Three Ways to Create Eco-Friendly, Financially-Beneficial Packaging

By Andrea Bradshaw, Brightstar

It has been said that at retail, your package is your brand. And, increasingly, consumers are opting for products and packaging that are green. Can you integrate these seemingly opposing ideas to create packaging that's compelling to buyers and environmentally friendly? And, can you do it without breaking the bank?

The answer is, resoundingly, "Yes!" It takes some research, analysis and planning, but "going green" can not only improve your image with your customers and your relationship with Mother Nature, it can also improve your packaging quality and reduce your costs. And, remember that the green quotient of a package is more than the sum of its physical parts. Its supply chain—with production, distribution and transportation processes that consume energy and generate waste—also contributes to or detracts from its green rating.

But consumer preference and retailer requirements, influential as they may be, aren't the only drivers in the trend toward environmental sustainability in the marketplace. The supply chain offers many opportunities to conserve, and that conservation yields savings that drop directly to the bottom line. In a competitive market with little room for excess cost, removing waste at any point can generate a lever for applying pricing pressure or boosting margin. By rethinking how your wireless products are distributed, packaged and/or merchandised, there's opportunity to incorporate new ideas that can improve brand and product performance, as well as the customer experience. Following are three critical areas to consider when developing environmentally and financially sustainable packaging

for your products.

Size Matters

Simply reducing the footprint of a package goes a long way toward lessening its environmental impact. From eliminating internal plastic trays to reducing, or even removing, user manuals, to minimizing the number of items contained in the package itself, reducing package size has a significant effect throughout the supply chain. A smaller, lighter package allows more units of product to be loaded onto each truck, resulting in fewer trucks on the road to consume fuel and produce carbon emissions. And with a smaller package, there's less to print, less to store and less to ship, lowering your costs for production, inventory and transportation…a quantifiable savings.

Material Decisions

Materials used in the packaging itself are important. Many consumer electronic products are housed in cumbersome and environmentally-unfriendly plastic clamshells. This type of packaging is durable, secure and holds up well on retail shelves, but does little for the consumer experience and scores very low on the eco-friendly scale. Nowadays there are other choices—even a number of paper-based products--that offer equivalent or even superior durability. Check out alternatives like BlisterGard TM and Natralok TM. Sturdier packaging keeps product more presentable on the shelves and minimizes product repackaging and returns (which also conserves fuel and other resources). You may find that completely eliminating plastic is not financially feasible, but reducing the amount of plastic used or substituting a recycled or recyclable plastic can make your packaging greener.

Less is More

The environmental impact is not limited to the physical package. The processes of packaging and delivering product to retail stores affect the environment too, and these are areas where you can improve your earth-friendliness and cost savings. Companies often drive up packaging costs significantly by using multiple vendors. Many times one vendor will be used to create the packaging, another to kit it and yet another to deliver to stores. Using a vendor that can manage multiple components in one location reduces costs, shortens time and mitigates risk for reaching critical deadlines. Reducing the number of touch points from manufacturing to the store shelf will not just result in a greener supply chain, but can provide tangible savings while gaining speed to market.

Sam's Club is well-known for its commitment to reducing the commercial carbon footprint. The retailer recently engaged Brightstar and requested a green approach to design branding and packaging for its wireless accessory portfolio. Among the products Brightstar sells is its Wireless Genius brand of private label accessories.

During the design process, Brightstar studied packaging from hundreds of products in and outside the wireless category to survey the good and not-so-good ideas that are currently in practice. We analyzed, adapted, improved on and incorporated some of those with our own ideas as we developed model packaging to meet all the qualifications. The packaging we designed is not only partially recyclable but also consumer-friendly. It relies less on plastics, replacing much of it with a tear-resistant, specially treated paper product that retains its sturdiness—and doing away with it in other spots. Total plastic content was reduced by more than 60%. The new packaging is smaller, lighter and costs less to ship, further reducing costs and carbon emissions.

Then, we made the packaging more accessible, so consumers can confirm accessories are compatible with their devices, which reduces customer returns. We moved connector access to the back of the package, which keeps its face intact and attractive and decreases the likelihood the product will be shipped back unsold. Finally, we packaged and color-coordinated items by category so customers can easily find and purchase the products they want. The result is packaging that not only uses fewer resources, it also improves and makes the wireless shopping experience more efficient for Sam's Club customers.

"Sam's Club has set three overarching sustainability goals: to be supplied 100% by renewable energy, to create zero waste and to sell products that sustain our resources and environment. We strongly advocate reduced packaging and incorporating recyclable materials, and we've even developed a packaging scorecard to evaluate all Sam's Club packages and drive continuous improvement," said Jeff Shipley, senior buyer, wireless and connected products for Sam's Club.

"Wireless Genius packaging is helping our wireless accessories category move Sam's Club one step closer to achieving our goals, with content that's more sustainable and earns high marks on our packaging scorecard."

Rethinking and retooling your product packaging to a more environmentally friendly format can be an effective method to conserve financial, natural and other

resources that are becoming increasingly expensive for businesses. Many companies already have green programs underway and are reaping the rewards. It's only a matter of time before those that don't will be operating at a disadvantage. It remains imperative to carefully evaluate and plan before implementing a green program. A thoughtfully crafted one can yield impressive results.

Andrea Bradshaw is executive vice president of Brightstar, www.brightstarcorp.com, 305-421-6000.

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