In the 1990's, environmentalism has become a key concern among the general public and the media, and is one of the most important issues facing business. Many companies are finding that what's good for the environment is also good for business. For example, numerous market surveys show that consumers are attracted to—and tend to buy from—companies with sound environmental policies. This issue of Insights poses 9 key questions each package goods manufacturer should ask about his product's packaging as it concerns the environment—and some of the answers.

**QUESTION #1: “ARE TODAY’S CONSUMERS REALLY ALL THAT CONCERNED ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT?”**

The overwhelming evidence is “yes,” as proven by numerous polls and surveys. For example: The Michael Peters Group conducted a nationwide survey of 1,000 adults. Their finding: 80 percent of Americans are concerned about the impact of products they purchase on the environment.

And a Gallup survey of 1,000 adults showed consumers are deeply concerned about the potential environmental damage caused by consumer products and packaging. They related their concern a 4.14 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not concerned at all and 5 being “very concerned” (nearly half of those polled said they were “very concerned”).

**QUESTION #2: “CAN I REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF MATERIAL IN MY PACKAGING OR REDESIGN IT SO IT PRODUCES LESS WASTE?”**

Source reduction, achieved by minimizing the amount of material used in packaging, is the EPA's number-one priority. The reason: Many recyclable products never actually get recycled. Many degradable products are not disposed of in a manner that allows them to decompose.

Packaging materials are a major contributor to the municipal waste stream: 18 percent of municipal solid waste is plastics, 38 percent paper and cardboard, and 14 percent metal.

Three of the major packaging strategies that aid source reduction are redesign, reuse, and refills. Redesign options include eliminating the package or some of its components, reducing weight or volume through the use of different packaging or container forms; changing packaging geometry or structure to achieve a lower surface area to volume ratio; and replacing a number of smaller packages with a single, larger, more efficient package (e.g., bulk containers instead of individual portion packs).

Reuse means using the package without remanufacturing. An example is Ralston Purina's Cat Chow Self-feeder, which is designed to be reused repeatedly. Refill strategies involve making product or packaging changes that enable containers to be refilled by the consumer—for instance, cleaner spray bottles where the consumer purchases a large-size container of liquid which he uses to refill a smaller spray-type bottle.

**QUESTION #3: “HOW CAN I TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE INCREASED RECYCLING ACTIVITIES TAKING PLACE IN TOWNS AND CITIES ACROSS THE U.S.?”**

For recycling to work, two things must happen. First, your package must be made of materials that can be recycled. And second, there must be a commercially viable recycling system for collecting and recycling the package.

If there is no recycling system in place, consider designing your package so it can be reused in its existing form without remanufacturing. Example: Soda pop bottles with a nickel deposit paid to consumers who returned the bottles to the manufacturer or bottler for reuse were once popular. If the material can be recycled, packaging should identify the plastic resin recycling code or other materials, to assist municipalities in sorting and recycling.

Consider manufacturing your product or package from recycled materials, and if you do, be sure package copy stresses that the product is made from recycled materials.

**QUESTION #4: “CONSUMERS CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT WILL THEY ACTUALLY CHANGE BUYING HABITS—PAY MORE, OR SUFFER INCONVENIENCE—to save the earth?”**

Although not all consumers will match their concern for the environment with actions, surveys show a huge number of them will.

Consumer Network, a firm that conducts consumer attitude surveys for package goods manufacturers, found that one-third of 5,000 shoppers polled said they consider the environment before making purchase decisions, and wanted retailers to stock more “green” (environmentally safe) products.

The Gallup survey found that 90 percent of 1,000 adults polled said they would be willing to make a special effort to buy products from companies trying to protect the environment...95 percent said they would sacrifice convenience to buy environmentally responsible products...and 88 percent said they would pay more money for such products.

**QUESTION #5: “WHAT'S THE REAL STORY—ARE BIODEGRADABLE PRODUCTS AND PACKAGING REALLY BIODEGRADABLE?”**

For “biodegradable” products to work effectively, the package must be made of biodegradable material and it must be disposed of so that degradation takes place. Materials which break down readily with exposure to water and light assure that degradation proceeds at a faster pace. Once degradation begins, microorganisms can complete the effective breakdown of
the material. Very little degradation takes place in landfills. This is due to structure of
landfills and the lack of water and oxygen. Biodegradation occurs primarily in
composting heaps and sewage treatment plants.

