road summer 2009.

More information is available:

Axon LLC, 800/598-8601.

www.axoncorp.com.

Microsoft Corp., 888/477-7989.

www.microsoft.com/dynamics.

Industrial Dynamics/filtec

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Big brands make sustainable strides

Geared to **SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGY**, DuPont's award winners include prime examples of source reduction, biodegradable and recycled content, renewable components and more.

Lauren R. Hartman, Senior Editor

Several firsts marked the announcement of the winners of the DuPont Awards for Packaging Innovation from **DuPont Packaging & Industrial Polymers** (www.dupont.com). For one, DuPont announced the international awards online this year as part of its first virtual webcast event.

Another new element to the competition is the basis for which the winners were judged: Efforts to enhance sustainability and performance.

Key innovations include a generous use of post-consumer-recycled (PCR) materials and shelf-stabilization/transportation efficiencies, source reduction, energy efficiencies, responsible resourcing and solutions for end of life.

An independent, international judging panel facilitated by Anne Johnson, director of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, evaluated more than 120 entries in this year's competition on seven innovation factors—also new to this year's competition—such as resource and energy optimization and enhanced performance—selecting 10 winners and eight notable accomplishments. Here are the top 10 winners:

Shampoo bottle, cap promote PCR

Rethinking waste, Aveda Corp., Blaine, MN, part of the Estee Lauder Cos., celebrated its 30th anniversary by relaunching one of its original shampoos in what it calls a breakthrough sustainable package. Aveda's Vintage Clove shampoo (1) was part of a proactive, company-funded bottle-collection program and outreach at retail stores and schools internationally.

The majority of Aveda's shampoo bottles contain 80 percent PCR, which totals more than 300,000 lb of recycled plastics used annually in the company's HDPE bottles. For outstanding producer involvement and commitment to a takeback program and innovative use of post-consumer-recycled material, Aveda converted to a bottle made with 96-percent PCRHDPE content and caps made with 100-percent PCRPP and 4-percent colorant carrier virgin resin. The amount is the highest level of PCRHDPE for an Aveda shampoo bottle molded by **Matrix Packaging** (www.matrixpackaging.com), reports Karen Copp, corporate packaging innovations specialist at The Estee Lauder Cos. Inc., New York City.

The PCRHDPE source is recycled milk jugs. **TricorBraun** (www.tricorbraun.com) supplies the bottle to Aveda, which has the bottle decorated by **Technigraph** (www.technigraph.net). "The graphic design drew inspiration from those used on the original Clove Pure Plant package so that regular customers would recognize it," notes Dean Maune, executive director of Aveda package development.

To top it off, the 100-percent PCR dispensing cap is the result of Aveda's new cap-collection/recycling program. "The cap project began as a way of reusing plastics polluting the oceans," explains Estee Lauder vp John Delfausse. "We

thought, better than taking them out, let's keep them from getting in the water at all (and wreaking havoc with birds and sea life)," Delfausse says.

Loose bottle caps aren't easily recovered, reprocessed and/or recycled by U.S. recycling centers, so the company built its own infrastructure to manage the recycling, he says. "We have been working with more than 60 schools to collect, sort and reprocess caps."

The caps are sent to **KW Plastics** (www.kwplastics.com) in Alabama, where they are washed, ground up and formed into pellets. The pellets are sent to **Sequist Closures** (www.sequistclosures.com), which uses them to mold new caps, which end up gray in color as a result of the rainbow of recycled, colored caps obtained.

"The color was worked into the new bottle graphics to give the design a pop," Delfausse says.

Label copy on the bottle promotes recycling and the judges recognized the package for achievements in community education and responsible sourcing.

Aveda produces the shampoo at a facility in Blaine, which uses 100-percent wind power in its production operation. A pioneer in environmental



2.



3.



4.



practices, Aveda funds new wind energy sources that generate enough wind energy to offset 100-percent of the electricity used by its manufacturing facility, distribution facility and corporate headquarters in Blaine, according to Bopp.

“Our mission is to care for the world we live in, from the products we make to the ways in which we give back to society,” notes Delfausse. “We strive to set an example for environmental leadership and responsibility—not just in the world of beauty, but around the world. This packaging system supports our principal goal at Aveda, minimizing our ecological footprint. A major part of accomplishing this goal is achieved by using the highest level of post consumer content.”

Compostable bakeware

A renewable, compostable rigid tray (2) makes it possible for Whole Foods to reinvent its retail baking practices and simplify supply-chain operations with substantial waste reduction.

Recognized for enhanced performance, resource and energy optimization and effective recovery, Whole Foods’ new compostable bakeware from **Sealed Air Corp.**(www.sealedair.com) together with **Biosphere Industries, LLC**



The trays can also be disposed of in the paper-recycling stream. Yet they can enjoy an indoor shelf life of many years, Sealed Air says.

Moisture is a factor in the degradation of the product, points out Charles Dunlap, Sealed Air’s director of sales and marketing.

Part of a growing family of earth-friendly, high-performance packaging, Renew-a-Pak bakeware stays cool to the touch, reducing the threat of burnt hands. It doesn’t need to be washed, which conserves water and energy used to wash baking dishes, and reduces the amount of dishwashing detergent discharged in waterways, Sealed Air says.

Most importantly, the bakeware incorporates 100-percent-renewable content. Whole Food Markets uses them for in-store-baked banana nut bread. “Biosphere Industries has been developing technology for starch-based packaging systems for more than seven years,” explains Dunlap. “We have partnered with them to offer a package that is environmentally friendly and also provides a cost savings in the process.”

Along with bread loaf pans, Whole Foods is evaluating other Renew-a-Pak bakery containers, including muffin trays and pie pans. Whole Foods’ previous bakery practices were to bake items

in disposable metal trays and transfer the baked goods to a second package for in-store sales. The secondary packaging would be disposed of by consumers as waste.

Now, the products remain the dual-ovenable, microwavable tray from point of production to the consumer level and may be used from freezer to oven to table.

In the partnership with Sealed Air, Biosphere Industries offers the equipment, tooling and mold development services to produce the container,



while Sealed Air provides its research center and customer-application testing facility as well as turnkey solutions from packaging materials to equipment and market know-how, marketing and customer service.

Biosphere joined forces with Sealed Air in 2006 as a joint venture partner to bring sustainable, biodegradable packaging to market.

The container material isn’t converted from starch into plastic; instead it’s baked, similarly to the process of making bread, waffles or ice cream cones. This clean, advanced, two-step “ice cream cone-baking” technology involves no harsh chemicals or plastics, *PD* is told. Steam is the only by-product of the minimal-waste manufacturing process. The base material is engineered to be made primarily of starches such as tapioca, potatoes and a smaller percentage of grass fiber and other raw materials harvested yearly, Biosphere Industries says.

“We have a number of customers using the containers in varying applications,” adds Dunlap.

Pitcher-shaped pouch cuts material use

Direct from Helsingborg, Sweden, comes a lightweight approach to aseptic packaging of dairy products that cuts package weight in half. Using a material structure that significantly reduces raw materials, **Ecolean Group’s** (www.ecolean.com) standup pouches (3) have a cleve, “pitcher-like” design noted by judges for enhanced performance and cleaner production.

An international company with headquarters, manufacturing and development in Sweden and manufacturing in China (for Asia and Pacific markets), Ecolean has commercial activities in 30 countries, the largest markets being China and Russia. The company develops and manufactures packaging systems for liquid foods as well as the packaging materials and filling machines associated with them.

Typically weighing 40 to 50 percent less than most conventional liquid food cartons and bottles, the Air Aseptic pouches are aseptically filled on Ecolean’s compact EL3 machine designed for low-acid food products. All process connections are isolated with steam barriers to ensure the full aseptic integrity of the product supply, as well as that of the filling machine. The low-acid food product, the filling equipment and the package form a contamination-free chain where risks are controlled or avoided, says Ecolean.

