

Being green – it's the right thing to do

Ecological issues are nothing new for Ross-Ellis, part of the Transcontinental Printing Group, as Frank Salvaggio, general manager, tells Elizabeth Toppin, but there is still a long way to go

How important is it for Ross-Ellis to continue developing 'green' packaging? And is keeping the production process 'green' as important as the packaging itself?

It is extremely important for Ross-Ellis to continue developing green packaging simply because it is the way of the future, and not just for the media industry. This is no trend; fundamentally, it is the right thing to do. As such, people are very interested in what is being said and written on the subject. Many are concerned about the future of our planet. So, it is obvious that we need to make some changes and that starts with us as individuals. I make changes myself in as many ways as I can, such as moderating my driving speed to use less fuel, and recycling everything that can be recycled.

As consumers we will make decisions to choose green products to some extent by the packaging they are in. At Ross-Ellis, we will continue to develop green media packaging and improve our processes further both because it's the right thing to do and also because in the long term it makes sense financially.

Was it a company strategy or did it come about through outside pressure?

It is a combination of both. You see, for a long period of time, Montreal has had very strict emissions controls for the printing industry in particular. Also, there is a provincial 'chemical products and waste disposal code' in Québec that is equally stringent. We have, however, also developed our own green systems for recycling and recovering materials which

“Green packaging is the way of the future, and not just for the media industry”

make sense for Ross-Ellis. It isn't just a trendy thing to do as a result of heightened awareness – we have been doing it for quite a while now!

If there is pressure from outside the company, where is it coming from – from content owners or retailers? Or both?

We've had the occasional request for green packaging from content owners and artists.

The real pressure, however, has come from Wal-Mart. In fact, they continue to put a lot of pressure on all of their DVD and CD suppliers. Wal-Mart has all of their suppliers working towards sustainable packaging! Their drive for sustainable packaging shows real leadership on such a critical issue and we are proud to have participated at Wal-Mart Canada's Sustainable Packaging conferences where we presented our green media packaging to their supplier group.

All of our green products far exceed Wal-Mart's mandated reductions. Benefits include weight, volume and materials reductions. We are also working with some of our clients to develop green solutions for their specific packaging needs. But until a new standard is developed, the pressure will continue from Wal-Mart and others within the industry.

What materials do you use in your green media packaging?

Media packaging consists of two major components – paper and/or board, and plastic. We use exclusively FSC Certified paper and are increasingly using 100% recycled board. Digipak trays are now available in 100% recycled plastic. Other trays (CDStar, DVStar, DiscBookLite) will soon be available in recycled plastic. We encourage our customers to use



The DVD E-Pak, made of 100% recycled board, and biodegradable

more board packaging, and the DVStar and CDStar are great improvements over traditional alternatives in terms of their reduced weight, volume and use of materials.

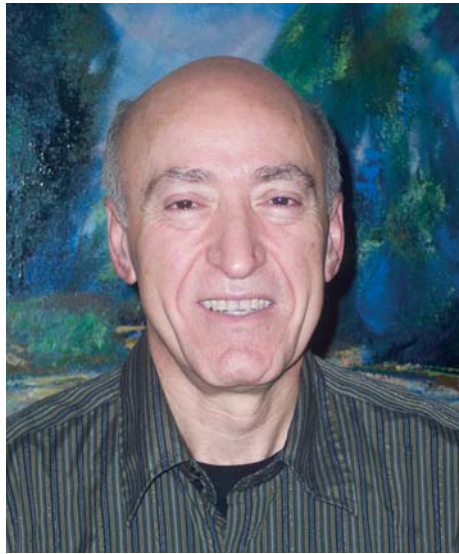
Will all media packaging eventually become environmentally responsible or are there obstacles, either perceptual or practical?

When it comes to recycled plastic, there's still a lack of sufficient availability. It must be noted, though, that there is ongoing development on many fronts that should result in more availability of recycled plastic and other innovative materials in the near future. We have suppliers, both domestic and overseas, that are working on these supply issues. As was the case with paper and board sometime ago, supply will increase to satisfy the growing demand from customers wanting ecological alternatives.

How does this shortage affect your products?

Although we presently have good supplies of 100% recycled plastic Digipak trays, some of the other products that we make, such as the DVStar and the DiscBookLite, do not have the components injected with 100% recycled plastic due to the lack of raw material availability. I predict that this raw material shortage should ease within six months to a year.

In the meantime, we offer products that are quite an improvement over traditional



Frank Salvaggio

packaging alternatives. For instance, our DVStar and CDStar use less than half of the plastic content and take up less than half the space of other alternatives. They are also lighter so they cost less to ship and take up less space in warehouses and on retailer shelves. All round, the DVStar, CDStar, and other green packaging solutions we have, such as the E-Pak, are more economical and require less

materials and other scarce resources – and will be even more attractive when made with 100% recycled plastic.

How important are things like the FSC certification to Ross-Ellis specifically and the industry in general?

The FSC (Chain of Custody) certification is very important for Ross-Ellis! It provides a practical and cost-effective solution to the problem of the depletion of our forests. It ensures that any new fibre in the paper and board we use can be traced to well managed, environmentally friendly forest operations. All the participants in the FSC chain are audited periodically to ensure the process is maintained by everyone in the chain.

I strongly encourage media packaging suppliers who are not yet FSC certified to do so in short order so we, as an industry, can do our part in protecting our environment. Equally important are production practices and processes. These must also be environmentally sound as FSC certification only deals with part of the problem.

Are you optimistic about the future for environmentally responsible media packaging?

Yes, I'm very encouraged by the response of content owners in particular! Several of them, including the big studios, are trying to meet Wal-Mart's sustainable packaging requirements.

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The CD Digipak, made of 100% recycled board and a tray of 100% recycled plastic



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These are not easy changes though, because there is so much at stake. For example, investment in high-speed CD and DVD packaging lines, warehousing systems, etc. Shelving at retail is essentially geared towards the Amaray box; if the Amaray is replaced with thinner packaging, this will have a major impact on the entire product merchandising process.

There are a lot of things that need to change, including attitudes, but it will happen gradually.

sustainable media packaging. Slim, light, and environmentally friendly media packaging alternatives are now available. The disc insertion issues will be solved shortly through automation. The other implications on the industry and retailers are all positive – reduced bulk and weight results in reduced freight and storage costs, as well as reduced shelving requirements at retail. This should help maintain more SKUs on retail shelves for both standard and new high definition DVD formats.

“There’s no obstacle that cannot be overcome in the quest for sustainable media packaging.”

Even if Amaray cases were to be made with 100% recycled plastic when that is more readily available, do you think they still should – and will – be phased out?

Yes, because they take up more space than necessary. Packaging needs to slim down. Current practices and packaging products are somewhat wasteful, and space will become more of an issue with many consumers, possibly encouraging more digital distribution and storage of content. We do a lot of packaging for independent distributors and content owners – and most of these products are packaged in board packages. Apart from a disc insertion issue, this is more economical and definitely more environmental.

There’s no obstacle that cannot be overcome in the quest for

Isn’t there a conflict between reducing packaging and the continued demand for special packaging, which can be very elaborate and is designed to take up space and be noticed?

We also do some elaborate special packaging but it doesn’t need to have a lot of bulk to be noticed. In fact, bulk does not add any real value. I do think we can still add value to a package that is slim through features such as embossing, spot varnish, foil stamping, etc. There are some examples of DVD box sets containing up to six or seven Amaray boxes. We can put that many discs in a DVStar that is a fraction of the volume and a lot lighter, with much less plastic in the packaging – and trust me, it can be just as impressive as the Amaray box set! ●