



**27.-29.9.2022  
NÜRNBERG**

## STORY

August 2022

### **Joining forces for the circular economy**

**To achieve a functioning circular economy for packaging, companies need to collaborate, share responsibility, and broaden their horizons. The 'Verpackung mit Zukunft' (Packaging with a Future) platform provides a powerful network for making this happen.**

To proactively address the problem of waste and the impact of packaging on climate change, Austrian companies ALPLA and Greiner joined forces with five other firms to establish the 'Verpackung mit Zukunft' platform at the end of 2019. They quickly found other allies – from raw material processors to recyclers, and from packaging producers to consumer goods manufacturers. The objective is to improve communication about the issue of packaging, including its benefits and proper handling. In addition, the initiative aims to significantly advance the development of a functioning circular economy for packaging. All member companies operate according to the principles “replace, reduce, reuse and recycle”. Although the nucleus of the platform is in Austria, the network is meanwhile also active across borders, above all in neighbouring Germany.

Since early 2021, Sandra Pechac has been responsible for managing the exchanges between the meanwhile 25 member companies and the dialogue with the public. As platform coordinator, she brings together all aspects of the strategic communication. “One of my most important jobs is to be the common voice of our members. Naturally, I am also in charge of the operational implementation of all planned communication measures. The communication is both internal, i.e., into the platform, and external, for example targeting consumers and companies not directly involved in the packaging supply chain,” says Pechac, describing her role.

#### **Internal and external communication**

For external communication, the first step was to set up professional social media channels with corresponding content, e.g., as video formats. These provide a tool for starting a conversation with consumers, because the

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discussions of recent years have left the public with a distorted image of packaging. It is simply not true that we don't need packaging at all and that it only causes problems. "Clearly, all superfluous packaging is to be avoided. But what sometimes appears to be superfluous at first sight is in many cases not redundant at all. Our aim is to encourage a nuanced view of the issue," says Pechac.

Pechac has also expanded the practical aspects of the platform's work with the members: "I need to be a good listener and have a sense of the issues that currently matter to our members. This allows me to then make connections that may subsequently result in synergies," she says. One of the platform's stated mutual goals is to support strategic collaboration between its members. This allows the platform to push ahead with innovations and flagship projects.

"The associated ideas are mostly initiated in the companies themselves. They then get the opportunity to pitch these ideas at our general meetings to find suitable partners among machine manufacturers, recycling companies or material producers," explains Pechac. Because the challenges involved in realizing a functioning circular economy are substantial, and no single company can master them alone. The member companies all contribute their expertise from their respective segments and complement one another. "Once partners have found one another they form smaller working groups that I then support and coordinate. We always meet up again when specific milestones are reached and discuss the preliminary results," the project coordinator explains. At FACHPACK in the autumn, the platform will provide insights into its work and possibly the first results of its ongoing flagship projects at the stand of its member CLARUS Films.

### **Supply chain under the spotlight**

When it comes to sustainability, Pechac says that there are a lot of innovations meanwhile that show how seriously the industry is taking this task and its responsibility towards society. But looking at the bigger picture and the necessary collaboration, she believes that there is still work to be done. After all, an idea is only as good as its practical implementation. "For example, before a manufacturer of consumer goods launches a new product on the market, they first have to look at each stage in the cycle, and to do this they need the expertise and experience of other companies in the packaging supply chain," says Pechac.

Our platform shows how this can be done. “We want the packaging produced and put on the market by our members to be part of a closed-loop system,” explains Pechac. For example, this involves avoiding problematic materials (replace), rethinking packaging sizes (reduce), and designing packaging to be recyclable (recycle). Decisions on the most suitable material need to be made on a case-to-case basis. In this context, Pechac cautions against rejecting the use of plastics out of hand: “No material is inherently worse or better than another. For many areas, plastics are indispensable and offer benefits in respect of sustainability. We communicate based on facts and address both the positive and negative properties.”

### **Getting consumers on board**

Pechac believes that the industry is already on the right track with its transformation. Companies are fervently setting themselves sustainability goals. “I am happy to see the efforts being made in the industry and glad to support its journey,” Pechac stresses. Nevertheless, the extent to which innovations by manufacturers will succeed hinges on their acceptance by consumers and the correct handling of packaging waste. Manufacturers need to keep sight of whether their developments are actually being implemented in daily life in the way they intended. When it comes to packaging design, Pechac believes it is important to make waste separation as easy as possible for consumers. She thinks one solution is the increasing replacement of composites by mono-materials.

“In our work on awareness-raising campaigns we have seen how consumers are trying very hard to be sustainable and make the right purchasing decisions,” Pechac says. However, their behaviour is often guided by half-truths or myths. It is therefore the job of the platform to eliminate uncertainties and make it easier to handle packaging sustainably. “There has been a shift in thinking in recent years and consumers are paying more attention to the issue of packaging.”

However, there is still quite some work to be done to ensure that all this comes together properly to create a closed loop for packaging. Nevertheless, Pechac is confident: “If all companies involved in the production, use and recycling of packaging are on the same page, it really will be possible to get things done.”



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