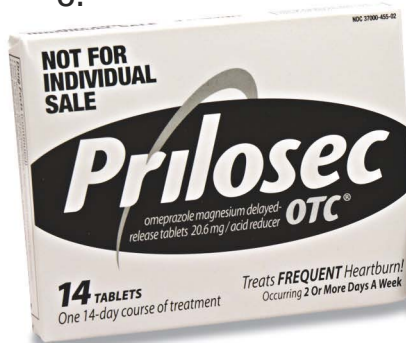
The pouch uses little raw material and saves energy during production, transport and waste handling, the company notes. Film structures are

Continued on page 32

The reason behind the resin’s development? Resource and energy optimization.

(www.biosphereindustries.com), launched the Renew-A-Pak™ baking trays. Designed for dual-ovenability, microwavability and maintaining structural rigidity in freezing temperatures and extreme heat up to 420 deg F, the trays are made of a renewable starch-based composition and withstand the same kind of punishment as conventional metal bakeware, and pans. But they begin to biodegrade outdoors in 40 days or less (depending on precipitation conditions), or 10 days in a commercial compost environment.

8.



used to make the pouch instead of carton board. This helps save resources and energy, the company says. Interestingly, calcium carbonate (chalk) is incorporated in the structure to reduce the amount of polymer needed.

The lower weight and volume mean that more packages can be shipped per truck. Once empty, the pouch is as flat as an envelope, saving space in the trash bag, and has a positive effect on the waste-handling process.

"We want to offer a modern, aseptic packaging system that is easy to operate and a package that satisfies the demands of the consumers," says Peter L. Nilsson, managing director. "We have chosen a completely new approach."

An empty pouch comprises a multilayer polymer film that's 140 microns (5.5+ mils) thick, and weighs 14 g—about half of most paperboard cartons, Nilsson reports.

Nilsson also says the package saves resources as it's being made instead of saving them when it's thrown away. The pouch also has a sturdy, air-filled handle that enhances the pitcher design and gives the pouch a stiff back that makes it easy to grasp.

Produced by Ecolean, the five-layer Calymer™ pouch structure, from the outside, is a durable PP printing layer, a mineral-filled PP layer that adds stiffness, an ethylene vinyl alcohol (EVOH) oxygen barrier layer, a carbon black layer to protect against light and a PE sealing/food-contact layer. The packaging material is folded, shaped and sealed in proprietary Ecolean machines to produce rollstock of individual, ready-to-fill pouches.

Ecolean offers the equipment and packaging together, but the Calymer material itself isn't sold separately. The filled pouch is then hermetically sealed and sterilized, and the process is monitored and traceable down to individual packages. Sterilized using what Ecolean calls a dry, nonchemical process, the pouch ensures that the food contained inside is never exposed to chemicals during manufacturing or filling. Ecolean's marketing manager Louis Hobroth tells *PD* that the sterile filling process takes only about

2 sec. "The system isn't yet offered in the U.S.," she points out.

The electron-beam (EB) sterilization process is separate from filling and is performed in-house by Ecolean. The sterilization has no effect on material properties like strength, color or odor, PD learns. The premade pouches come in sizes from 0.05 to 1 L, Hobroth says, adding that the company

requirements set by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for the use of PCR content in this particular application.

Through ConAgra Foods' partnership with APT, a proprietary, ultra-clean RPET resin was qualified for commercial use in the Healthy Choice frozen meal trays and meets FDA regulations for direct food contact. APT calls the material RePET.

Says Tavill, "The RPET in the tray reduces the amount of virgin PET required to support our business by 8 million pounds per year—the equivalent of removing 145,000,000 frozen food trays from the wastestream. Because of that, 236 million BTUs of energy can be saved per year."

Adds George Frederick, APT's vp of sales and marketing, "The proprietary formula used for the tray material provides superior frozen impact-performance for CPET dual-ovenable trays."

APT produces more than a dozen different tray configurations. It thermoforms those for ConAgra on **Davis Standard** (www.davis-standard.com) extruders and **Lyle Industries** (www.lyleindustries.com)



is developing an aseptic pouch to be compatible with high-acid products. Ultra-high-temperature (UHT) milk is the current application, but soon, the pouch could be used to pack fruit juices and other liquid food products.

New/old RPET food trays

ConAgra's new PCR PET-containing trays for frozen foods (4) include 40 percent post-consumer-recycled PET, which reduces the need for virgin PET and supports the frozen food tray market for post-consumer-recycled material.

In development a bit more than one year, the trays are so far being used for about 100 SKUs across ConAgra's frozen-meal brands, including Healthy Choice Select Entrées, Complete Meals and All Natural Entrées as well as dinners in the Marie Callender's brand, Kid Cuisine and select Banquet entrées.

The trays were developed and thermoformed in various thicknesses (depending on the specific tray-pack) by **Associated Packaging Technologies** (APT [www.aptechnologies.com]). Exhibiting



10.

systems, which utilize conventional and in-line thermoforming as well as proprietary rotary thermoforming technology, Frederick tells *PD*.

The draw depth of each tray is 1 to 2 in., on average, Frederick adds, and the thickness is 10 to 15 mils.

For ConAgra Foods, the RPET-containing tray also creates an additional value-added stream for RPET, strengthening the recycling infrastructure. The move to the RPET trays reduced greenhouse gas production by 15,200 tons of carbon dioxide equivalents per year, the same as taking 2,500 cars off the road for a year, Tavill reports.

The reason behind the resin's development? "Resource and energy optimization," says

Tavill. "These were the primary drivers for the project. There isn't currently a collection stream for CPET, which also has poor end-of-life options, so it's not traditionally compatible with the PET recycling stream. We partnered with APT to identify opportunities to look at new technologies on the raw-material side."

APT reached out to some of its suppliers to locate a highly cleaned RPET. "First, we did some research and development work in conjunction

We had to adjust our manufacturing processes, since the material processes differently than virgin PET resin.

advancements in materials technology, they optimize resources and energy, offer clean production and responsible sourcing, say judges.

The PCR content is obtained from recycled PET beverage bottles. The trays are a first in dual-ovenable food packaging, says ConAgra. Typically, this kind of tray is made using virgin CPET because of cleanliness requirements, points out Gail Tavill, vp of sustainable development research, quality and innovation. ConAgra met

with our RePET supplier to get FDA clearance for microwave and ovenable direct-food contact use in the trays," recalls Frederick. "Then we had to adjust our manufacturing processes, since the material processes differently than our standard virgin PET resin."

Lastly, for new tray designs for ConAgra as well as any re-tooling requirements, we factored some additional design changes that facilitate the use of RePET in our process."

Another task involved removing the finished trays from the thermoformed molds. Says Tim Joseph at APT, initially, this could have limited the amount of RePET used. High levels of RePET wouldn't provide the trays with the right release properties. Breakage levels during manufacturing, shipping and usage performed at parity to virgin material. The tray also had to machine well, seal effectively with lidstock and perform according to plan in a blast or plate freezer, as well as tackle shipping rigors and distribution and heat effectively both in a microwave oven and a conventional one.

Tavill says ConAgra is considering use of the material for other products where it would be appropriate for the end use and can assure food safety and performance, and APT has received a great deal of interest from other food manufacturers. ConAgra and APT both received awards for the package.

Flexible film 'shipper'

Procter & Gamble of both Belgium and Turkey were given high marks for resource and energy optimization, cost-effective economics and enhanced performance for what they call their Invisible Case Polyouters (5). Focused on creating and selling products that reduce their environmental footprint, the companies teamed to develop clear film bags that replace corrugated shipping cases. The bags, which are used to ship pallet loads (960 kg) of Ariel granular laundry detergent form/fill/seal sacks in 1.5- to 6-kg sizes, not only cut 80 percent of the case weight but also 20 percent of their volume.

