

# BDMO – upgrading packaging

BDMO believes that being at the front of the trends, rather than bringing up the rear, is one key to success – creativity and added value are also vital elements in this company's strategy for success. Elizabeth Toppin discovers a merge of packaging at this pan-European company

**P**ackaged entertainment. Chocolates. Motor racing. What a great combination. And the connection? Packaging specialist BDMO, a Belgian holding company, comprised of two units, from which it gets its name: Bruggeman & Desouter in Meulebeke, Belgium and Montreuil Offset in Le Mans, France (hence the motor racing association). The BDMO entity has been in existence since 2004, drawing from both packaging and print expertise in its history.

Refreshingly, in today's market, the company's main business is packaged media, which comprises about 70% of its work, with packaging for chocolates making up the other 30%. Let me state now that, yes, there is a natural female inclination to think, and talk, and write about chocolate, but leaving that aside, there are parallels between packaging for

physical entertainment formats and chocolate. Particularly the high-end, Godiva-type chocolates (a market that BDMO has cornered, says managing director Geert Casselman, as most Belgian chocolates will be in the company's packaging). But back to physical media and company strategy.

equal and opposite reaction and so rock-bottom priced discs can have a positive consequence. Packaging becomes more important as a marketing tool, providing a backlash to commodity media with the need for product to catch the consumer's eye at retail.

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“One of our strategies is not to be a follower, but to be a trend-setter. For that reason we have solutions for both the BD and HD DVD formats, and we also continue to investigate new applications,” says Casselman. There are card-and-tray cases with single and double push trays for BD and HD DVD, as well as other applications such as CD cards, where there are similar solutions.

“We are testing the market for other possibilities in data storage – is there a market for USB sticks, for instance?”

These markets are not very huge but there is potential for growth.” Which, of course, there is, with recent releases of music on flash memory cards, and the announcement that Island Records is releasing Bob Marley's album *Exodus* on a USB stick.

## Marketing tool

Diversification – are we tired of that word yet in our beleaguered industry? There is no getting away from it these days; however, the fact that CD and

DVD are mature to the point of being a commodity is not a completely dismal situation, says Casselman. There is an almost Newtonian logic to what he says – for every action there must be an

“Prices are very low for many applications, but what is interesting in packaging, particularly for multimedia, is that as soon as there is a lot of pressure on product prices people start to look for alternatives. They start wanting special packaging, something that is not standard, so their product will stand out at retail and they can charge a higher price.”

That, says Casselman, means good business for them, even in the ‘download era’ (yes, we're probably all tired of that phrase too), and the company has even created a new slogan to reflect the trend of wanting to create – and charge for – premium packaged media.

“Our slogan is ‘Upgrading Packaging’ – that means not just the packaging itself but the product that comes into the packaging. It's like chocolates – if you buy them in a very simple box they do not have the same perceived value as chocolates in a fancy box. It makes sense: like chocolates, physical media, if being purchased for special occasions, have to look special. For Valentine's Day or Mother's Day, you don't buy a box of chocolates in a plain box – you want the one with the ribbons and hearts and flowers.

“Special packaging becomes particularly important with downloading of music, and even movies, becoming more common. People don't download everything. For instance, if you want to buy a gift for someone, you're not going to download it and give it to them on a

Individualised packaging is an important aspect of BDMO's industry offerings





The tray-and-card format lends itself to some very flexible solutions

you have to set-up your machines and change them every thousand units, say, compared with maybe 100 thousand, or course it makes it more expensive. This is where automation becomes important.”

## Recycled materials

The environment is another buzz word facing most companies in today’s industry. Replicators say that content owners are increasingly starting to look at how their vendors stack up when it comes to being environmentally responsible. When it comes to green issues, packaging itself is particularly targeted, often being in the front line of perceived ‘baddies’ when it comes to being green or otherwise. What kind of impact does this have on a packaging company, particularly one that relies on providing special packaging for premium products?

“The concern about environmentally friendly packaging is still a small area of interest, but it is definitely growing with regards to multimedia,” Casselman states. “More and more customers – and potential customers – want to be sure that we have the proper levels of concern for the environment.” To this end, the company uses as much as possible chlorine-free and recyclable cardboard, and environmentally friendly inks, varnishes, and glues.

