



By Jennifer Leonardson

Brand, Packaging, and Sustainability— Can We All Get Along?

Like all packaging professionals, I've done a lot of virtual networking with my peers over the past year. One topic that keeps coming up is sustainability. Everyone seems eager to talk about it, but everyone also seems to have a different idea about what sustainability means and what the best solution could be. So, I'll add my two cents to the conversation.

As a graphic designer who works on package and label design for clients in the manufacturing and packaging space, I must stay current and continuously be learning about the packaging industry. I do this for my own business, but also to help my clients. In fact, I recently joined a group of Climate Designers to be more focused and intentional about designing for the environment.

Many considerations

I deal with regulations and compliance for all types of industries on projects that range from warning requirements for a chemical product label to the brand identity and packaging design for a new food product. It can be complicated when limited to the U.S. When a company decides to expand their reach outside of the U.S., there are even more items to consider. Each country requires specific regulations for product labels, down to the specific font size of warning text and icons, not to mention running into size constraints when adding translations to your product label.

These regulations can be confusing and conflicting, and can affect the original design of the product. That's why a graphic designer needs to problem-solve and find ways to adjust the layout to fit these items on the label, while still staying within the company's style guidelines to stay true to their brand.

When it comes to sustainability, it has become even more complex. With everyone staying at home more in 2020, we were forced to see how our daily habits contribute to waste. Having more things shipped to our homes quickly brought that fact to light. Instead of eating out and having the restaurants deal with the waste, we got to eat at home and couldn't help but see the packaging waste it creates, whether it's single-use products or through the shipping of consumer goods bought online.

Three things to consider for packaging post-COVID-19

1. How do you create new systems and processes that are more sustainable when consumers also demand individual "fast" packaging? Eliza Erskine, Owner of Green Buoy Consulting, who specializes in helping companies with their sustainability plans, says that there has been a definite shift from consumer responsibility (like recycling efforts) to more corporate responsibility.

And that shift is starting. Larger corporations that used to say "this doesn't apply to my industry" are now working with their internal departments to manage their sustainability efforts. Erskine goes on to say that even small- to medium-sized companies, which make up 80% of the economy, are following suit. The main barrier to her clients using sustainable materials is the cost to implement these programs.

2. With a definite shift from personal responsibility to more corporate responsibility, we may see more regulations coming that require using items that are more sustainable. My challenge, as a designer, is to address this without every

product looking the same. Packaging presentation is so important to the look and feel of a company's brand. Two popular examples include Apple and Gucci. Will upscale brands like these want to make a change to brown paper packaging? It's important for designers to find more sustainable design solutions if regulations change but keep the company's brand in mind while using new materials.

3. According to an article in *Fortune* magazine, consumers want more sustainable options, yet price and brand are still at the top of their list when making purchases. There is no doubt that we need a more circular product lifecycle. With companies like TerraCycle launching a global recycling program that includes recycling difficult items like car seats, etc., this will bring a policy shift with a greater emphasis on accepting more items for recycling and a trend toward designing items for the environment.

I hope these conversations are happening in the first place, and I truly believe there is a solution to this issue of sustainability. Small changes add up, and by working together, I think we'll get there. **PW**

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The author, Jennifer Leonardson, is Founder at Oxygen Design, Principal at The Sourced Collective, and a board member in the IoPP Minnesota Chapter. For information on IoPP, please visit www.iopp.org.