Says senior engineer Ian Bea, "For every point on a product's life cycle, there is a sustainability component right alongside superior performance, quality and value. The new bags retain the speed of the packaging lines but eliminate the need for manual handling at the end of the lines."

Measuring 15.3x11.4 mm, the clear film bags seal tightly, Bea reports. Before, P&G could pack eight bags of the Ariel detergent into a corrugated shipper, but the shippers were made of a lot of corrugated. The large, clear 3.3-mil, monolayer PE film Polyouters are recyclable, act as a source reduction and can be opened without tools.

"The Ariel packages now look better on shelves because the new packaging process compresses the

loads, keeping the bags wrinkle-free in shipment," adds Bea.

He also says the new packaging required P&G to install proprietary bagging machines at the end of existing production lines.

The bags are being applied across Central Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa, with

three more plants to go onstream early next year. The transparent film shows the brands and the sizes and is easy to handle. "There's an easy-open feature so the bag eliminates the need for a knife to open a shipping case," Bea explains. The bags are also lighter in weight, so are easy to handle by distributors and retailers that can now store more product.

Shelf-ready shipper saves on material

Another convenient shipping container from P&G won an award for a new, shelf-ready version it adopted for Alldays feminine liners marketed by its German counterpart (6). The new two-piece shipping case now comprises a tray-and-hood format that cuts packaging material usage by 28 percent and enhances retail appeal and storage efficiency. Both the German and U.S.



portions of P&G are involved in this entry.

P&G knows that retailers want to reduce the amount of packaging at the store level, so it redesigned the product to fit into smaller packages. The tray-and-hood case concept improves on store labor and consumer appeal on retail shelves because it's sleek, offers product visibility and actually improves store performance. It also uses less printing ink for an 80-percent printing savings. The judges cited it for enhanced performance, cost-effective economics and resource and energy optimization.

P&G's R&D associate director Mike Ferrari says the proprietary case saves 1,500 tons of corrugated, 375 truck trips and \$1.8 million a year in material costs. The case also speeds up the production line by 33 percent, while shaving 50 percent of restocking time for P&G's customers.

"It creates a more elegant way to ship the shelf-ready packages to market," he says. Previously, four Alldays cases were packed in a printed corrugated case with a perforation on the bottom edge that allowed store employees to rip off the top and keep the remaining "base tray" for handling and in-store display of the product.

The new tray and a streamlined, detachable hood protect the product, but the hood can be more quickly removed because one end is completely open, exposing the product inside, and the outer container needs no printing.

"The perforations often are the cause of

improper tears, which creates a low quality look," Ferrari says. "There are no more perforations and no more knives are needed. When the hood is removed, a clean edge remains. This reduces the burden on stocking personnel. The perforations are replaced with a glue bond between the hood and tray that is more reliably broken by hand."

For every point on a product's life cycle, there is a sustainability component right alongside performance.

Now, only the tray portion of the shipper is printed and no new burdens are created with its execution. The case was launched commercially in Western Europe beginning in January 2009.

Pasta sauce pouch with a twist

Replacing glass jars with shelf-stable, standup pouches that slice 70 percent in structural material is no easy task, but Unilever's standup pouches for Bertolli® and Ragu® sauces (7) do that and more. Produced by Amcor Flexibles, (www.amcor.com), the pouches are microwavable so the sauce can be heated inside quickly and with little mess. And the pouches rival the shelf life of glass jars, according to Humberto Garcia, Unilever's packaging manager for environmental sustainability.



But the transport benefits are substantial: The pouch represents a source reduction of 95 percent for the primary package, on a per-ounce basis and both primary and secondary display-tray packaging represents a 70-percent drop versus with comparably sized glass packaging, says

Unilever. One truckload of unfilled pouches equals 25 truckloads of empty glass jars.

Amcor produces the pouchstock of a 104-micron (4.09-mil), seven-color reverse-printed barrier lamination comprising PET, nylon and PP layers. The material achieves key shelf-stability hurdles for the oxygen-sensitive sauces. Launched in January 2008 for six sauce varieties, the pouch is the first nationally marketed for retail pasta sauces in the U.S., Unilever reports.

Impactful graphics replicate the jar labels and call out product benefits in terms of freshness and the quality of ingredients. The 13.5-oz package also facilitates shipping and warehouse handling, causing product damage. For the packaging launch, the pouches sped up the shelf-stocking process and reduced labor for retailers, Garcia says.

Unilever's pasta-sauce processing technology is considered proprietary so that it can maintain distinctly high-quality product attributes, says Mike Huges, senior manager, packaging.

The sauces are contract-packaged by an unnamed source on an intermittent motion **Toyo** Continued on page 34

Jidoki (www.tyj.co.jp) system.

The nonfoil barrier material was a top choice for microwave heating, Garcia continues.



Less acid; far less packaging

The Prilosec OTC tablet/capsule blister-pack of antacids from Procter & Gamble and **Alcan Packaging** (www.alcanpackaging.com) (8) was overhauled in an industry-standard approach, according to Cincinnati-based P&G. Noted for its economics and enhanced performance, the new structure doubles the number of pills available on a blister-card so that consumers can have an entire course of treatment on a single card. This cuts packaging waste. Before, Prilosec was in a blister-card that held seven tablets with a peel-and-push, child-resistant access device. But the product must be taken for 14 days, so two cards were required.

The Prilosec team cut packaging material use in half with the redesigned and cartoned package of blister "sheets." One sheet holds twice as many tablets as before, and makes the tablets easier to access. Not only does the package offer an entire course of treatment on a single blister-card, it saves a whopping 800,000 lb of packaging material/year. Also, it cuts carbon dioxide emissions during production in half.

The new package began distribution nationally last year. Due to tablet sensitivity, it's made using a foil/foil construction that provides certain required barriers. Conventional cold-formable foil blister cavities often result in what looks

like oversized cavities. P&G's John Eadicicco, of package development for the pharma and digestive wellness business, explains that this is because foil doesn't form the same way as thermoformable materials do, which basically flow during forming. The redesigned package uses foil formed in a series of draft angles that allow it to create a cavity shape without sharp angles that could cause stress points and create cracks

carton filled with bodycare essentials and cushioned with recycled-content rafia. Made by **UFP Technologies** (www.ufpt.com) with zero waste, glue or dyes, the hinged clamshell is made of 100-percent post-consumer newsprint and is decorated on the outside only with a large paperboard band label that supports this product line's organic branding yet with sleek, sophisticated shelf appeal.

The environmental attributes of the clamshell are within. Seeds are actually embedded into the container.

or holes. This change created a smaller cavity length and width, and testing showed the new design to still be in a safe forming range, he says. The package also has a new easy-open, push-through feature replacing the former peel-and-push device. The former design required Prilosec users to separate each cavity to gain access to unsealed areas as part of the opening instructions. The lidding material meets the company's safety requirements for child-resistance.

Spruced-up gift-pack that keeps on growing

Revised holiday gift packaging from ecocentric bodycare maker, Pangea Organics (9), Boulder, CO, has emerged as a renewable, biodegradable recycled-content molded fiberboard clamshell

A significant sustainability achievement in the gift-pack category, this redesign, judges said, fits with the brand's organic positioning and attractiveness while substantially reducing packaging waste. The clamshell is renewable, recyclable and biodegradable. Made of **Monadnock's** (www.mpm.com) Astrolite PC 100 paper, a 100-percent-recycled fiber, the overband is printed with vegetable-based inks, Pangea says.

The important environmental attributes of the hinged clamshell are within. Seeds are actually embedded into the container so that it can be "planted" after use. After the label is removed and the container is flattened, it can be soaked in water for 24 hr and planted about 1/8 in. into the ground. Pangea says in about two weeks, the seeds begin to germinate into the beginnings of a spruce tree.

