



# Position Paper The Case For Packaging



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## The Case For Packaging

Contain, protect, inform, preserve, transport and sell... those are the primary functions of Packaging. These functions can be observed during manufacturing, transportation, storage, selling, and end-use of any package.

While the egg is, in many aspects, nature's perfect package, perhaps the first man-made packages were animal skins, used to contain liquid to be carried on a hunt from village to village. Later, pottery and eventually, glass became the containers of choice, probably because they made transportation and storage more convenient, and protected the product better. Shortly after the word 'competition' was made manifest, packages began to change again, becoming more attractive, more colorful, and more shapely, helping to differentiate similar products, one from the other. Packaging became as much art as science. Packaging became a silent sales tool attracting customers through the creative use of graphics and the imaginative use of different materials.

And so it is today, especially in the industrialized world where there are multitudes of different products designed to perform different functions. Packages protect the product, but sometimes they also protect the manufacturer, the user, and the environment from the product as well. Consider for example, the case of insecticides or any hazardous material.

Many people find packaging objectionable, for a variety of reasons: hard to open, hard to close, wasteful, burdening the environment. But, it is a fact that the package is essential to our lives. Without packaging, products will not get to market. It is perhaps the most common of man-made objects that we encounter every day... everywhere. And it performs an invaluable set of services, including security and traceability.

The services provided by packaging can support the overall societal challenge of a sustainable society. A good packaging choice can support the development in all three dimensions of sustainability, i.e. people (society), profit (economy) and planet (environment). From an economic perspective, a good package should be cost-efficient as it travels through the supply chain. Ideally, it should provide user value that generates both revenue and savings at the same time. Packaging is essential as a means to facilitate trade and economic growth globally, particularly in the development of emerging markets.

Packaging should also provide a good user interface to make our daily packaging encounters enjoyable experiences. Packaging is essential to the social dimension of sustainability, considerably influencing our perceived quality of life. The package should be easy to open and re-close, information provided must be easily recognized and readable both electronically and by eye, and it should be of the right size to match consumption, handling, and storage demands. It should be lean on resource consumption. The package should prevent its contents from being spoiled and also be recoverable in order to support Society's goal of a better environment.

Despite packaging's benefits to society and our contemporary lifestyle, packaging has unjustly become a symbol to illustrate societal waste problems, excess consumption and so on. Perhaps packaging would enjoy a better reputation if the true performance of packaging with regard to society, economics and the environment were understood better.

Innovation, knowledge expansion and knowledge transfer are key elements in packaging development. WPO – World Packaging Organisation contributes through the education, WorldStar and WorldStar Student Award

Programs, within the framework of its mission: “Better Quality of Life through Better Packaging for More People”. So, Packaging Professionals, Suppliers, and Users need to jointly address some of these major issues.

**Ease of use** – An example of a package where new development is needed is the blister pack or clamshell package. No one likes to open it but manufacturers know that both package styles reduce damage and pilferage. Cereal packages with ‘excellent’ heat seals are also hard to open without tearing... and when they tear, they are hard to close, wasting food. There are better materials and methods, but they are likely to be more expensive in a narrow, raw material cost-only perspective. A total cost-benefit equation together with holistic education is the solution here.

**Environmental performance** – Over-packaging is seen as a significant problem. Using more packaging materials or the wrong materials may protect the product well, but this approach likely wastes resources. But, under-packaging is typically even more wasteful. Product damage wastes the resources that have been put into manufacturing the product. This can be ten times more than the resources used for the package. The solution is ‘right-sized’ packaging. ‘Right-sized’ packaging can be defined as the tipping point where just enough materials are used to accomplish the purpose of the package.

There is also the issue of balancing material minimization (reduce) and performance against the need to reuse, recycle, and recover. An example would be the use of multi-layer films, which tend to be less recyclable but more effective versus recyclable materials or more resource intense mono-materials. A possible solution to this challenge is to use energy recovery. Littering; that is, discarding packaging waste on the ground or in the water is actually more a cultural problem than a packaging problem, but nevertheless the packaging industry has to engage to solve this matter. The answers are consumer education about disposal, stronger laws regarding littering, and comprehensive programs that coordinate individual, public, and government efforts to address the 4 R’s... Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Recover.

In order to address some of these challenges, it is important that Packaging Professionals have both design and technical awareness, supported by knowledge of packaging materials and their applications. All too often, those at the sharp end of the process lack this expertise. WPO and its constituent organisations stand at the forefront of promoting professionalism in packaging and can foster education in these skill sets across the globe.

The notion of Sustainable Packaging is a relatively new and essential component that has to be part of the thought process of every Packaging Professional from this moment forward. Sustainable Packaging techniques and requirements are already being woven into the fabric of many cultures around the world. Consequently, Packaging can become a very powerful tool for educating people about Sustainability. The practical, common sense application of Sustainable Packaging principles has the unique capacity to teach everyone about how a Sustainable Society can function.

Superior packaging is about changing our habits and our mindset so that we think in a different hierarchy, with the 4 R’s nearer the top of the list. No matter what the solutions, they are likely to be part of a long-term incremental process that will employ a blend of technologies, applied in context, with a measure of common sense. The Case for Packaging is clear, and good news for the Packaging Professional and for long-term Sustainability.