“Recycled material isn’t always cheaper; sometimes it is, but often it can be more expensive,” Casselman says, “especially if you only want to use one material: then you can end up with something that is more expensive. However, if the studios want to be trendsetters as environmentally-friendly companies, then we try to come up with solutions for them. Sometimes it is a critical factor, but up to now it has not been essential to provide, say, packaging with a particular type of recycled material. However, I can imagine that it may happen in the future.”

Apart from games, music and movies, as the company also provides packaging for food, there is even more pressure on their packaging materials, particularly in EU countries with border-crossing directives on health and safety.

*(Continued on page 30)*

plain disc. You will want to buy the special edition of a music album or movie, with extra value and in a special package. Many studios and music labels are looking for special packaging to add value to their products.”

The company’s products break down into two main branches: the packaging for multimedia, and the rigid boxes for various applications. The two main facilities where manufacturing is carried out, Le Mans is mainly focused on the manufacture of multimedia packaging, and Meulebeke concentrates primarily on making the rigid boxes. In addition, there is a sales office in Paris, and the company is looking to expand its sales office network in the UK and Germany. The company employs about 180 people, roughly split as 60 in Belgium and 120 in France.

## The multimedia mix

BDMO’s markets are focused in Europe; their markets with the rigid boxes for chocolates, games, gifts and other applications are primarily Benelux, France, and Germany; for CD, DVD, and other entertainment packaging, customers are spread throughout Europe. In France, as Casselman says, BDMO is the biggest packaging company, and that is where their main market is, with Germany second and Benelux third. The company also has its sights set on moving into the UK market – hence the plans for a sales office there.

In the multimedia side, they are still producing about 30% of their cases for CD and 70% for DVD. With the rise in special packaging, says Casselman, there is a special R&D department to develop special packages for media and other applications. Functionality has to go hand in hand with appearance, and there is a dedicated CAD/CAM section to develop packages up to a working 3D model. After that, the company’s graphics team takes over to come up with designs that fit with the product image and live up to the company’s slogan of upgrading packaging.

Two big issues are automation and environmental concerns. Although it is sometimes inevitable that a concept may involve a level of manual assembly towards the end of production, the overall strategy is to keep as much of the assembly within the packaging line as possible, says Casselman.

“We try to keep our production as automated as possible and whenever we develop a new package, the need for automation is always a key background concept. It is entirely possible to create a great deal of special packaging that is suitable for automation on existing machines. It is better all round that we continue to provide concepts that we can make ourselves.”

Keeping the process automated and in-house means controlling costs and reducing lead times. Both of these factors are always important but they play a particularly big role in today’s industry. As with so many other companies, BDMO’s customers are increasingly working with short runs and smaller orders.

“Of course the cost of packaging is directly related to the size of runs,” says Casselman. “If

Even simple boxes can add a feel of luxury and quality when a lot of care has gone into the graphics and the finish





**The standard box remains one of the most regular demanded packs by clients**

*(Continued from page 29)*

“For our chocolates customers, we have had to spend a lot of attention on ensuring that our packaging is adapted for food applications, even though there is no direct contact between the chocolates and our boxes. Two years ago it was not an issue and packaging companies could use whatever cardboard, paper and ink they wanted. Now, we have to prove that everything we use – glue, cardboard, paper – is acceptable for the food industry.”

What that means is that chocolates packaging has to be not only environmentally friendly, but human friendly. Quite literally – even if the packaging doesn’t touch the chocolates, because it is for food, it has to be safe enough, that even if someone were to eat the packaging itself, it would not harm them.

Another important issue in the world of entertainment is, of course, piracy – or, rather, anti-piracy measures. Here is another instance in which special packaging becomes not only a marketing tool, but a way in which content owners can counteract the piracy.

“Because of our belief that customers should upgrade their packaging, that provides

them with a product that will not only be distinctive but also be harder for pirates to copy. For instance, if you see a movie on a DVD in a classical Amaray-style box with a printed insert, it may not be obviously a pirate copy, as that style of package is relatively easy to copy. When you have a more specialised package, even a simple Digipak-type case, it becomes less easy to copy, so special packaging can be in part an answer to fighting against piracy.”

Summing up, Casselman is confident that packaged media still has quite a bit of life in it yet. “Especially if the packaging is special, because people will always want to buy

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something that is a collector’s item, or as a gift for someone else.”

To that end, he says, the company continues to look for new markets and new applications, to examine new technologies and innovations – “And always to be aware that that competition is everywhere and very active!” ●