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Eco Opportunities in Beauty Packaging

From material to manufacture and from distribution to disposal and recycling, brands have opportunities to reduce their products' impact on the environment one step at a time.

• BY SARA MASON

IMPACT POINTS

- Packaging is always a forum for a beauty brand to extend its eco efforts further, and consumers are continuing to seek out eco-friendly options—although they often don't want to trade eco for price or efficacy.
- New materials for more eco-friendly packaging are becoming available all the time. The trick is finding what fit is right for your beauty brand and knowing where the value is for environmental friendliness in your packaging.
- Other eco opportunities include things like Unilever and L'Oréal's recent innovation to reduce the size of Unilever's aerosol deodorants while still offering the same value with a concentrated formula.

As consumers become more educated on product ingredients—and more vocal about their support for the use of natural ingredients—they expect to see a similar eco-consciousness reflected in the packaging of their products. Therefore, beauty companies are coming under increasing pressure to be sustainable and utilize green packaging.

Emotional Appeal

Package design can communicate a brand's philosophy and marketing story. Many consumer decisions are made unconsciously, and if a package makes the right impression to consumers, it is much more likely to appeal to their emotions and influence their buying decisions.

"Packaging has an incredible ability to sway the consumer at the point of purchase," says Kyla Fisher, corporate sustainability director, PaperWorks. When brand owners look to appeal to an

eco-conscious consumer at the point of purchase, packaging is often the best way to communicate the brand's commitment.

In a recent Eco Market study cited by Fisher, surveyed consumers said packaging was the first place they checked for a brand's sustainability story. "These consumers are more discerning and more likely to seek out information actively on brands before making a purchase decision than other consumers," she explains. "They also are well-educated and know what packaging attributes indicate a natural, healthy or eco-conscious brand."

The most effective way to ensure that products make it from store shelves to their carts is to make sure the packaging communicates what they need to know, as well as the values of the brand. A brand that touts sustainability as a value but does not "walk the walk" with an eco-conscious package—either because a well-intentioned packaging format is difficult for consumers to recycle or because the package has chemical properties thought to be harmful—will only be perceived as

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greenwashing. "It's important to be well-versed in these trends and understand the importance of balancing a look that fits the category with elements that will differentiate the product on-shelf," says Fisher.

Cost Comparison

The package is a communication tool for any brand, and it is an excellent opportunity to tell a great sustainability story, provide information consumers are looking for and help the product stand out on the shelf. Consumers who are actively seeking brands with values that match their own are likely to pay a higher price for that product. "These consumers aren't standing in the aisle weighing whether they will purchase a product at a higher price point just because the packaging looks interesting," says Fisher. "The packaging isn't a separate entity from the product; it is an extension of it."

A luxurious, all-natural skin care brand touted as an eco-luxe indulgence, Kari Gran wanted to do its part to reduce the brand's impact on the environment by using recyclable packaging and eco-friendly materials whenever possible. Gran's products are designed to encourage a holistic approach, and the philosophy is timeliness and classic—the "little black dress" of skin care. "Our product packaging is a visual representation of those values," brand founder Kari Gran says.

For high-end cosmetics, glass continues to be a popular choice. It also is recognized

as recyclable and can be repurposed—even though it costs more to use and ship.

"We had wanted to house our products in black glass, but found that black glass was clear glass that had been coated, thereby not allowing the glass to be recycled," explains Gran. Instead, Gran chose 100% recyclable dark violet glass bottles that would look good and enhance the shelf life of the product. Miron glass is a sturdy, European imported glass that blocks the complete spectrum of visible light, which would otherwise accelerate molecular decay among preservative-free ingredients, providing the proverbial cool, dark place suggested by many as the ideal storage environment advised for natural products that don't contain chemical preservatives.

While the attractive and functional packaging may not be a deciding factor for everyone, Gran wanted to be true to the brand. The cost of the Miron glass is four to five times what it would cost to use plastic or amber/clear/cobalt glass, but Gran decided it was the only glass she was willing to use rather than go a cheaper route. "We didn't want to sacrifice luxury in the name of being kind to the environment, or vice versa," Gran explains. "The glass looks and feels substantial, allowing the quality of our packaging to reflect the quality of the ingredients in all of our products."

As the brand grows, the plan is to keep this mindset as a key brand value. "Eco-friendly materials are always a priority when making any buying decisions moving forward," says Gran.

The Trade-off

Like the higher-priced Miron glass, there is a trade-off for eco-packaging. How much are consumers willing to give in or give up in order to solve the problem? That is the question, according to packaging consultant JoAnn Hines. "Studies continually show that consumers want more environmentally friendly packaging, but not if it affects the price, quality or convenience," she notes. Often, consumers are saying one thing and doing another—especially in the U.S., which tends to have a more throw-away mentality. "Single-serve, disposable, fast-food, cups-to-go, one-time use—these are booming packaging trends that revolve around instant gratification and fly in the face of the environmental movement," explains Hines.

There is a disconnect, agrees Julie Urlaub, managing partner, Taiga Company.



"Everyone has great green intentions, shopping with the environment in mind, but there is a gap between thought and action," she comments. The good news is that it's trending upward—consumers are more willing today than yesterday to put action where their mouths are.

