

Breaking down the truth

In the second part of her analysis of the impact of paper and plastic packaging, Debbie Galante Block asks what steps the entertainment industry is taking to go green

Companies continue to step up their innovations in terms of green and sustainable packaging. As we reported in the last issue, development is not as easy as it sounds. New information is being learned every day about paper and plastic products, and how to make them safer for the environment. Most industry sources agree that both materials will co-exist, and it is important to know as much as possible about handling them.

No matter what the material is, the key is to “slim down packaging and come as close to the size thickness of the disc. When you have a slimmer package, benefits are many. In addition to being more environmentally friendly, slimmer packages are more cost effective. It will take a while to get there. Marketers are reluctant to move away from the standards that exist right now,” says Frank Salvaggio, general manager, Ross-Ellis.

Blu-ray opportunities?

The Entertainment Merchants Association (formerly VSDA) made important decisions early on about what DVD packaging should be made of. Will it be the same in the area of Blu-ray and, if so, is ‘green’ a real concern?

Bo Andersen, EMA president, says issues surrounding entertainment packaging are not the same as issues surrounding plastic, such as bubble wrap. “Unlike bubble wrap and many other forms of packaging, we believe that few consumers consider clamshell DVD cases to be ‘packaging’ and, in the sense of sustainability, they do not handle them that way. Instead, DVD cases are, for the most part, an integral part of the product. Since few are discarded – they’re most often ‘recycled’ by giving them away or through retailer-based buy-sell-trade programmes – the



EcoChic: An increasing number of CDs from Sony BMG are available in 100% paperboard packaging

only real ‘packaging’ on a DVD is the shrink wrap that surrounds and protects the case.”

EMA has supported the initiatives of the Content Delivery and Storage Association (CDSA) – endorsing its ‘safety in packaging’ standards and participating in its environmental
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Super Jewel Box: the focus should be recyclable, not biodegradable

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responsibility caucuses – and those of the DEG. “Ultimately, the content providers and their suppliers need to be the first to study and recommend alternatives, if found necessary.”

On the music side, the National Association of Recording Merchandisers and the Recording Industry Association of America Sustainable Packaging Working Group, has recently been formed to look at the possibilities that exist for environmental packaging.

What customers want

After all is said and done, it really just comes down to the customer, says Matti Koski, director at Stora Enso, which offers the 100% paperboard DBS Discbox Slider case. “We try to get our customers to define what environmentally friendly means to them specifically. What are they trying to achieve?”

John Cote, corporate director technology and innovation for Multi Packaging Solutions, agrees. “The key to success is defining these priorities and understanding how to combine smart design and sustainable materials with printing and finishing technologies to achieve the environmental and aesthetic benefits desired.”

Music titles from Sony BMG artists, such as Christina Aguilera and Avril Lavigne, are also sold in the DBS Discbox Slider case. According to Koski, Sony BMG is selling a growing number of its titles in this package. “The sustainability of DBS lies in our wood procurement based on sustainable forestry, the certified environmental management systems at our mills, the use of best available techniques and the high share of bioenergy in board production.”

Sony BMG has issued numerous releases in plastic-free, eco-friendly packages, many of which use recycled materials. Packaging efforts continue to span the company’s labels and divisions, with upcoming efforts in the US involving more than 50 titles in various eco-friendly packages, including, but not limited to, DBS Discbox slider packs, BioD packs, and Softpacks. Last year, Sony BMG’s operations in Canada adapted a European packing format called the ECO-Slipcase and, in

the UK, Sony BMG recently released 22 classic titles in eco-friendly packaging. The group is pursuing similar initiatives elsewhere in the world on a country-by-country basis.

Ross-Ellis also offers environmental packages, such as the E-Pak for DVD. Slim, light and made entirely of 100% recycled or FSC-certified board makes it eco-friendly, according to Salvaggio. “Even if plastic is recycled it does come from a non-renewable resource. Paper can come from renewable resources if they are properly managed. Board can also do a better job in terms of creativity. With plastic, you often need paperboard to enhance it.”

Jakob Skarin is not a fan of plastics either. His distaste for plastics is how his company and product, JakeBox, came to be. “The fact that plastic cases crack was my motivation to create a new box. On top of the fragility of the jewel case, plastics are not eco-friendly and I am happy that JakeBox is all board.”

Not only is the package 100% recyclable, but it can be made of recycled carton board or paper, and it is always printed with vegetable inks, both for standard CMYK print and additional pantone colours. Gloss lacquers are also free from petroleum solubles, using water-based polymer-based lacquers instead.

“It weighs a third of the traditional plastic packaging, thereby cutting shipping and storage costs by half, and it doesn’t break when you drop it,” said Skarin. Thus far, the JakeBox has been used for promotional purposes by companies such as Lamborghini and Volvo. However, it was also used by Universal Music for Rolling Stones’ *Rolled Gold*.

Innovative approach

In terms of materials, MPS offers “a full range of options so that we can tailor our sustainable print and packaging solutions to specific customer and project needs”, says Cote. “Some customers are focused on recycling, others on sustainable forestry practices, and still others on reducing materials usage.”

