

ISSN 1032 5298 • PRINT POST APPROVED PP241613/00096 VOL 71 ISSUE 3



food

JUNE - AUGUST 2019

australia

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Accessible Packaging Design is a Must for Modern Food Manufacturing

Words by Nerida Kelton, MAIP

How many times have we all grabbed a knife to open a pack of ham, spilt food across the kitchen because the pack was too hard to open, been unable to read the text on the pack (even with glasses on) and then vowed to never buy that brand again? These challenges are even more pronounced for the ageing population, those hospitalised, people with a disability, arthritis sufferers and children.

Accessible Packaging Design that is intuitive, easy-to-open and innovative should be an integral part of packaging new product design (NPD) processes.

All too often accessible packaging is not considered when designing products, which in turn leads to unnecessary frustration when opening and closing packs or reading the ingredients or instructions on packaging. It is important that packaging technologists consider how their packaging design could affect someone's ability to eat and drink and the flow on effect on food wastage.

Research from Arthritis Australia in 2018 shows that:

- All consumers struggle with packaging at times, but those most impacted are the ageing population, consumers with disabilities, arthritis sufferers and children
- 44% of consumers struggle with packaging every day
- 92% of consumers have spilt or damaged a product when trying to open the packaging

• When consumers experience hard-to-open packaging:

- 56% look for the production a different type of packaging
- 21% look at buying a competitor's product
- 65% of consumers have had to wait for someone to come and open packaging for them
- Half of all consumers have injured themselves opening packaging – including deep cuts and chipped teeth
- 89% of consumers feel 'frustrated' or 'furious' with packaging
- 67,000 consumers in the UK visit hospital casualty departments every year due to an accident involving food and drink packaging.

Accessible design and ease of use critical design elements need to be considered in all packing design decisions and packaging technologists should be using available resources and training to better understand the needs of the wider consumer market.

Step one: accessibility packaging design guidelines

If the accessibility packaging design guidelines aren't being utilised, then it's possible brands could be losing customers whose abilities are not being considered and needs are not being met. These Guidelines were developed by Arthritis Australia, in conjunction with Dr Brad Fain from Georgia Tech Research Institute, and are available in New Zealand through a

partnership with Arthritis New Zealand.

Some of the key guidelines are that packaging must be easy to open and use for those with limited functional abilities, packaging labelling must be highly legible, packaging shall be fit-for-purpose, and must be able to demonstrate accessibility.

Step two: accessible packaging design training

The Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP), in conjunction with Arthritis Australia and Georgia Tech Research Institute, has developed a half-day training course on accessible packaging design. The course allows attendees to become aware of design requirements and understand ease of use packaging design tools, including examples from around the world. It provides information on changing household demographics, meal preparation requirements and case studies from users.

Attendees learn measuring techniques, the types of injuries caused by packaging, and current consumer satisfaction levels with packaging accessibility. The course offers an activities-based approach and hands-on team exercises, helping participants understand the constraints on current packaging designs for people with disabilities, arthritis sufferers, children and the ageing population. This includes testing with simulation gloves developed by Georgia Tech Research Institute and reading glasses from a UK researcher.

Step three: Recognition of Innovative accessible packaging design

The AIP, in conjunction with Arthritis Australia and New Zealand, has developed a new accessible packaging design award to recognise packaging that is accessible, intuitive, easy-to-open and innovative, as a part of the Australasian Packaging Innovation & Design Awards.

The judges were looking for accessible packaging design that included measuring techniques, an understanding of injuries caused by packaging, and consumer satisfaction levels with packaging accessibility. The inaugural award winners were announced this month, with SPC Ardmona winning gold and Flavour Creations winning silver. The other two finalists were Moana New Zealand & Sealed Air for Cryovac® Grip and Tear®, and Campbell Arnott's.

SPC Ardmona have developed their SPC ProVital Easy-Open Diced Fruit in Jelly range that is carefully designed for all consumers to open, including those with reduced fine motor skills, dexterity and strength. On-pack communication is clear, crisp and legible for all. This design achieved 'easy to open' certification as well as an ISR +8 accessibility rating, meaning the product is universally easy to open, with 95 per cent of the population able to open the pack without tools.

Flavour Creations developed their pre-thickened ready-to-drink (RTD) packaging in a new dysphagia cup and cup holder, designed to specifically increase rates of hydration and decrease rates of malnutrition for residents and patients with dysphagia. Along with a reusable holder and plastic over seal, the snap fitting portion control cup has a large overhanging tab that has textured and clear 'peel back' wording to make it very obvious how to open the product.

Moana New Zealand & Sealed Air for Cryovac Grip and Tear (including 'small tab') was designed to foster ease of use for packaged meat, poultry and seafood products for processors, food service and retail markets. This accessible packaging enables convenient product access using a design that is simple and intuitive for consumers to use, irrespective of their age or functional abilities. Previously, these difficult to open items required opening tools which could easily cause injuries.

The Grip and Tear feature means the packs can now be easily opened by a simple hand action. Sealed Air have undertaken significant design innovation in the development of the Grip and Tear feature in order to meet both the food handling and food protection requirements for a wide range of products that may use this new packaging format.

Campbell Arnott's have redesigned 10 SKUs from their catering range of portion control packaging to adhere to accessible packaging design guidelines. Key features of the Campbell Arnott's packaging include serrated edges on both sides of the pack to reduce the force required to tear the corner of the packaging open, and providing consumers a clear written message on how to open the pack. Arnott's received an ISR +8 accessibility rating for this new style of packaging.

Nerida Kelton MAIP is executive director of the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP) and ANZ Board Member of the World Packaging Organisation (WPO).



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REF:101

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