Priced at \$35, the Harmony gift set includes a 3.75-oz of bar soap, a 8.5-oz HDPE bottle of shower gel, a sample-size hand and body lotion in a 0.1-oz paperboard laminate "tube." Launched in September 2008, the clamshell features a recycled-content, carbon-neutral paper overband that's color-coded to coordinate with the selection of products inside the package.



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Produced and offset-printed by **Johnson Printing (www.jpcolorado.com)** using soy-based inks, the copy on two sides of the band details the company's, handcrafted, organic and cruelty-free manufacturing principles, and facts about the package. A supporter of the Forestry Stewardship Council, Pangea urges buyers to skip the wrapping paper, save a tree and give the gift of less waste.

"We believe the fringe predicts the future; therefore, we always try to stay on the fringe of design," says Joshua Onvsko, founder and CEO of Pangea Organics.

"The goal is to create products with little to no environmental impact," Onvsko says. "If everyone would plant their container this year, we'll have collectively planted 122,000 trees. That's equivalent to saving 30 million miles of driving in one year."

Frugal F-style jug



A redesigned 20-L jug with built-in handles on two sides and a tamper-evident, mechanical closure (10) from **A & C Packers Pty Ltd. (www.aandcpackers.com.au)** of Australia is 30-

This is where savings can be made. Our customers estimate a five-percent freight savings, overall." The savings apply to warehousing throughout the supply chain," Stone adds.

Most drums used in Australia are made of HDPE, Stone tells *PD*. The material accommodates water-based products well, but may not be compatible with agricultural products such as fungicides and pesticides that are solvent-based. In these circumstances, containers might have to be fluorinated and freighted to the only fluorinator in Australia, which is located in Sydney. The extra fluorination process is very expensive, Stone adds.

To bypass the additional step, A&C Packers developed a proprietary six-layer container based on HDPE and polyamide (DuPont's Sellar), that needs no fluorination. Stone will only say the drums are extrusion/blow-molded on equipment that can produce up to 2,000 drums per day.

The construction not only saves additional freight costs to Sydney and fluorination charges, but also reduces the cost of the container by around 12 percent.

The 63-mm, no-glug cap from **Dorony Pty Ltd. (03 9427 1505)** is a tamper-evident, wedge-seal design that works by positioning the neck and changing the pouring direction so that no bubbles become trapped inside the jug. Stone says the bottle neck controls the pour from start to finish, without glugging, in about one-third the time it takes to empty a conventional drum. "Market acceptance has been exceptionally high of the new drum," he concludes. "One customer purchased our total production capacity for the first year and more than 120,000 of the drums have been sold in the last twelve months."

The first barrier layer versions of these containers were produced in October 2008. Stone says that the container has received UN certification for dangerous

goods and that six large chemical companies are currently conducting stability trials on the revised 20-L jug.

We believe the fringe predicts the future; therefore, we always try to stay on the fringe of [package] design.

barrier structure replaces steel drums in common solvent applications and is reusable, with a five-year life, compared to the previous one-time usage life. The new design enables better stacking and cube efficiency—a 30-percent improvement.

An easy-pour "glug-free" neck design also helps avoid spills or splashing when pouring. Recognized for effective recovery and enhanced performance, the opaque white container can be recycled and made into items such as drain pipes.

Mark Stone, CEO at A&C Packers, says that most 20-liter drums used in Australia are generic in shape and the dimensions only permit 16 drums per layer on a standard-sized pallet (in Australia, that's 45.6x45.6 in.). Most often, full containers are shipped two-layers-high so only 640 liters of product was able to be put on a pallet.

"The new drum shape allows you to pack twenty drums per layer, two high, to ship 800 liters in the same space," Stone says. "Freight from the warehouse to the distribution center and then to the customer is at pallet freight rates.

More information is available:

DuPont Packaging and Industrial Polymers, 302/992-4204. www.packaging.dupont.com.
A&C Packers Pty Ltd., 61 732652 700. www.aandcpackers.com.au.
Alcan Packaging Pharma Center, 502/647-2300. www.alcanpackaging.com.
Amcor Flexibles, 301/745-5000. www.amcor.com,
Associated Packaging Technologies 484/785-1120. www.aptechnologies.com.
Biosphere Industries, LLC, 805/566-6563. www.biosphereindustries.com.
Ecolean Group, 46 52 450 00. www.ecolean.com.
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Artfully 'green' package for artisan lettuce

Tanimura & Antle's custom, scalloped clamshells for artisan lettuce not only protect the lettuce heads in separate compartments for maximum freshness and visual appeal but help **PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT**, saving 12 percent in packaging material.

Lauren R. Hartman, Senior Editor

Engineered to protect each product as well as the environment, new packaging adopted by Tanimura & Antle Fresh Foods Inc. is almost as "green" as the company's products themselves. Deep in the lush Salinas Valley of Salinas, CA, the produce giant maintains that its living lettuce is "so beautiful, that it comes with a bodyguard," according to its ad slogans. That strong-arm is a new, custom-designed scalloped clamshell for Artisan Lettuce in four- and six-count quantities, which promotes freshness and a longer shelf life.

Thermoformed by a proprietary source (the company declines to specify packaging materials or suppliers), the clear, custom clamshells wear transparent pressure-sensitive film labels printed with graphics and product copy in eye-catching leaf colors.

"With our new, top-of-the-line scalloped clamshell packaging, we're able to maintain the freshness and integrity of our product and provide our customers with not only convenience, but also an easy way to help preserve the earth's limited resources," reports CEO Rick Antle. "The introduction of this packaging goes hand in hand with our core business values of bringing only the highest standards of quality to the market."



Even more importantly, the company says the curvy packaging also uses 12-percent less material than a typical square clamshell, which adds another element to Tanimura & Antle's environmentally responsible goals, as the company is also striving to improve its energy and water usage. "We are dedicated to reducing energy waste and improving

With our new packaging, we're able to help preserve the earth's limited resources.

equipment performance," declares a message on its website. "To that end, we involve our employees in our energy use decisions."

A recent high-efficiency lighting upgrade in the company's cooler in Salinas aims to reduce energy consumption comparable to planting 75 acres of trees. Tanimura & Antle says it is also looking to upgrade the efficiencies of its corporate headquarters facility.

The grower farms more than 40,000 acres of fertile farmland and ships its line of produce throughout North America, Europe and Asia. Versatile and available year-round, the lettuce varieties include: Red and Green Petite Gem; Red

and Green Petite Oak; and Red and Green Petite Tango. Grown on Tanimura & Antle farms in Salinas from approximately mid-April through mid-October, the artisan lettuce is grown in Yuma, AZ, from mid-October through mid-April.

The lettuces come in a range of quantities, including two- and four-count packages for retail sales, six-count packages for clubstores and 8-lb cartons for foodservice distribution.

Long-life lettuce

Most beneficial to consumers, when properly stored, the clear containers contribute to the lettuces' refrigerated shelf life of more than two weeks. The clamshells can be merchandised either horizontally or vertically while protecting the delicate, buttery lettuce leaves.

The whole heads of lettuce can be left in the clear containers, intact until they're ready for use, which Tanimura & Antle believes provides a compelling change from packaged salads and blends.

Unlike salad packs in bags, the individual heads of lettuce contained in each clamshell allow consumers to customize a blend, the company explains. Artisan Lettuce is easy to prepare—make one to two cuts, rinse, crisp and serve. The petite size and shape of each Artisan Lettuce head allows for quick and easy preparation, as well as flexibility in size and cuts.



sustainability



Pick up any national newspaper or surf your favorite website and you're bound to find an article about sustainability, focused on the "greening" of something—frequently packaging. And as Kermit the Frog used to say, "It's not easy being green."

