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Rethinking Eco-Responsible Packaging

BEAUTY PACKAGING

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Many brands in the beauty industry are looking to suppliers for more eco-optimal packaging and sustainable practices.

It seems as if nearly every day, news of an environmentally responsible beauty package or practice appears in my inbox. These announcements of advances in our industry come from suppliers, brands and organizations around the world.

Consumer demand lies at the heart of many of these packaging launches and facility or process upgrades, and when I'm out and about at events, I frequently hear about the particular influence of millennials and those in Generation Z in this regard. They are determined and powerful groups and committed to their values when making purchasing decisions. They're reading labels more carefully and looking for more transparency in the products they are willing to spend their money on. Along with being more conscious of the foods they're eating and the products they are putting on their skin and hair, they're also considering the health of the planet and, in accordance, are rethinking and altering their habits. These same factors are also weighing in on many baby boomers' product choices.

Cost efficiencies throughout the supply chain also remain a key motivator for brands investigating sustainable options in everything from materials to manufacturing processes.

Packaging Sustainability Trends

Anne Bedarf, senior manager of the Sustainable Packaging Coalition (SPC), an industry group dedicated to a more robust environmental vision for packaging, says that, in general, packaging sustainability trends tend to be the same across all sectors, including beauty. These encompass sustainable sourcing such as forest certification and biopolymer use; material optimization such as source reduction and light weighting; design for recycling and composting; and labeling for recyclability. There is also a focus on eliminating toxicity at both the product and package level.

She says there is overall increased demand for sustainable packaging and practices, “although there is a perception that it has slowed more recently.”

Bedarf believes that companies are recognizing the long-term benefits such as resiliency, risk reduction, adequacy of supply and brand equity. Environmentally responsible packaging “has become a standard practice to incorporate sustainability goals into corporate decision-making,” she explains. “There has been a big focus on metrics, measurement, and goals, but the next step of taking action against these metrics is not happening very quickly. There is a lot more pre-competitive industry collaboration.”

On the consumer side, Bedarf says demand focuses mainly on recyclability, but also as it relates to material health.

Still, she says, there is no package considered “sustainable” today; rather, attributes and other metrics—such as recycled content or percentage manufactured with renewable energy—are used collectively to meet corporate sustainability goals. So one cannot say “a brand is using X amount of sustainable packaging,” she explains.

As insufficient recycling facilities and lack of knowledge are sometimes obstacles to the end of life for some products, Bedarf suggests that consumers start looking for the SPC’s How2Recycle Label on products, including Aveda and Target brands.

General Trends

The wood used for Virospack’s sophisticated cosmetic droppers comes from sustainable, PEFC-certified forests. The rest of the components are recyclable, and the plastic components are partially recycled materials.

Much of the responsibility for achieving environmentally responsible packaging goals falls to the industry’s suppliers. In the past year, I have heard a number of outright appeals from beauty brands for suppliers to contact them if they can offer environmentally responsible packaging solutions such as increased PCR content, biodegradable bottles, innovative manufacturing solutions and the like. On the other hand, some measures that seemed to provide solutions have proved ineffective. For instance, several suppliers and brands we spoke with have dropped their light weighting approach to packaging, as in some instances, protection of the product and the look on shelf were compromised when taking this tack.

As the experimentation with packaging and the generation of satisfactory solutions continues, it remains an exciting time for innovation in the beauty industry.

In talking with numerous suppliers, brands and agencies for this article, we plotted a number of current trends.

For one, there seems to be a general feeling that environmental concerns regarding packaging are currently of greater interest in Western European nations, where sustainability is more widely regarded as a positive social behavior—and where there are also more related standards. Also, and as expected, many of the brands/products that offer “sustainable packaging” are those that have a “natural” DNA. But the list is growing all the time—and whether the brands are large or small, global or local, many are taking advantage of supplier innovation like that which we describe here.

See more at: http://www.beautypackaging.com/issues/2015-04-01/view_features/rethinking-eco-responsible-packaging/#sthash.ItO1SGNA.dpuf