



2/3rds

Of groceries make up all packaging waste

Saving the planet, one pack at a time

The need for environmentally conscious packaging is now more important than ever, as highlighted in a recent sustainable packaging workshop.

By Jane Boler.

Held on July 19 in Sydney, Sustainable Packaging 101 offered a greater understanding of environmentally-friendly packaging, including the current options available, with an FMCG focus.

Hosted by Sydney-based design agency Boxer and Co, the 90-minute hands-on workshop was led by sustainability specialist and author of *Sustainability With Style* Lisa Heinze and Boxer & Co Managing Director Gwen Blake.

"Packaging gets a hard time in the industry and, in a lot of ways, it isn't very sustainable, but it is necessary," Ms Blake said.

"Things have to go in packs. We need a place to put our brands and claims about products."

Ms Heinze said it is necessary to "find the

right balance between sustainability, making your business financially successful and making your brand look fantastic."

According to the 'one planet living theory', if everyone lived the way that Australia does, four planets worth of resources would be required. Each individual accumulates 90kg of packaging waste annually, two-thirds of which is grocery waste, making it essential to invest in closed-loop systems so we are not continually using new resources.

On the latest Clean Up Australia day, the top items collected were glass and plastic bottles, chips and confectionery packets. Even though a lot of packaging is recyclable, it's not happening at the rates it should be, with only 16 per cent of plastics being recycled.

This low recycling rate is possibly a result of consumer confusion, with 26 per cent saying there isn't enough environmental information on packaging, 20 per cent confused by the different claims and 22 per cent not knowing the differences between packs.

"People want to choose the right ones, but they are very confused," Ms Heinze said.

"There is a lot of misinformation out there and people are confused because of what is known in eco circles as greenwashing, when there are claims being made by companies about something either being greener than it is or just flat out lying."

This confusion has led to consumers to become incredibly skeptical, with 90 per cent of Australians doubting health and sustainability claims on packaging.

"These days we can't easily win out by putting a green message on a pack," Ms Heinze said.

"People are getting more and more skeptical and you really need the substance to back up your claim."

There is a growing demand for eco-friendly products, resulting in the emergence of the LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) consumer group. The segment has nearly doubled in the past four years to now account for up to AU\$21.5 billion of market share and US\$300 million globally. LOHAS consumers are willing to pay up to 20 per cent more for environmentally friendly products.

Materials

The first thing to consider when looking at sustainable packaging is the materials to be used and their impact on the planet.

"Take an honest look at what you are doing right now and have an audit of your packaging," Ms Heinze said.

"You need to understand where you are so you can know exactly what you need to change."

Common packaging materials include paper, plastic, glass and aluminium, with each having their pros and cons.

If managed properly, paper and cardboard are a renewable resource, while being lightweight, resulting in low transportation emissions.

"On the other hand, when you are using paper and card you need to be very careful where you are sourcing that paper from and make sure that you are not adding to deforestation," Ms Heinze said.

The Forestry Stewardship Council has devised a certification system looking at the life cycle of paper from plantation through to when it is printed. Verification is given for every step that it is sustainable, with certifications ranging from 100 per cent from well-managed forests, recycled or for using a combination of mixed sources such as recycled plus virgin.

There are also a few things to consider with paper and cardboard in terms of what is recyclable at the end of their life. Printing is a main consideration, with standard sulphur- and petroleum-based inks being created, using a non-renewable resource and omitting volatile organic compounds when being printed. Soy- and aqua-based inks provide an alternative.

Metallic inks, laminates, UV and clay coatings, adhesives, oiling, waxes and certain dyes are also problematic at the recycling stage, with embossing, die-cutting and applied labelling providing environmentally friendly alternatives.

Another popular packaging material, plastic, is light to transport and is easily recycled, but has a poor reputation as it's toxic.

"It's the most vilified packaging out there," Ms Heinze said.

"It's the one that's going to be attacked by a lot of campaigns and activists."

Another popular packaging material is glass, which is infinitely recyclable. No matter

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how many times a piece of glass has been recycled, it maintains the same structure. Glass also has decent recycling rates, but results in high transportation emissions through its weight and uses high energy requirements to create and recycle.

Aluminium also has very high recycling rates, with consumers learning at an early stage how to treat cans. Recycled aluminium uses only five per cent of the energy required to create it in the first place, making it a very low-impact material.

"On the negative side, at the beginning, if we do need to mine new aluminium, the smelters are very toxic and polluting," Ms Heinze said.

Design and examples

Seventy per cent of the overall impact of product is determined at the design phase.

"It's really important when starting work on packaging that you get collaboration happening, so the packaging designers need to talk to the recyclers and the material suppliers," Ms Blake said.

There are also cost savings involved through simplifying packaging. The introduction of Coca-Cola's Easy Crush Mt Franklin bottle, containing 35 per cent less plastic, saw the company save \$90 million in 2010 by reducing the amount of packaging waste.

"It is a really cheap bottle, but they have positioned it fabulously from the sustainability side and have obviously made a significant investment in their machinery, but they will be saving down the line through all kinds of reductions in transportation and storage," Ms Blake said.



1. Spreading the sustainability message.
2. Sustainable packaging examples.
3. Lisa Heinze and Gwen Blake.

Coca-Cola saved 30 per cent of the weight of its aluminium cans and 50 per cent of its glass bottles while also saving \$5 million by making its bottle closures shorter. The company is currently working on a plant-based plastic bottle that is intended to be recycled.

Nando's has also jumped on the sustainable packaging bandwagon, using recycled paper and cardboard for its takeaway bags.

"It's just an example that you can still have fun and stand-out design on a sustainable package," Ms Blake said.

In the US, Pantene launched a bottle made from sugarcane pulp that can be recycled alongside number two plastics, meaning it doesn't have to be recycled elsewhere.

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Duck & Orange Pate

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Flavours include:

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DUCK & ORANGE
PATE



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Original Source in the UK introduced packaging that uses 50 per cent less plastic and has displayed the claim larger than its own branding on the shower gel pack. Another UK example, Seventh Generation laundry liquid, is packaged with a thin plastic lining to hold the liquid while the pulp outer provides stability on-shelf.

Transportation and end of life

Transportation is another important element of packaging, with all stages from raw materials to finished packaging needing to be considered. To lower transportation emissions, it's best to send an article flat.

"So instead of a glass or plastic bottle, if you can have flat packs from the manufacturing plant to where it gets filled, you will save on your transportation emissions," Ms Heinze said.

End of life is also something that is generally overlooked, but is a huge component of packaging. When consumers are finished with

the contents, the packaging can be recycled, composted, biodegraded or sent to landfill. In order to make sure packaging gets to the end of its life and is either recycled or composted, it is essential to have these conversations at the design stage.

"As you are designing your packaging, have you thought about where your product is going to be consumed?" Ms Heinze said.

Another end of life is up-cycling, which has become a buzzword in sustainability circles and describes the process of taking a product and turning it into something new.

"It's not necessarily recycling it and taking it back to its material so start over, but taking it and making a new product," Ms Heinze said.

Storytelling

Once something has been done to make packaging more sustainable, the world should know about it because there needs to be something in it for the planet and the company. In terms of labeling, it is essential to be transparent, avoid greenwashing and ensure that the correct labelling is used,

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whether it be FSC certification, recycled, recyclable, compostable or biodegradable and to tell a story about what you have done.

"I think the best story you can tell is how much better what we are doing now is compared to what we used to do," Ms Blake said.

"Or how much better what we do is from what an average soap bottle does." ■