And despite the lack of consistent follow through, consumers are showing an inclination to learn more. "They want to know the life cycle, how to use the package and how to dispose of it," says Urlaub. "Is it easy? Where do I go? What do I do?"

Consumers often do need to be educated about what to do with the package to use and dispose of it properly. There's no progress in making a change to benefit the environment if the users don't know what to do or have the right resources. "Consumers are overwhelmed by the volume of message in the marketplace," says Urlaub. "Engaging consumers with clear and authentic communication can ensure they understand the role they play in minimizing the environmental impact associated with a product's life cycle."

The average user may not recognize biodegradable materials or understand whether it was manufactured using renewable energy. "Piggyback on what they do understand, such as waste and recycling, to engage them in your story," Urlaub says.

Paperboard packaging, for example, is inherently renewable and recyclable, and continues to be a viable option for brand owners looking to communicate a commitment to sustainability. Many consumers immediately recognize that paperboard is recyclable and have easy access to the necessary disposal services. "This minimizes the learning curve and allows them to feel good about making a choice that is better for the environment but that did not add any inconvenience," explains PaperWorks' Fisher.

PaperWorks partners directly with customers to guide them on designing a package that is sustainability-enhancing, such as including materials that are recyclable, made from recycled material or lightweighted. "In addition to providing brand owners with packaging that demonstrates its eco-awareness to consumers, we also provide package assessments that show how these enhancements contribute to their overall environmental footprint," explains Fisher.

While eliminating excess packaging is important, the key is to balance the reduction of the packaging consumers see without affecting the integrity of the product. Typical methodologies have been to lightweight the materials—using a lighter plastic or lesser weight outer carton—or eliminate it entirely. "Consumers will not tolerate contaminated, spoiled or broken merchandise," Hines explains, so "removing elements of packaging only to have the product break in shipping or face the uproar after an outbreak of illness is going to cost a brand more in the end." Before making costly mistakes, companies need to educate consumers on the role of packaging to protect the product and the user.

"You cannot have a product without a package," says Hines. "Packaging is not going away." She recommends that the industry work together to solve the problem of excess packaging, rather than turning it into a marketing campaign and a competition to see who comes out on top.

She cites the example of deodorant, which once upon a time came packaged in a cardboard box with the tube inside. "The industry eliminated the excess packaging without destroying the integrity of the product," she explains. "Together, companies came up with a solution to the problem and implemented it."

The industry can collaborate and look to see what others are doing to keep progressing as well. "The more new ideas are embraced, the more we can push the envelope," says Urlaub.

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—Julie Urlaub



Unilever is very diligent about reaching its sustainability goals, and one way the company is striving to present itself as eco-friendly is by following the lead of concentrated laundry detergents: ultra packaging where concentrated formulas provide the same product in half the packaging. Unilever's new "compressed" deodorant format—developed by Lindal Group—pioneers a new approach to deodorant packaging, branding and eco-design for brands such as Sure, Dove and Vaseline. Now on shelves throughout Europe, the smaller cans last as long as the old product, use 50% of the propellant, are half the size and reduce the overall carbon footprint of the product through 28% aluminum and further transportation and stocking gains (e.g., more packs stacked per pallet). According to Unilever, the aerosol format makes up 80% of the deodorant category.

"The aggregate savings are tremendous," says Philip Brand, Lindal's global marketing director. "By reducing packaging size, weight, shipping costs—it all impacts on supply chains as well as on product life cycle." With Lindal's Truspray system, Brand anticipates other product categories to adopt platforms that cut propellant and solvent use as well. "Development opportunities become wide open with such innovation," he explains.

As for Lindal's eye toward the future, recently the company launched its new Global Innovation Center, a facility designed to leverage the company's aerosol expertise and further support customers in development of new generation packaging solutions.

Outside the Box

By sourcing and finding innovative packaging ideas and alternatives, beauty brands can make a difference behind the scenes as well. Available sustainable

packaging materials for shipping can be 100% bio-based, including bamboo, rice, palm and sugarcane. They are inexpensive and reduce energy and water use too.

Ecovative, for example, offers molded pulp from mushroom fibers grown on a farm for protective packaging in lieu of plastic foam. The company is able to up cycle very low value waste products into renewable and home compostable packaging. Mushroom Packaging is made from agricultural byproducts bonded together with mushroom "roots" called mycelium. "This technology is a radical departure from traditional bioplastics," according to environmental director Sam Harrington.



Designers can customize Mushroom Packaging for individual applications. "Mushroom technology is a great way to protect glass bottles and cosmetic gift sets," explains Harrington. "It's an alternative that performs just as well, is cost-competitive, and provides a beautiful natural material that can be home-composted."

Such sustainable packaging options deliver both tangible benefits and emotional rewards, allowing consumers to contribute without forcing them to step outside their comfort zone. But not everyone needs to make radical modifications to make a difference. "Everyone has the ability to shift in the direction of eco-innovation by starting small and building over time," says brand owner Gran. From material to manufacture and from distribution to disposal and recycling, brands have opportunities to reduce their products' impact on the environment one step at a time. As Hines says, "Sustainable packaging isn't a destination, it's a journey." ■ GCI



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