For example, MPS offers a full menu of tray options to help customers reduce their carbon footprint. For customers interested in trays made from renewable resources, MPS offers CD and DVD trays made from paperboard, corn resin, or potato starch. For other customers, trays made from recycled plastics are an attractive choice.



Symphony by Sarah Brightman is one of the first projects to utilise FoilKote technology

“There has been strong interest from customers in our BioD tray made from 100% recycled paperboard. Designed in response to growing customer interest in earth-friendly packaging, the trays offer the function of a styrene tray without the environmental impact of plastic.”

Another route to sustainability is innovative printing and coating technologies that offer environmental benefits while achieving improved aesthetics relative to traditional finishing techniques. “Our latest technologies replace non-recyclable laminated materials with more environmentally benign materials while also reducing coating weight and energy consumption,” Cote explains. MPS’s FoilKote technology replaces metallized substrates with an in-line foil application on a variety of coated substrates. Among MPS’s first projects using FoilKote technology is Sarah Brightman’s *Symphony* from EMI’s Blue Note label.

Another new technology, HoloKote, replaces laminated holographic films with proprietary press-applied coating technology to achieve patterned and holographic effects.

Inks are another concern when it comes to green packaging. For example, MPS utilises vegetable-based inks throughout their facilities, UV inks specially formulated to contain low or no volatile organic compounds (VOC), and adhesives that are non-toxic, biodegradable, and low VOC.

The case for plastic

Super Jewel Box made a splash in the industry when it developed – as it sounds – a ‘better mousetrap’ or at least an improvement on the, even by then heavily criticised, standard jewel case. With a plastic (polystyrene) product, the company not unnaturally defends that as a packaging material.

“Our products are 100% recyclable, which makes them a good choice for eco-conscious consumers,” says Brigit van Winkel, director, international operations. “Super Jewel Box versus paper-based packaging is the same argument as ‘Plastic versus Paper’ in grocery stores today. Most people agree plastic is better because it doesn’t consume trees to produce. Both are 100% recyclable, so it’s just a matter of consumer commitment to recycle what they use. If either one gets disposed of in landfills, plastic won’t harm the environment like biodegradable products such as paper will.”

In support of this, van Winkel points to the ‘Garbage Project’ conducted by Dr William Rathje of the University of Arizona, which states that nothing biodegrades in modern landfills – not even paper or food. However, over time, decomposition of these ‘biodegradable’ materials occurs, producing methane gas allowing toxic fumes and leachate [the liquid that drains from a landfill] to pollute the air and underground water supplies. This is potentially hazardous to local plant and animal life.

The ‘packaging as part of the product’ argument is important as well, she adds: “Although some paper/cardboard type of packaging are nice, there also exist many cheap versions that degrade its content to a throwaway

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Rolling Stones' *Rolled Gold* in a 100% recyclable JakeBox: not just for promotional purposes

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item. How are consumers expected to store their optical discs nicely and safely, especially now that more and more (expensive) Blu-ray Discs are finding their way into the home? In paper? Or in a durable eye-catching packaging that underlines the quality and durability of its content?

“We are happy to report that, after trying out different kinds of alternative packaging options, leading music publishers are singing the same song and packing and selling their content in a higher quality, better looking packaging that offers the consumer more value for their money and at the same time allows the industry to make a bit of a margin.

“Now we all need to focus on educating the consumer to throw their old jewel cases in their recycling bin and not their trash bin.”

Following the footprint

As *MediaPack* touched on in the last issue, carbon footprints are becoming more of a concern in the entertainment industry, but the issue is quite involved. Koski says Stora Enso has done a lot of research in the area. “Starting with CO₂ emissions, we have mapped out all CO₂ emissions at our mill in Finland. We started mapping out these emissions more than 10 years ago, before it was trendy. We know how much CO₂ certain papers produce, but beyond that we’ve looked at all of the data out there from different countries and tried to estimate how much emissions are put out when you make polystyrene jewel cases from oil. We mapped out the whole process comparing

jewel cases and DBS cases, and the difference is remarkable.”

The DBS case reportedly has emissions that are 10% of plastic jewel cases. Also, he says, pulp mills are energy-producing units, not energy-consuming units. Whatever cannot be used for making paper and board can be used to make energy. “It’s bioenergy. It doesn’t use fossil fuels.”

In conclusion

“We need to take steps in the right direction, not just make giant leaps,” says Salvaggio. Too much infrastructure is devoted to fulfilment, insertion of the discs and sealing of the product for the market to change overnight. “There is very little automation available to insert discs into paperboard packaging at high speed. There is some, but there it is not as reliable and not as fast as Amaray equipment, for example. This is a problem for high-volume releases such as *Harry Potter*, where there is a limited time to get the product done and shipped to make the launch date. It will take at least three or four years before automation is in place to seriously compete with the Amaray product.”

While environmental concerns take a different turn with each project, all of the issues, from the choice of plastic or paper to reducing carbon footprints, will likely come more and more into play over the next few years. Hopefully record labels and studios will be able to find knowledgeable sources that can offer objective advice on how to prioritise and to ultimately reach their environmental goals. “Ultimately alternative packages needs to make financial sense,” Salvaggio believes. ●