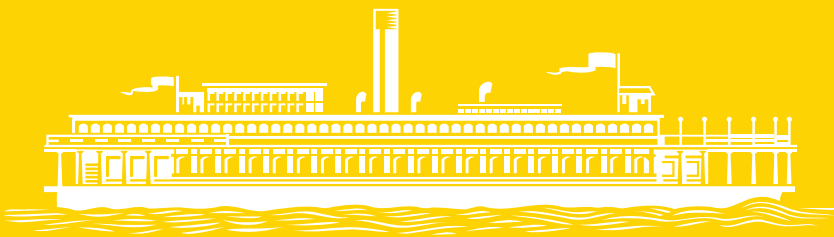


Packaging for a small planet
Navigating the sustainability maze
by Brad Scott
May 2010



Landor

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Packaging for a small planet

Navigating the sustainability maze

What's the best way to make product packaging ecofriendly?

Clients and colleagues frequently ask me some variation of this simple question. At least on the surface it appears simple enough, with a few simple answers: Using recycled cardboard and vegetable-based inks. Reducing the size of the box. Putting a recycling logo on the back panel.

Simple, right? Maybe not. To begin with, eco-friendliness is only one component of a broader issue—sustainability.

Acting sustainably means maintaining a balance and not depleting your available resources. In business this often translates into balancing costs against a product's impact on the community where you operate. Some companies refer to this as the triple bottom line, which takes into account profit, people, and planet. Businesses must turn a profit in order to keep their doors open. Workers must be paid fairly and treated decently in order for communities to thrive. And our natural resources must be used with care, respect, and an eye to the future in order for

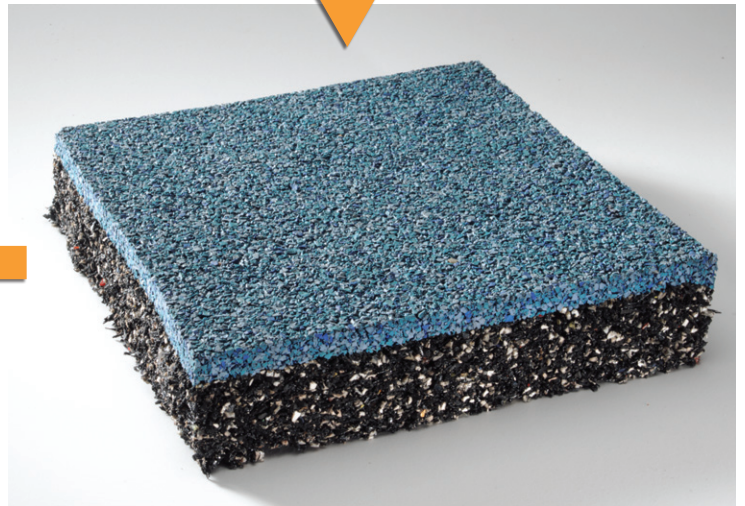
the planet to survive. All these actions sustain our collective well-being—just as mismanagement, pollution, and disrespect threaten it.

Introducing the chief sustainability officer

Another term we often hear is cradle-to-cradle or closed-loop product management, meaning that products have more than a single life or can be reborn in a new form. Nike Grind is a dazzling illustration of this concept: To date, some 25 million pairs of used athletic shoes have been collected, ground up, and turned into surfaces for playing fields.

But sustainability initiatives don't exist in a vacuum. They affect an entire business from internal operations to supply chain to marketing and sales, influencing policy in each area. Because of this, more and more companies are appointing chief sustainability officers to manage the complex and interconnected issues that sustainability raises. Smart businesses understand that to be successful they must define their goals, practices, and public relations efforts around sustainability. Packaging is an important element of all these activities.

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Nike Grind gives used athletic shoes a second life: To date, some 25 million pairs have been collected, ground up, and turned into surfaces for playing fields.



Digesting your Ps

Sustainability efforts can be summarized by what we call the three *Ps*: policy, practice, and perception. Our job as packaging designers and business strategists is to help guide our clients through this tricky maze as they develop packaging and marketing plans.

Policy is the formal statement of principles established by a company to help it operate and act in a sustainable way. Policy clearly defines intent, objectives, requirements, responsibilities, and standards. It includes the supply chain, purchasing, and legal department. Major packaging redesign projects often act as a catalyst in this area, providing an opportunity to determine, implement, and refine policies around sustainability.

In terms of packaging, *practice* is literally what is designed and specified to achieve the company's sustainability goals. This includes visual and structural design, material and print specifications, on-pack claims, and legal ramifications. It may also extend to product endorsements and assembly recommendations.

Walmart now uses an internal scorecard to evaluate packaging for products sold in its stores, with the ultimate goal of a 5 percent reduction in packaging across its global supply chain by 2013. The sheer volume of Walmart sales gives manufacturers a strong incentive to improve their performance on metrics such as energy efficiency and space utilization.