But by focusing the sustainability discourse on environmental impacts, have we forgotten that it's not a single bottom-line paradigm? Sustainability incorporates economic prosperity, social equity and environmental stewardship, yet somewhere

The many excellent examples of responsible material sourcing, lightweighting, closing the loop and clean production practices increasing in packaging design and production have as much positive social as environmental impact. Society benefits any time a major corporation positively transforms some aspect of their packaging that reduces energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, toxicant use and emissions and/or landfill waste. But, there's considerably more to the social parameters of sustainability than

and complex, third-party audit programs to monitor offshore product-manufacturing operations, but are they extending those same risk-management measures to packaging vendors and subcontractors? As the focus on "greening" turns to "greenwashing," it seems time for packaging professionals to think more about fair labor practices. As one SPC member put it, companies need to consider cost-cutting measures in response to economic uncertainty, and take care not to lose sight of how important supply-chain partner selection and oversight is. The SPC is looking at social metrics for sustainable packaging. Resources include Social Accountability Intl, (www.sa-intl.org), the Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (www.sedex.org.uk) and the Global Social Compliance Program (www.ciesnet.com/2-wwedo/2.2-programmes/2.2.gscp.background.asp), the latter an initiative of the European Union-based retailer association, Comité International d'Entreprises à Succursales.

It's not just about being 'green'

along the way, companies have started to talk about sustainability efforts and corporate social responsibility as two distinct efforts.

How do we bring social issues back into the sustainability conversation?

Since its launch, the Sustainable Packaging Coalition has placed the social aspects of sustainable packaging systems on its agenda, even though a majority of projects and resources have focused on the environmental aspects. Social issues are included in the SPC definition of sustainable packaging, which offers, as one of eight key criteria, that sustainable packaging "is beneficial, safe and healthy for individuals and communities throughout its life cycle."

secondary benefits of environmental improvement.

It's not easy being socially responsible. A frequently little-considered factor of sustainable packaging is worker impact. In the International Labor Organization's photo archive, one can view images of children working in an Indian facility that packages products for an internationally recognized brand. And at the SPC's 2008 spring meeting, two packaging logistics management firms discussed hidden risks in the global supply chain. Most major brands have conscientiously developed supplier codes of conduct

Katherine O'Dea is a senior fellow for the Sustainable Packaging Coalition, a project of GreenBlue (www.greenblue.org). For more information, email spcinfo@greenblue.org.



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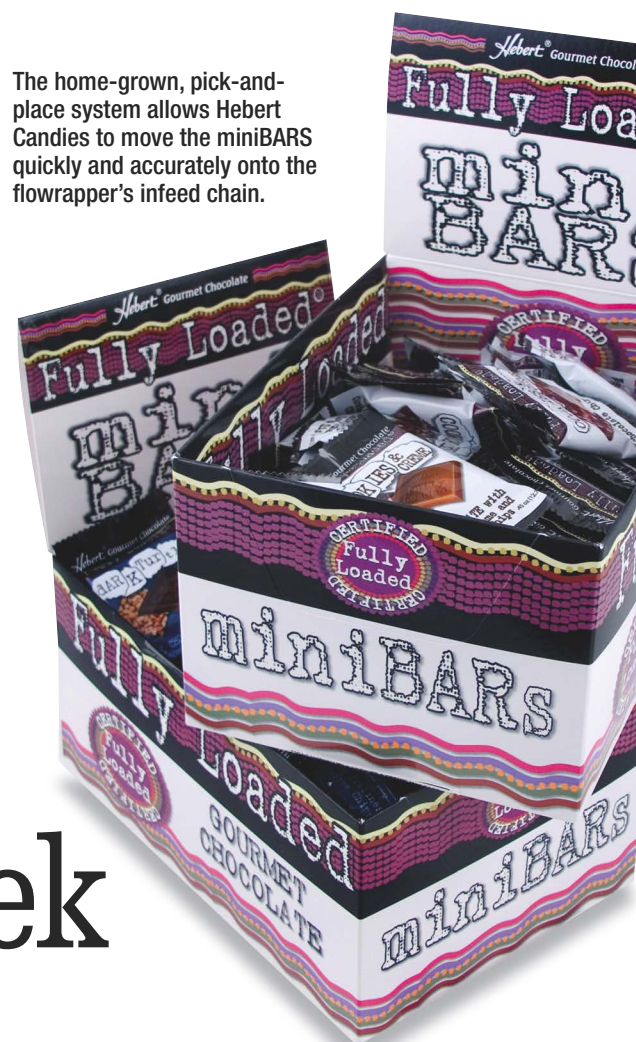


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The home-grown, pick-and-place system allows Hebert Candies to move the miniBARS quickly and accurately onto the flowrapper's infeed chain.



The 11-week pickup

Rejecting costly third-party solutions, Hebert Candies picks up productivity with a home-grown, low-cost **PICK-AND-PLACE** system that reached ROI in 11 weeks.

Linda Casey, Associate Editor

Eleven just might be a lucky number for Hebert Confections LLC, Shrewsbury, MA. It was precisely \$11 that purchased the copper kettle, knife, thermometer, table, marble slab and stove that company founder Frederick Hebert used to start the company in 1917. Eleven also is the number of weeks in which Hebert Confections reached full ROI (return-on-investment) on a pick-and-place project for the flow-wrapping line that wraps, codes and counts Hebert Gourmet Chocolate Fully Loaded miniBARS.

Readying for the surge

Hebert's Fully Loaded miniBARS are part of a line of inclusion candies. Inclusions, which are the small

items that are added to a chocolate bar such as nuts, toffee chips or cookie pieces, are usually incorporated throughout a bar. For its Fully Loaded candy line, Hebert chose to place the inclusions on the exterior of the bar, which provides two tactile stimuli during consumption. The crunchy inclusions provide the first tactile experience, while the creamy chocolate offers the final tactile experience.

Prior to the pick-and-place project, Hebert manufactured and packaged these miniBARS at a rate of 120/min. This sufficed for demand after the initial offering and during the business' slow period from May to August.

An online survey conducted by the confectioner found that its Fully Loaded chocolates are a favorite among its customers, and Hebert expected heightened demand for the miniBARS when its overall business surged in the fall.

While the confectioner could manufacture the 400 miniBARS/min, Hebert's production was severely bottlenecked at the miniBARS packaging line, which had a top speed of 140 chocolates/min.

At first you don't succeed

Dan Brackett and Dennis Gulliver of the Hebert production team, researched

a wide range of options to increase the packaging throughput, including buying another flow wrapper. "But another machine would cost, all said and done, about \$100,000," Brackett recalls.

Necessity fosters innovation

If buying a new machine was too expensive, the pair had to find a way to get more throughput from one flow wrapper. They noted that manually placing the miniBARS on the wrapper infeed chain was holding the packaging line productivity back. The pair met with outside vendors to learn about how an off-the-shelf solution would eliminate the need for operators to manually place each chocolate square one-at-a-time between the spacing lugs on the wrapper infeed chain. The quotes—at \$300,000 to \$400,000—were even higher than buying another flow wrapper.

"Then, we brought in eight people—different integrators, different machine builders," says Brackett. "Each person brought in a different concept of how he or she could increase production. Some suggested belts carrying the product, and others presented solutions using small robots that moved the product." Of this group of eight, only two returned with quotes and the lowest quote was \$120,000.

Gibson Eng. Co. Inc. (www.ibsonengineering.com) took a different approach. Gibson senior



A flow-through design on the vacuum generator, left, prevents the clogging problems associated with competing vacuum generators that use filtration.

automation engineer Sean Merrick presented equipment, including a high-speed picker from **Festo AG** (www.festo.com), from which Hebert could custom engineer its own pick-and-place system. The picker fulfilled two of the production team's core criteria: It has a high operating speed; and it is easy to operate and setup. To help obtain buy-in for the project, Gibson Engineering lent a demo unit to Brackett and Gulliver for a week.

