

INDUSTRY ARTICLE

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Corrugated board – an all-rounder

Corrugated board is essential when it comes to packaging materials for shop-based retail. In addition to its value for transport and logistics, it also plays an important part in customer acquisition.

Corrugated board accounts for two-thirds of the transport packaging used in Germany – the most popular material by far. As a secondary packaging material it is benefiting more than any other from the growth in online trading. Even so, the importance of its role in shop-based sales is often underestimated. In retail premises, it is both a tool for logistics and a means of advertising – whether to separate it from an adjacent product or to make the job of shelf stocking faster, for use as stackable boxes and trays, display boxes, stand-up displays and even entire display layouts.

Just what corrugated board can do to help make shop-based retail viable for the future, was the subject of a study by the Institute for Retail Research in Cologne (IFH), on behalf of the German Corrugated Board Industry Association (Verband der Wellpappen-Industrie, VdW), entitled “Handel im Wandel” (Retail in Transition). The study was presented at the Corrugated Cardboard Forum during FachPack 2019. The analysts identified three core themes: sustainability, convenience and the special purchasing experience for the consumer.

Sustainability – a trend that’s here to stay

FachPack impressively demonstrated that sustainability enjoys widespread support in the packaging sector. It also meets an important wish on the part of consumers. The study “Retail in Transition” also reached this conclusion, with 93 percent of those surveyed stating that sustainability was “personally important” to them. Asked which features of packaging would gain in importance in the future, nine out of ten of those surveyed identified recyclability, avoidance of plastic waste, and the use of environmentally friendly materials.

A major opportunity for corrugated board lies in its perception as an environmentally friendly packaging material. According to the study, consumers think of cardboard packaging as being particularly natural and sustainable.

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About 90 percent of customers want their buying to be plastic-free. 93 percent hope to see plastic packaging increasingly replaced by packaging made of sustainable raw materials.

In reality, however, demand for sustainable products often ranks behind convenience. While corrugated board scores points as a sustainable raw material that is perfect for recycling, it still has a part to play from the important aspect of convenience.

Convenience – shopping must be uncomplicated

Consumers expect their purchasing to be no more complicated like online shopping, and also expect to be able to find what they want quickly. This aspect is important for 90 percent of those surveyed. For retailers, that means a clear shop layout is essential, so customers can quickly identify the product range and find product information. Shelf-ready packaging made of corrugated board helps in this regard, since it visually separates the product categories and brands. Shelf-ready boxes are sealed for transportation and are opened at the supermarket in such a way that they just have to be put on the shelves.

Brands can also make use of eye-catching displays to stand out from the competition and increase their turnover. Cleverly designed secondary packaging made of corrugated cardboard thus functions as a point of differentiation for supermarkets.

Creating buying experiences

Besides visual design, giving packaging a future-oriented design serves as a point of differentiation that gives shop-based retail an advantage over online trading. Adding digital links to an attractive design will increase the product's information content and its added value. This is something that customers appreciate: according to the study, 38 percent of consumers like it when prominent campaign elements emphasise particular products in a shop. The figure is as much as 12 percent higher for consumers who are heavy Smartphone users: this group expects to obtain additional information via elements printed on displays and on product and shelf packaging.

In addition to digital added value, the opportunity to perceive items with the senses remains a unique selling point for shop-based retail. Retailers make use of this opportunity by increasingly structuring their sales areas as “shopping worlds”. The goal is to create an environment that will last as a positive memory. Used in the form of displays, stand-up displays and ceiling banners, corrugated board helps to set the scene for the “shopping world”. These items can create a winning design for sales campaigns offering special tasting, consulting, or catering opportunities, for example. As Christmas approaches, they put seasonal products in the spotlight and create an appropriate atmosphere for the season. These product presentations are eye-catching and help to ensure that customers take up the offers and keep coming back.

The benefits of corrugated board therefore go well beyond product protection and logistical aspects: the fact it serves as a sustainable packaging material and valuable marketing tool also helps to prepare the retail trade for the challenges of the future.

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