Perception has to do with how your product and company are viewed in the market. Perception is influenced by the way a product looks and performs as well as by on-pack messaging. Through our global ImagePower® Green Brands Survey, Landor has found that over the past few years a majority of consumers now seek out green products and services and anticipate buying more of them each year.

Putting it together

What are the most important things we've learned about sustainability in packaging?

Sustainability is a constant balancing act. There is no such thing as a 100 percent sustainable



package. So many variables are involved in packaging that you must decide which areas are the most critical to achieving your overall sustainability goals.

A key question to start with is: How will the packaging design affect manufacturing, shipping, use, and disposal? You may choose to focus on making packages lighter to reduce the amount of fuel needed to transport goods from one location to another (and bring down your shipping costs in the process—another plus). Or you may opt for packaging that contains a higher percentage of recycled materials. Both areas present significant opportunities, but they may be mutually exclusive when it comes to execution.

You don't have to look green to be green. Unbleached corrugated cardboard screams, "Green!" but may not be the look you're going for. No worries—these days it's easy to design a premium-looking package that is also sustainable. Try using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper with an ecofriendly coating. Harmful metallics can now be replaced by environmentally friendly inks that create comparable tones. Do the research and push your design team to explore sustainable ways of achieving the results you're looking for.

Any claims you make must be substantiated. It's natural to want to tell consumers what you're doing. But before you slap a logo on your package, make sure your actions back up your claims. Consumer watch groups are quick to denounce brands they believe are greenwashing or condoning unsustainable practices.

Paper sourced from a forest that is certified sustainable may qualify to carry a logo from the FSC or the Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification. These globally recognized symbols indicate to consumers that the packaging materials come from renewable forests whose habitats are actively protected.

We strongly advise clients to set up tracking systems to verify that material specifications are being properly executed. An added benefit to tracking is the potential for telling your story to the public. Nokia's boxes now proudly announce that by reducing its packaging and print materials, the company has saved 100,000 tons of paper and removed 12,000 trucks from the road.

One little specification can make a big difference—for good or bad. One simple reduction in packaging may have an exceptional impact that translates into less material, less fuel, and less space. On the flip side, specifying some kinds of coatings, such as high-gloss laminates, to be applied over recyclable materials can render them completely unrecyclable.

We often recommend that our clients who use corrugated cardboard in their packaging switch from E flute to F flute. Not only is F flute half the size, meaning it requires considerably less material to make, it is more rigid and therefore creates boxes that are more crush resistant.

Puma has gone a step further in minimizing its "paw print"—by eliminating cardboard shoeboxes altogether and replacing them with the Clever Little Bag. According to the shoe manufacturer,

Using F flute (top) corrugated cardboard instead of E flute (bottom) can save considerable material and create boxes that are more crush resistant.



TOP Nokia offers products without a charger for customers who already have one, avoiding unnecessary energy use on manufacturing and shipping.

BOTTOM Nokia's packaging is 95 percent paper-based, and the company is increasing the amount of recycled plastics only when plastics are necessary.



this revolutionary move will save substantial amounts of paper, electricity, and water, as well as reduce carbon dioxide output and labor costs.

The person across the aisle may be your best resource. Given the flurry of business activity around sustainability and corporate responsibility these days, there are likely to be many people within your organization who can share information with you. Has your procurement department done research into finding printers who score high on sustainable practices? Has someone on your legal team analyzed sustainability claims and their risks? And don't forget corporate communications or government affairs employees—they may have insight into global manufacturing policies and certifications.

Recycling and sustainability are not the same thing. The ultimate goal is to use materials that are renewable and sustainable. Using recycled paper is good, but sourcing materials from a sustainable forest is even better.

Although plastic clamshell packaging may be labeled recyclable, the vast majority of clamshells still wind up in landfills because most sorting facilities are unable to distinguish between clamshells made of PET and those made of PVC plastic. Amazon.com has taken the lead in offering customers alternatives to the difficult-to-open clamshells through its Frustration-Free Packaging initiative for products sold on its website.

One of the most powerful sustainability moves you can make is reclaiming packaging materials at the point of purchase. Make it a part of your retail policy

to request that consumers leave packaging behind. They have less to carry home from the store, you get the packaging back to be reused, and recycling isn't left to chance.

Wrapping it up

Acting responsibly toward the planet and its inhabitants isn't just the right thing to do, it's fast becoming a requisite for doing business in today's global marketplace. Governments legislate it, consumers demand it, and watch groups aggressively monitor corporate behavior around it.

Packaging is an ideal vehicle to showcase and promote your brand's commitment to sustainability. In many cases, the package consumers hold in their hands is the one touchpoint where they can see a company's sustainability policies in action. Be aggressive in pushing for sustainable design: Mandate it within your corporation, require it of your business partners, and insist on it in the products you buy. ■



Puma's Clever Little Bag replaces the cardboard shoebox with a reusable bag. This innovative system builds efficiencies into manufacturing and distribution by decreasing the amount of raw materials and energy used, reducing the amount of weight transported, and eliminating the need for extra carrier bags.

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