

# A postcard with a difference

Swedish company Expericard has successfully created a new CD/DVD postcard packaging solution that provides a unique way for both the direct marketing and leisure industries to deliver content to its target audience. Darren Lock reports

**W**hen one thinks of optical media packaging for CDs or DVDs, the mind quickly thinks of plastic jewel cases and Amaray-style cartons because polypropylene packaging is synonymous with both those formats. Despite technology advancing to allow paper and card-based packaging to be developed for those formats, media publishers have often returned to plastic packs because they are cheap and a robust means of protecting their content.

But there are some applications where plastic packaging just won't make the grade. When CDs and DVDs are used for promotional purposes and are bound into magazines or sent out in a mail-shot, all-paper packaging is a necessity and one company that recognises this and has successfully acted upon it is Expericard. The Swedish company has developed a means of packing CDs and DVDs in a postcard style envelope made from stiff card, which by means of a perforated window allows access to the media held safely inside. Once the perforated window is opened, the disc is then free to move in and out of the packaging. Despite being card stock, the packaging is surprisingly tough and resilient and does a good job at protecting the disc contained within.

## Concept, creation and design

The idea for the Expericard style of packaging came about during the autumn of 2003 when the company was faced with the problem of finding



Peter Gustafsson (left) and Johan Phil



Expericard provides a money-saving direct marketing solution

a cost-effective way of distributing 100,000 CD-ROM discs which were part of a marketing campaign. "The main problem was that the total weight of the disc inside a package made the postal fees almost higher than the whole production itself, thus the whole economy of the project was challenged," explains Peter Gustafsson, the CEO of Expericard. "All the available packaging solutions for optical discs were too heavy and expensive. Also, due to the rather large quantity we saw that



all manual steps in the production heavily increased the total cost of the package and, more importantly, the postage."

So a means of overcoming the spiralling costs was sought and the company began to investigate the cost of designing its own specialist packaging solution that would be light enough to avoid excessive postage costs caused by the extra weight of alternate traditional optical media packaging and that could also be produced without any manual steps. After an initial design period and investigation of different production plants, the company came up with something that looked and felt like a regular postcard.

**"The potential of cutting distribution costs and at the same time pinpointing target groups with content is enormous."**



**The Vatican uses Expericard**

When developing the prototype Expericard, factors like weight, size, printability, stiffness, thickness and low density were crucial. The total weight of the A6 format pack including the disc was not allowed to exceed 20g and the pack had to have a stiffness in the cardboard for handling and quality. The card stock also needed to be of sufficient quality that it could be printed on with 175 lines and that it ran smoothly through the fully automatic production line and was compatible with the laser-guided glue heads. They were looking for thickness, but not weight, in order to have a solid basin in which to place the disc. But weight would be an important factor when keeping postage costing down and selling this product to clients as a viable, money-saving direct marketing solution.

After that, three different designs of the Expericard were developed and the company applied for the European and US patents for the new postcard packaging. At the moment, the company offers two formats of the Expericard: the A5 pack is 210 x 148mm and weighs 34g with a disc, while the A6 pack is 148 x 105mm and weighs only 18g with a disc, which allows for the lowest postal rates worldwide. The company had successfully created a new packaging solution that would be able to prove itself in the direct marketing and leisure industries.

"We have definitely filled a gap in the market and we see our business growing in two major sectors: the direct marketing industry and the museum retail market. In the direct marketing sector, we provide a cost efficient way to deliver content via optical discs, where a typical client is a car company who really wants to show the new car model in all its splendour using the high definition

picture and sound of a DVD," says Gustafsson, "On the retail market, we deliver a completely new type of postcard, where the visitor buys one postcard but gets the whole experience on the disc. Today, we work closely with museums so that Expericard products can be sold at their museum shops."

Gustafsson sees his product as a truly revolutionary way to distribute content and that the full potential of the Expericard has yet to be exploited. Already, the company has clients in the retail sector such as The British Museum, The National Gallery, The Vatican and Tate Modern, where their products are used to package DVD and CD items. The other side of the business deals with direct marketing and has been used for promotional campaigns by companies as varied as Toyota Corporation, General Motors, Ultimate Bet and The Discovery Channel.

The Expericard packaging can be fulfilled on a fully automatic production line. "As part of the design work, we soon realised that price and logistics were everything and so we worked to develop a fully automatic production line," explains Gustafsson. "We can add a direct address onto the postcard in the line and match a personalised disc with the corresponding recipient using Sony's n-cd function." The company now has three plants in operation; one of these at AGI Van de Steeg in the Netherlands, one at AGI Melrose Park in Chicago and one in Stockholm, Sweden.

As the product is still quite new on the marketplace, Expericard is working very hard on getting potential clients to see the benefits and potential of the new system in the marketplace. Often, Expericard projects begin with an initial dialogue between the company and their client where the various design possibilities are presented. The actual process of getting the discs and Expericard

containers out is remarkably swift. "If we get the discs from the client/disc replicator and we do the fulfilment and the printing, the process takes between five to seven days. However, we can produce up to 1,500,000 units in two weeks," says Gustafsson, describing just how quickly his company can meet the demands of the marketplace.

There was 71 minutes of video footage to be split up into 17 parts and put onto an 8cm DVD. This was packaged inside the A6 Expericard, allowing us to reduce a 956g catalogue to a video catalogue that weighed just 18g. It was direct addressed onto the postcard to all recipients and the viewer could enjoy the presentation at home in their own environment."

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### Case study

A good case study of how the Expericard concept can change a promotional model and be implemented is what the company produced for the MyTravel Group, which is one of Sweden's largest travel agents. MyTravel distributes a 956g catalogue, bi-yearly, to promote its holiday resorts, the same way its competitors take its products to the consumer. Gustafsson explains how they implemented the Expericard solution in this instance: "We were given filmed material from each destination, the resorts, films explaining the concept, room alternatives, swimming pools, the food and entertainment, etc.

The resulting completed Expericard project ended up costing a quarter of what it would have done distributing the catalogue that it replaced, making a great saving in terms of production costs and postage. This case study gives you an interesting insight into how a packaging format can radically change a company's marketing method and provides a 21st century solution to an age old problem: getting the consumer to book a holiday. In this case the DVD replaces the catalogue and the consumer gets to see and hear the resort they might think of booking.

But the Expericard isn't just about direct marketing and sending optical media through the

post. The latest application of the technology allows Expericard to bind a DVD into a magazine, replacing the need to manually attach covermount cases, which can easily get lost. The Expericard DiscInsert also allows the reader to put the disc back into the card after viewing, so that the disc doesn't go astray and provides a convenient container.

### Looking ahead

The future is looking bright for the company as it became part of the Bonnier Group, which acquired a majority stake in the organisation. So what's next for Expericard? Gustafsson has a clear vision of the next phase for his product: "Our objective for the near future is to become partners with various content holders. We believe that we could show content companies a completely new way to reach their market, thus creating a multitude of new business opportunities. Secondly is for Expericard to become an industry standard for all disc manufacturers. Thirdly, to develop our newest product extension: the Expericard DiscInsert, an Expericard that is automatically bound into magazines. The potential of cutting distribution costs and at the same time pinpointing target groups with content is enormous."

Indeed, with more media being sent via the mail, both commercially and privately, and with content owners looking for new ways to distribute their discs, the Expericard could soon become the industry standard that Gustafsson hopes for. ●