Demonstration sells execs

They used the unit to demonstrate to upper management how a custom pick-and-place system would work. "We [packaging engineers] understand machines and processes," Brackett explains. Sometimes when we talk machines, financial people or business people don't understand us."

After obtaining buy-in from upper management, the Hebert production team took only two weeks to design a pick-and-place system and select components. Gulliver wrote a new PLC program, and he and Brackett spent their Labor Day weekend installing the system.

"By Monday, it was running," Brackett recalls. "Like any startup, it was running kind of rough. But by day two, we were up to full rate. And by day three, we were exceeding rate."

The Hebert production team did not rest on the laurels of this success though. "We concluded that we could increase output even more if we could release the squares faster," says Gulliver. "Waiting for them to drop by gravity wasn't fast enough."

The original design used five venturi vacuum generators each delivering vacuum to 1-in.-dia. silicone-bellows suction cups. Unfortunately, these generators would clog frequently with loose chocolate bits and inclusion pieces. The cups would lose their grip and then drop the miniBAR. Because of this, operators frequently slowed down or turned off the system to remove misplaced chocolates.

After trying four different types of vacuum generators, Brackett contacted **Vaccon Co. Inc.** (www.vaccon.com). Brian Ferri, president of



Operators no longer have to place miniBARS one-at-a-time between the spacing lugs on the wrapper infeed chain. The new pick-and-place system is faster and less labor-intensive.

Vaccon, visited the packaging operation and knew immediately that a Fastbreak vacuum pump would solve the clogging problem.

"Within a week, he [Ferri] was back with a five-station pump assembly, designed to mount onto our machine using T-nuts," Brackett recalls. "He had the entire system, including hardware and the proper metric fittings, ready to go. Within 20 minutes, he and the production supervisor swapped out the existing pumps on one head and had the machine running."

Putting dollars to productivity gains

Using a soft puff of air, the Fastbreak's adjustable automatic blow-off feature allows rapid release of the miniBARS. "With all of the pumps now the Fastbreak type, we increased production to 350 pieces per minute," Gulliver remarks. "Having the right vacuum source increased production, saved us a lot of money and our operators have a quieter working environment."

Brackett estimates the cost savings to be about \$200,000 compared to third-party-provided solutions. And these are not one-time savings. "Management doesn't get their payback once,"

Brackett remarks. "They get it again and again."

Explaining to upper management how the system would generate savings to pay for itself repeatedly, Brackett states, "Every eleven weeks after [reaching ROI], I'll give you \$30,000. As long as we run this product, you're going to get that."



More information is available:

Vaccon Co. Inc., 800/848-8788. www.vaccon.com.

Gibson Eng. Co. Inc., 781/769-3600. www.gibsonengineering.com.

Festo Corp., 800/993-3786. www.festo.com.

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Correcting package weights puts giveaway on ice

SPC system at Oregon Freeze Dry assures that package weights are on the mark and eliminating underfills as well as overfills and gratuitous product giveaway.

Meeting minimum weight and net contents requirements without producing significant amounts of waste is a delicate balance for manufacturers and their packaging operations. The cost of overfills and gratuitous product giveaway add up quickly. At the same time, businesses must always be mindful of legal requirements and fair trade regulations that protect consumers against negligent underfills.

At Oregon Freeze Dry (OFD), the world's largest custom processor of freeze-dried products, statistical process control (SPC) is key to maintaining consistent weights within its packaging operation and achieving higher profitability.

With a menu of more than 500 items, the Food Div. at OFD has evolved into a distinctly segmented business. In addition to providing private-label manufacturing, the company features a fullline of ingredients used by some of America's largest food companies. It's also a major supplier of field rations to the U.S. military and markets its own line of

backpacking foods under the Mountain House® brand. The company has more than 20 million kg of drying capacity at its three facilities, representing about 70 percent of North America's total freeze-drying capacity.

The packaging department consists of two horizontal form/fill/seal lines, a vertical f/f/s line, two vibratory gravimetric feeder systems and a cup line. OFD packaging options include film bags, foil pouches, cans, paper and barrier cups, either in bulk or single-serving sizes.

Transforming waste into savings

Weight compliance affects OFD on a multitude of fronts; the most obvious of which centers around material waste. Every fraction of product saved is money in the bank. However, underfills can be just as wasteful, when the cost of reworking the product, refilling operations, time and labor are factored in. Improper verification of net weight can also take its toll on customer satisfaction and repeat business.

Because the instructions for rehydrating the freeze-dried product is

OFD has standardized on the Synergy 2000™ SPC application from **Zontec Inc.** (www.zontec-spc.com). A real-time system, the software handles data collection, process monitoring and corrective action on the food-packaging lines and in the quality-assurance lab to maintain weight records for incoming raw materials from suppliers. The software is also used for analysis and reporting by the SPC administrator and packaging engineers.

Once the product is freeze-dried, it moves to the packaging lines, where feeder buckets and weighcells fill the amount of product to correspond with the label weight on the package. Packaging operators take samples off the line for their SPC weight checks at predetermined intervals. Typically this is every hour, but sometimes it is more often, depending on specific product requirements.

The software contains a built-in connectivity interface with Trooper and Explorer scales from **Ohaus Corp.** (www.ohaus.com) and only requires that the operators press the "Print" key to send the calculated net weight into the system. Data is

Oregon Freeze Dry has configured the SPC software to display a data spreadsheet and control-chart view of weights coming into the system.



It's a very proactive system because it helps identify problems on the spot. If out-of-control conditions occur, the operator can immediately adjust the machine to bring the weight back within acceptable limits.

based on net contents, if the customer adds too much or too little water, then product quality, nutritional value, texture and/or flavor may be compromised.

To address these critical weight and filling issues,

automatically saved when entered to guard against accidental data loss.

Real-time process feedback

Tim Stutzman, OFD's manufacturing systems analyst, has configured the Synergy 2000 program so that the operators monitor the process using a combination spreadsheet display, along with the corresponding control chart for net weights. "It's a very proactive system," says Stutzman, "because it



helps identify problems on the spot." Data points on the control chart are color-coded in green, yellow or red to indicate whether the samples are within control limits, trending away from the target weight or out of control. "If out-of-control conditions occur, the operator can immediately adjust the machine to bring the weight back within acceptable limits," he explains.

"It's an extremely useful function, and it has saved us a lot of money preventing potential rework. As you can imagine, rework can become a major expense, since it involves doing your work twice."

Not only is the software having a financial impact on the business, OFD has also observed a higher level of ownership for the work performed by operators and greater pride in their output. "This tool has instilled in them a better sense of control. They see the big picture of the process, are able to hone in on a cause when things go wrong, and assume direct responsibility for taking the proper corrective action," Stutzman says

The overall success of the SPC implementation hinges on the rigorous training program all operators participate in. First, there are three sessions on SPC concepts for a total of four hours in the classroom. They then receive an additional hour of training on Synergy 2000.

According to Stutzman, "What's so fascinating is seeing them make an instant connection between the SPC basics and the software. They know immediately what the software is telling them. It's a very user-friendly piece of technology. Within minutes, they feel comfortable using it."



Random samples of Mountain House® lasagna are removed from the conveyor, where statistical process control (SPC) is performed (left). The Windows®-based SPC station gives packaging operators feedback so that adjustments can be made to the filling operation.

Data flexibility

On the analytical and reporting side of the process, OFD can quickly query the data and view the results in spreadsheet, chart, customizable report or e-mailable formats. The flexibility in working with the data comes in handy during on-site customer audits, when lot traceability needs to be conducted or for continuous-improvement efforts.

For example, packaging engineers study the historical data using histograms and work with capability studies to determine if specification limits can be tightened. If so, they adjust the process targets, refining the process over time.