If you intend for packaging to be biodegradable, make sure it will be disposed of
in a manner that facilitates degradation. For example, biodegradable diapers will
not break down when sealed in plastic bags and dumped in landfills. Also, avoid pack-
age materials which degrade into a substance potentially more damaging to the
environment than the original material.

QUESTION #6: “WILL THE DIS-
TRIBUTION CHAIN SUPPORT AND
ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTALLY
SOUND PACKAGING POLICIES?”

There are numerous examples nationwide
of major supermarkets and retailers pro-
moting and showing preference for en-
vironmentally safe products and packag-
ing. For instance, Wal-Mart Stores has
recently begun running a TV commercial
urging customers to choose products that
have been changed to be a little better for
the environment.” K-Mart is also actively
spotlighting manufacturers’ products and
packaging improvement designed to pro-
tect the environment. In San Diego, Big
Bear Markets, a supermarket chain, regu-
larly promotes its concern for the Califor-
nia environment in print and advertising.

QUESTION #7: “WHAT IF MY PACK-
AGE CAN’T BE RECYCLED OR MADE
BIODEGRADABLE?”

In that case, the package design should
facilitate safe, easy disposal. Package copy
should include instructions on proper
disposal methods, if not obvious. And, the
package and its components—inks, dyes,
pigments, stabilizers, solders, adhesives—
should be free of unsafe heavy metal ingre-
dients, such as cadmium, lead, mercury,
and hexavalent chromium. If your current
package contains toxic materials, deter-
mine whether these can be removed with-
out compromising the package design or
product integrity.

QUESTION #8: “HOW DOES NEW
AND PENDING LEGISLATION AFFECT
MY PACKAGE DESIGN?”

The Solid Waste Disposal Act contains
many initiatives that will require marketers
to implement cooperative recycling pro-
grams with municipalities and redesign
many existing packages. You should con-
tinuously monitor federal, state, and local
legislatures (e.g., package taxes, bans,
deposits, solid waste bills, etc.) that will
affect your product packaging.

Be aware of which state and local govern-
ments require packages to be made from
recyclable materials. In Minneapolis, new
laws require all plastic containers to be re-
cycled by 1991. A similar law in Connect-
icut will make recycling of soda bottles,
milk, and detergent containers mandatory
by 1991. Its goal: to remove 25 percent of
the refuse from the solid waste stream.

QUESTION #9: “WE WANT OUR
PACKAGES TO BE AS ENVIRON-
MENTALLY SAFE AS POSSIBLE,
WITHIN REASON. BUT HOW FAR
CAN WE GO?”

The integrity of the product must never be
compromised. For the package decision-
maker, the physical, chemical, and bio-
logical integrity of the product takes prece-
dence over any actual or possible environ-
mental benefits. The primary goal of the
package is to protect and preserve the
product while ensuring consumer safety.

Environmental issues are important but
secondary compared to the primary goal.
You cannot create the “perfect” environ-
mentally sound package, because it’s not
economically feasible. For instance, in the
beverage industry, packaging currently ac-
counts for one-third of the total cost of the
products and will soon cost more than the
contents! Make sure changes in your pack-
age made for the sake of the environment
won’t adversely affect profits, sales, or
market share.

Commentary

King-Casey specializes in consumer-
sensitive package design. Our research
clearly indicates that a significant and
growing number of consumers and retailer
are increasingly more aware of the dis-
posability of product packaging. King-
Casey responds to this consciousness by
considering environmental issues in the
design process.

About King-Casey, Inc.

For over 35 years, King-Casey has been
helping clients grow their business through
consumer-responsive design. We work
with our clients to help create new business
opportunities and offer innovative solu-
tions to the design challenges they face—
from new products and packaging to
corporate images.

King-Casey’s expertise in designing
total packaging systems is based on our
in-house support capabilities which in-
clude marketing, product package design,
engineering package design and graphic
design.

We take pride in helping our clients to re-
spond to the demands of today’s sophisti-
cated consumer and complex marketplace.