

Reducing the World's Waste Mountain

Elotalk takes a look at how packaging design and choice of pack size can help reduce the world's increasing mountain of food and drink waste.

In the UK alone £20 billion worth of food and drink or 5.3 tonnes is thrown away, including vast amounts of milk, soup and soft drinks which are literally poured down the sink. This waste constitutes 21 per cent of all commercial waste in the UK. The main reasons why products are thrown away are because they reach the end of their shelf life or it has 'gone off' in some way including taste and consistency. (source: WRAP, Household Food and Waste in the UK, November 2009)

Elopak's Director Environment Sveinar Kildal comments, "Globally these are familiar figures as the world's food waste mountain continues to grow and cause concern. Packaging can have a positive role to play in both extending shelf life and giving a more convenient, reliable or useable indication of the product's condition or measure. There are a number of our customers who have utilised some key packaging features or simply have taken a close look at the size of its products pack and its appropriateness to the current market conditions and consumer demands. Elopak offers a wide range of sizes and configurations that can support this strategy."

Innovation creates value in Italy

Italian dairy Centrale Del Latte di Torino created a new dairy segment by launching a 1.5 litre size carton for its fresh milk Latte Fresco. In the face of a growing private label market in Italy, branded milk was losing ground in this very traditional sector where product innovation is an expensive risk. Centrale De Latte di Torino's marketing manager Eduardo Lano spoke to Elotalk about this simple but effective solution to market pressures and environmental concerns. He said, "In Italy it is usual to invest a fee to introduce new products to the retailers, and in the fresh milk market consumers are not open to innovation but demand traditional options based on quality, security and freshness. To counter this and the rise of private label we carried out market research to measure interest in a new size pack. Over 14 per cent of consumers said that they would be interested in a larger 1.5 litre size pack for milk and 30 per

cent expressed interest based on price."

Within eight weeks of launch the 1.5 litre Maxi Pure-Pak® cartons with the extra large Elo-cap™ XE achieved around 80 per cent of total distribution to retailers, a process which according to Mr Lano takes some time to achieve. He adds, "From the start the consumer could see the values of the larger pack which in turn created retailer acceptance. I have never seen a market so traditional where so many new products fail, and therefore simple but intelligent innovations are essential. The 1.5 litre pack really was a brilliant idea and brings many added benefits with the ideal family pack concept and where the consumer could see the value of more product, less





packaging and the large screw cap for extra functionality and maintaining freshness leading to less waste. With the right support in terms of marketing investment we have reduced negative trends and our branded milk now has an important competitive edge with which to face this difficult period.”

Sveinar Kildal explains, “Larger packs retain freshness for longer and with a good screw cap the quality of milk is kept for longer also. Both leads to a better lasting product which in turn gives the user more time to consume, leading to less wasted product. This is an intelligent use of pack size in a market where innovation is rarely successful. It is also an indication that we should review pack sizes on a regular basis for environmental as well as commercial reasons.”

Q-Dairy creates a window on package benefits

Norwegian dairy Q-Meieriene AS, launched its milk brand Q Melk in 1 litre Pure-Pak cartons in September 2008 with Elopak’s window feature – a small band of clear plastic which consumers can use as a measuring device. Bent Myrdahl from Q-Meieriene explained, “Research showed 53 out of 200 Norwegians were throwing milk away weekly and that food wastage had doubled in ten years. The window feature helps consumers reduce waste as it is easy to see how much milk is left. This is a new way to package daily milk and protect its quality.”

Sveinar adds, the addition of a plastic window does not make the carton environmentally unsound. The actual amount of plastic employed is a small

amount compared to the overall surface area of the carton, which can still be recycled. Add to this the savings in waste and this is a winner in terms of food waste and environment. Package design and pack sizes are important factors to curb the rising amount of food waste.

Transparent simplicity

Elopak Feature Systems (FES) devised a simple yet effective solution for German customer albi GmbH to help reduce waste for its airline customers. Working with supplier Bericap, the FES team developed a totally transparent Pure-Twist X cap for the 1 litre Diamond Curve® cartons for airline Lufthansa. This enables the airline staff to easily and accurately differentiate between opened and un-opened packs in order to adhere to strict regulations that do not permit opened liquid products across international borders.



By using semi-transparent plastic for the cap the user is able easily see it is opened as the cut removes the white carton board so a 'black' hole is visible. This provides integrity, safety and stock control benefits to the catering and leisure trade, and for consumers who buy in bulk for multi-use purposes such as parties.

Hans Lippuner, Elopak's Commercial Manager FES says, "Simplicity in design which adds key functional benefits enabled albi to meet a very important and specific customer legal and safety requirement while reducing wasted product and packaging."

The new cap won a highly commended award in the Best

Cap and Closure category at the recent Beverage Innovation 2009 awards.

The green damage from waste

According to WRAP, the greenhouse gas emissions associated with food and drink waste are the equivalent to approx. 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. Most food waste reaches landfill sites

where it emits methane, a very powerful greenhouse gas. Beverage waste costs British industry £1.6 billion annually, with around £250 million fizzy drinks, £190 million of fruit juice and smoothies thrown away every year. Brits are also pouring away £110 million

of tea and £280 million of dairy products, with 90 per cent of the milk being discarded in amounts of 50g or more.

These staggering figures are echoed all over the globe as Sveinar reports; "The right packaging size is crucial in order to reduce food waste. The trend towards increased number of single households and a growing number of elderly in Europe leads to the obvious conclusion that the optimal package size can reduce food waste. 1,5 litre milk cartons are the sustainable choice for big families, whereas a small carton will reduce food waste for a single household in London. And if we add the climate change challenge to the food waste issue there are substantially higher carbon footprints in food and drinks (in general) than in packaging. Optimal package size will actually reduce CO₂ due to reduced food waste."

Sources:

Britain bins £12bn of food and drink every year, report reveals. Rebecca Smithers, Monday 9 November 2009.
Household Food and Waste in the UK. WRAP. November 2009.
www.wrap.org.uk/retail/case_studies_research/report-households.html



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