Software helps customers

The software also helps OFD customers with their commercialization process by rolling out new products faster, with minimal packaging issues. "When these opportunities present themselves," Stutzman says, "engineers perform tests on the

packaging lines, import the data into Synergy 2000, generate a selection of charts and analyze the results. The charts are an excellent means of communicating our process capability to the customer."

OFD's partnership with software developer, Zontec, is proving to be a worthwhile investment. "Of all the SPC systems available, Zontec

best fits our application" concludes a pleased Stutzman. "We know our weights are consistent. We know

More information is available:

Zontec, Inc., 513/648-9695.

www.zontec-spc.com.

Ohaus Corp., 973/377-9000.

www.ohaus.com.

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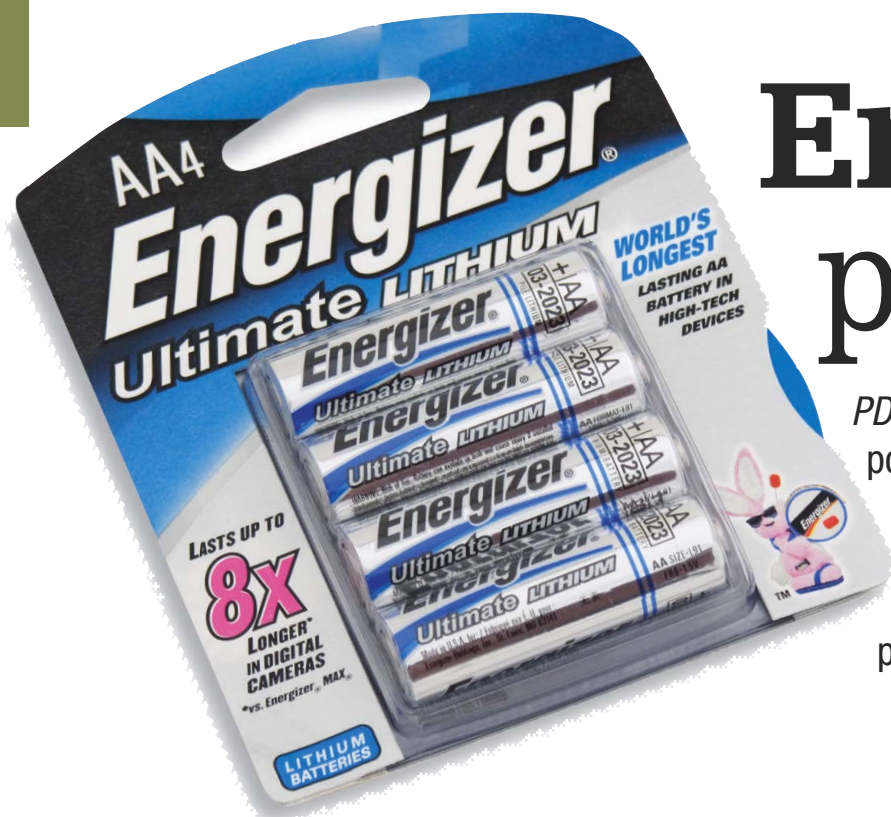
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Rebecca Oesterle, manager of global packaging development at Energizer Holdings, has worked there for more than 26 years. A graduate of Georgia Tech, Oesterle began as an industrial engineer with the company and in 2000, was appointed supply chain manager, focused on improving manufacturing operations and reducing production costs for larger retail clients including CVS, Walgreens and Target. In her current position, she leads a group of 25 engineers and designers in developing new

packaging while acting as a liaison between marketing, sales and operations divisions. Oesterle is also a member of the Packaging Management Council (PMC), a forum of the **Packaging Machinery Mfrs. Institute (PMMI)** [www.packexpo.com] for senior packaging managers from consumer and industrial goods manufacturing companies. *Packaging Digest* recently spoke with Oesterle to learn more about how CPGs approach packaging and the trends affecting the industry today.



Energizing packaging

PD looks at how packaging powers sales at Energizer and gains **PERSPECTIVE ON INDUSTRY TRENDS** with Rebecca Oesterle, head of Energizer Holdings' packaging development.



How important is packaging to Energizer?

Packaging is critical to Energizer, and we invest a great deal of effort to ensure it's functional for consumers. While packaging's primary purpose is to protect a product, it's also an important method to attract consumers. And in many ways, it works as a silent salesman, helping provide consumers with all the information they need about the product and how to use it.

How does Energizer approach the package-development process?

We begin by asking ourselves what would consumers desire in this product and where will the product be used.

From there, we establish brainstorming sessions. Depending on the product we are launching or redesigning, we will bring together internal design and engineering teams to begin mapping out what a product package may look like and what functionality it may entail. In certain cases, we also leverage the expertise of our suppliers or design agencies for input on specific package designs.

The result of these sessions is the ability to move forward with manufacturing a product package that matches market requirements.

What packaging trends do you see developing in

your company's marketplace?

With the increased emphasis on sustainability, package design and manufacturing processes are going to need to keep pace. One of the first areas that will experience change is packaging material. With consumers concerned about excess packaging such as clamshells or materials such as PVC, companies will begin to shift to more eco-friendly products and thinner packages.

From a manufacturing perspective, companies are going to have to learn how to be lean. At Energizer, for example, we aim to blend automation and streamline our processes to ensure we are running efficiently without much waste. By doing this, we are able to boost our productivity while remaining profitable.

How important is innovation to your company's packaging? Where do you seek innovation?

Innovation drives success in any company and it is vital to Energizer's business. We strive to create packaging that reflects the product inside and what it does. As machinery and material technologies advance, we are able to do this more accurately. Our internal team of designers and engineers plays a pivotal role here. Based on their knowledge and expertise, we can develop a product and a package

that more closely fits what the consumer wants.

Consumer desires are a strong catalyst for packaging innovation. What are they looking for from packaging? How are you measuring consumer wants and needs?

Consumers want to readily identify with a product, and their point of reference is the packaging. They want to know two essential things: what it is and what it does. To satisfy their needs, we rely on innovative package design, messaging and graphics to communicate product features. Equipped with information such as battery grades and iconic images to visually explain what our products can be used for, consumers can make intelligent and informed decisions.

To better understand today's consumers, we rely on industry research, surveys and focus groups. Based on the results and the customer feedback we receive, we are able to better address the issues affecting them.

Do you think the sustainability issue has been well defined? Where are the biggest strides being made? What are the biggest hurdles that still need to be overcome?

There's still a lot of work to be done both in the definition and general edification regarding

sustainability. The industry has witnessed high levels of greenwashing and inaccurate claims about what “going green” means. The result is massive amounts of confusion around what sustainability is and the benefits it offers.

The lack of education, stringent guidelines or a set of standards means sustainability is open to interpretation. To help mitigate the flow of misinformation, there’s a need for a governing body capable of setting a proper definition and approved guidelines by which the industry would follow.

Some of the biggest strides being made are the packaging materials emerging. Advancements in biopolymers and longer lasting materials are aiding manufacturers in providing more eco-conscious packaging with better, and less, material.

Automation is another growing trend. What do you think the drivers are behind this growth? What are end users such as Energizer looking for from automation?

The key to the growth in automation is the need for companies to become more efficient. For Energizer and most CPGs, automation is also about reducing costs and running lean.

An example we have benefited from are new technologies offering us the liberty to “plug and play.” We flip a switch and the equipment does what it needs to do without downtime or bottlenecking issues. With automated processes in place, we are able to track our productivity and see where we can improve.

What new or emerging technologies impacting packaging do you think will be important in the next few years?

Many of the emerging technologies are going to be linked to the progress of sustainability. I anticipate much of the advancements coming in the form of new and innovative packaging materials. We are only beginning to scratch the surface, and as we better understand the potential of reusable and recyclable materials, we’ll see many manufacturers incorporating them into their packaging.

What are some of the opportunities and challenges facing the packaging industry today and the next few years?

