



THE PACKAGING BRIEF FOR CATEGORY MANAGERS

PACKAGING—A CRITICAL FUNCTION IN THE SUSTAINABLE MANUFACTURE OF GOODS

Nearly all goods require some kind of packaging in order to bring those goods to market safely, efficiently and without damage. Packaging, when optimized according to the specific application, serves an important and functional role for the brand owner and retailer and, ultimately, for the consumer.

When looking at packaging from the perspective of a Category Manager, it is important to consider the function and purpose of packaging, when making product purchasing choices.

FACTS TO REMEMBER ⁽¹⁾:

- 1) Packaging makes an essential contribution to the sustainable production and consumption process by helping to reduce product waste and to protect resources. The manufacture of packaging consumes resources yet is often a very small part of the overall environmental footprint of the packaged product.
- 2) The packaging value chain is complex, as it must serve an increasingly diverse product supply chain. Optimal performance of the product supply chain is achieved when packaging and product developers work together to design packaging solutions.
- 3) Packaging is a function of consumption and the global demand for goods. Attempts to reduce packaging impacts should only be pursued if the functionality of the packaged product is maintained and the product contents are delivered safely to consumers.

THE ROLE OF PACKAGING ⁽²⁾:

While the fundamental role of packaging is to deliver the product to the consumer in perfect condition, there are a number of other functions of packaging:

- 1) **PROTECTION:** Packaging prevents breakage, spoilage, contamination, tampering and theft while offering the potential to increase product shelf life.
- 2) **PROMOTION:** Packaging describes the product while listing ingredients, product features, benefits, promotional messages and branding.
- 3) **INFORMATION:** Packaging identifies the product, describes product preparation and usage, gives nutritional and storage data, safety warnings, contact information, opening instructions and end of life management.
- 4) **CONVENIENCE:** Packaging offers a myriad of convenience opportunities including preparation and serving, product storage and portioning.
- 5) **UNITIZATION:** Packaging allows for the provision of consumer units, retail units and transport units.
- 6) **HANDLING:** Packaging offers ease of transport from producer to retailer along with point of sale display.

HOW CAN PACKAGING CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVING SUSTAINABILITY?

The movement towards more sustainable packaging emerged from a common belief that packaging has room to improve in areas of material quantities and use, design applications and supply chain efficiencies. As a Category Manager, the decisions about which packaging to use for any given product may sometimes appear daunting. Yet, well designed packaging will meet the requirements of the product while minimizing the environmental, economic and social impacts of the product and its package.

As a Category Manager, considerations might include the following:

- a) Has the packaging been optimized for the product? Does the package meet minimum requirements without compromising performance?
- b) Is the packaging safe and healthy for individuals and communities without any known negative toxicity issues?
- c) Is the packaging made from responsibly sourced materials and manufactured in socially and environmentally responsible manner?
- d) Is the packaging material easily and efficiently recoverable via existing infrastructures?
- e) Does the packaging meet consumer choice and expectation?
- f) Does the packaging meet market criteria for performance and cost?

Evaluating packaging is a complicated challenge, but with these few simple considerations, you will begin the journey of learning the fundamentals and gathering the expertise necessary to be knowledgeable about sustainable packaging and its role in the overall sustainability of the product supply chain. Generally speaking, there is no such thing as a fundamentally good or bad packaging material, but rather, all materials possess advantages and disadvantages depending on the context within which they are used.

For additional information, educational material is available through resources listed below.

For more information

1. Sustainable Packaging Coalition (www.sustainablepackaging.org)
2. The Sustainability Consortium (www.sustainabilityconsortium.org)
3. Consumer Goods Forum/Global Packaging Project (globalpackaging.mycgforum.com)
4. AMERIPEN (www.ameripen.org)
5. EUROPEN (www.europen.be)
6. Greener Package (www.greenerpackage.com)

References

⁽¹⁾ *Packaging and Sustainability*, EUROPEN, October 2011, www.europen.be

⁽²⁾ *A Global Language for Packaging and Sustainability*, Consumer Goods Forum, September 2011, globalpackaging.mycgforum.com

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