

Are you ready for retail?

RRP is an essential element in modern packaging, yet presents some unique challenges for designers, as recognised in the Starpack awards

Retail Ready Packaging (RRP) ticks virtually all the boxes for utility, versatility, impact and sustainability, so it seems almost churlish to question its credentials as one of the major 'plus' factors of modern packaging. Yet even the proponents of RRP admit that, in its early days, there were some questions to answer when compared with other forms of transit and display packaging.

One of the first questions was: Does it look good? The traditional 'brown box' or case did not have to be pretty as it wasn't going anywhere near a supermarket shelf. All it needed was product identification and transit information. Ray Cherrie, Packaging Innovations Manager, United Biscuits, and something of an expert on RRP, cites several horror stories where early RRP packs showed signs of wear and, definitely, tear in transit. Furthermore, the product was difficult to access and poorly presented.

A suite of styles

However, the industry quickly realised that good design could easily overcome this problem. They set to work making a whole range of styles to suit different products, ranging from chilled food and confectionery through to drinks and other, heavier items, such as bottles of sauce and condiments.

Just how far the industry has been successful in making a virtue of good RRP design was reflected in last year's Starpack Awards, organised by IOP: The Packaging Society. Several packs won major awards in the 'retail-ready' and 'display and collation' categories, together with the 'transit to consumer' and 'environmental' categories.

A typical example was created for Tetley Fruit Teas by Easypack and the POP Display Group. This easy-to-erect carton incorporates internal baffles which create an effective self-vending

system, ensuring that the product is always displayed at the front of the pack. The carton has an integral ramp at the top to 'roll' the product backwards for ease of filling, whilst the inner corrugated fitting divides the two columns of four tubs to stop them nesting. This also creates the slanted platform to roll the product forward at point-of-sale.

Take it easy

The outer pack is cartonboard with high-quality printing, whilst the internal corrugated fitting comprises plain white/test 'E' fluting to provide the required strength. This fitting also imparts stackable strength to the unit when palletising, thereby eliminating the need for an outer case. Clearly printed instructions and effective perforations make it easy to remove the front panel for shelf display.

These two latter requirements; clear instructions and good perforations, are something Ray Cherrie feels are particularly important. Several early attempts at RRP were defeated by over-complex assembly or preparation with poor perforation profiles which caused ragged edge tears or disruption of the surface print to expose the sub-surface brown fluting.

In the eye of the beholder

Shelf-impact, particularly for 'luxury' products, is integral to the success of RRP. A prime example from Starpack 2008 was created by D S Smith Speciality Packaging for the Cadbury Luxury Chocolate Drink.

The luxury sensation is provided by the use of flexographic printing, halftones and the use of metallic inks "to create a striking image". The combination of 'E' fluting and a simple pack design produced a "very stable pack with a perforation profile which works well".



Keeping it green

However, sustainability remains one of the key factors affecting the success of RRP, and this is the area where it has come under the most attack from critics who point to several weaknesses in the case for RRP's 'green' credentials. In particular, the average RRP is smaller than a SKU or other transit case or pack. This means more cartonboard or corrugated per product as collations are smaller, (18s rather than 24s for example). This means there are less products per pallet, resulting in more pallets in circulation, meaning that there are more transit miles overall.

Supporters of shrinkwrapping point to the reduced cost per pack when compared with using board, indicating that machine design improvements have significantly reduced energy consumption. Furthermore, as more plastic is now being recycled, the major argument for board usage becomes weaker.

Once again Ray Cherrie of United Biscuits states the case for RRP effectively: "Like most major investments, moving to RRP is not a short-term solution and should not be seen as such. It will require changes to equipment and possibly increased automation levels. And RRP needs to be looked at holistically in terms of the overall benefits across the supply chain. The benefits to the retailer and consumer should not be underestimated." ■

▲ **Left:** Functionality and on-shelf appeal combine in the RRP for Cadbury's Luxury Chocolate Drink

Right: This easy-to-erect carton incorporates internal baffles, thereby creating a self-vending system

Starpack 2009 Logistic Packaging Solutions categories are:
Transit – business-to-business (including business-to-retailer)
Transit – business-to-consumer
Retail Ready and Display & Collation

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