

“Going Green?”

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 con-

tributor 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 re-

cycling 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 package materials which degrade into a substance potentially more damaging to the environment than the original material.

QUESTION #6: "WILL THE DISTRIBUTION CHAIN SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND PACKAGING POLICIES?"

There are numerous examples nationwide of major supermarkets and retailers promoting and showing preference for environmentally safe products and packaging. For instance, Wal-Mart Stores recently began 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 protect the environment. In San Diego, Big Bear Markets, a supermarket chain, regularly promotes its concern for the California environment in print and advertising.

QUESTION #7: "WHAT IF MY PACKAGE 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 ingredients, such as cadmium, lead, mercury, and hexavalent chromium. If your current package contains toxic materials, determine whether these can be removed without compromising the package design or product integrity.

QUESTION #8: "HOW DOES NEW AND PENDING LEGISLATURE AFFECT MY PACKAGE DESIGN?"

The Solid Waste Disposal Act contains many initiatives that will require marketers to implement cooperative recycling programs with municipalities and redesign many existing packages. You should continuously 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 governments require packages to be made from recyclable materials. In Minneapolis, new laws require all plastic containers to be recycled by 1991. A similar law in Connecticut 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 ENVIRONMENTALLY 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 biological integrity of the product takes precedence over any actual or possible environmental 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" environmentally sound package, because it's not economically feasible. For instance, in the beverage industry, packaging currently accounts for one-third of the total cost of the products and will soon cost *more* than the contents! Make sure changes in your package 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 retailers are increasingly more aware of the disposability 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 solutions 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 include marketing, product package design, engineering package design and graphic design.

We take pride in helping our clients to respond to the demands of today's sophisticated consumer and complex marketplace.

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*Meeting Today's Needs
With Innovative
Product-Packages*

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