In the last few years we have seen packaging come

into its own. It is no longer an afterthought, but an integral part of the product development phase. As more companies begin to understand packaging and the benefits both on functional and marketing levels, we will probably see more investment and importance placed on advancing packaging technologies.

The current economic state will also begin to positively affect the importance of packaging. As budgets tighten, packaging’s role as a vehicle for communication with customers will become more prominent. Ultimately, what companies want is for



their product to be recognized and purchased—and packaging can encourage this behavior.

How do you begin choosing new packaging equipment, and what do you search for? What are the biggest factors when you make an equipment purchase decision?

We have a small group of trusted and tested suppliers that we have worked with for several years. Depending on what our needs are and what we are trying to accomplish, we will go to them first to source equipment. At the same time, we rely on internal networks, tradeshow like PACK EXPO and industry associations to keep track of the latest innovations that may benefit our operations.

When making a purchase, we have several things to consider, including cost, leadtime and floorspace. So we need to be sure we are purchasing equipment that will run efficiently and be cost-effective.

When sourcing new packaging, what resources do you use? How does attending packaging

tradeshow fit into your search for new packaging?

There are several ways we identify and source packaging. Similar to how we go about purchasing equipment, we leverage the relationships we have built with suppliers and tap into their expertise. Based on this, we can begin outlining what best fits our business needs.

Tradeshow play a part in how we go about finding new technologies. They provide us with a global view of the industry and allow us to meet with suppliers face-to-face and see solutions in

From a manufacturing perspective, companies are going to have to learn how to be lean. At Energizer, we aim to blend automation and streamline our processes to ensure we are running efficiently without much waste.

action. At the same time, tradeshow offer a unique opportunity to discover technologies we were not aware of, enabling us to constantly re-evaluate the way we do things.

Can you describe Energizer’s approach to tradeshow such as PACK EXPO?

Because PACK EXPO is a large industry event, we often travel to the show with a large team. We meet ahead of time to discuss our objectives. Depending on what each person is looking for, we’ll assign responsibilities—some members may visit suppliers while others may want to attend conference sessions.

Following the show, we reassemble and participate in a download session where everyone shares their experiences and findings to the entire packaging group.

NOTE: To register for PACK EXPO Las Vegas or obtain more information, visit www.packexpo.com, call 703/243-8555 or email PMMI at expo@pmmi.org.



The key to growth in automation is the need to become more efficient, says Rebecca Oesterle, manager of global packaging development at Energizer Holdings. Processes in Energizer’s various packaging operations keep pace with the increased focus on sustainability.

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system integration



As noted here last month, Rockwell Automation enjoys almost universal brand recognition among packaging system integrators. Fifteen other automation product vendors have also been cited under “product experience” by more than half of the integrators listed in the Packaging Integrator Guide (go to the Resources tab at www.packagingdigest.com).

Not surprisingly, 13 of those 16 top automation vendors have established system-integrator partnership programs to capitalize on their popularity. They offer their partners special training, pricing discounts, technical support, marketing services and sales support in return for whatever business their partners can steer their way.

Rockwell Automation says it expects its best partners to “target annual Rockwell Automation purchases to exceed 75 percent of discretionary automation purchases,” in markets that Rockwell serves, according to the Solution Provider overview at www.rockwellautomation.com.

Choosing integrators no longer a ‘casual date;’ it’s a marriage

“Discretionary” is the key qualifier in that statement. Integrator partnerships aren’t exclusive relationships, and vendors understand that an integrator doesn’t always have a choice in what products clients buy for their automation projects. *Packaging Digest’s* Automation in Packaging Study (www.packagingdigest.com/automationresearch) indicates that nearly all integrators responding to the survey reported that their clients accept their recommendations of alternate automation brands at least sometimes (41 percent), if not always (57 percent).

Conversely, more than half of the respondents also claimed that someone else actually decides which automation components are to be incorporated into projects: Generally the packager; the equipment vendor; or the packaging machine OEM. Even when they do have a say in the equipment selection, only 16 percent of the respondents cite a vendor’s partnership program as a factor in their decision. Packagers are even less enthusiastic about their integrators’ vendor partnerships.

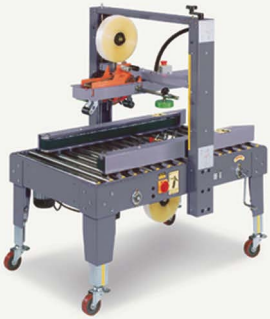
Only 8 percent of the packagers who responded to the first phase of the Packaging in Automation study cited “affiliations with preferred vendors” as a top criteria for choosing an integrator. Automation vendors still see integrator partnerships as a chance to leverage other delivery organizations that complement their own knowledge and expertise. Rockwell Automation’s Mark Moriarty explains, “As our customers find new ways to enhance machines or processes, engaging an experienced solution provider who has the proven experience early in the development continues to pay the greatest dividends for all involved.” Wonderware’s Scott Kiser points out that choosing an integrator is no longer a “casual date” for a packager, “it’s a marriage.” Clients say they want integrators certified by Wonderware on Wonderware technology. What the training integrators get out of them is a way for sponsoring vendors to meet clients’ technical needs, even if those clients don’t know it.

Consulting Editor Vance J. VanDoren, Ph.D., P.E., contributes articles on process control, advanced control and systems integration. Dr. VanDoren also edits Control Engineering’s and Packaging Digest’s annual Automation Integrator Guide. Dr. VanDoren previously served the industrial automation industry as an applications engineer for General Electric and as a product marketing and development engineer for Texas Instruments’ Industrial Automation Division. He currently manages a firm of consulting engineers in Lafayette, IN, where he develops custom control strategies for advanced process-control applications.

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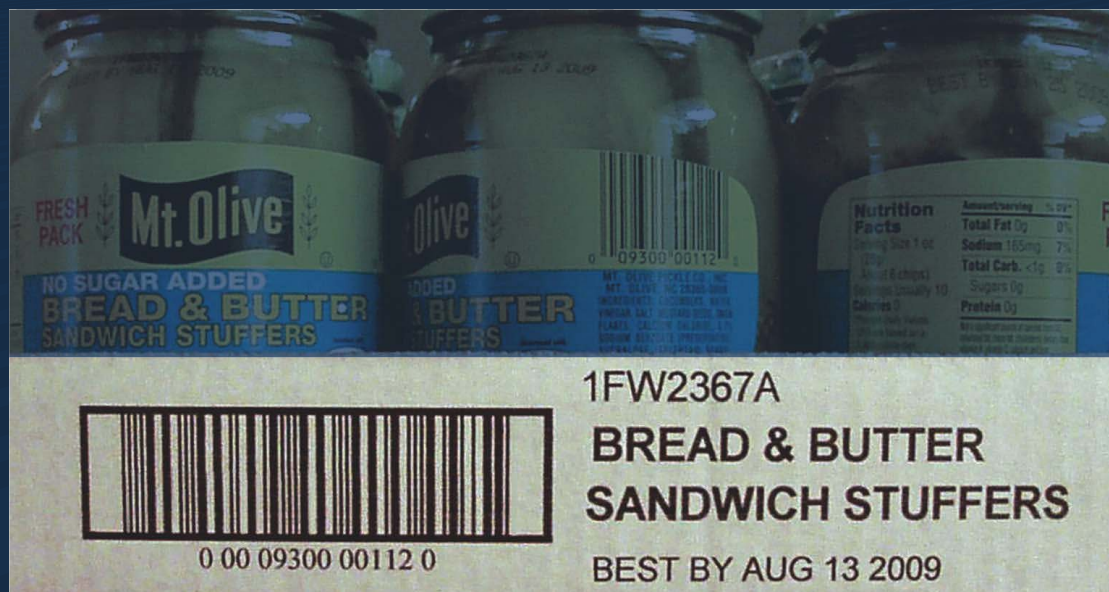
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