

FEATURES

Flexible Packaging When Form Meets Function

With near-limitless configurations, flexible packaging can be anything brands need it to be, including a mimic of a brand's full-sized retail packaging.



The Perfectly Imperfect packaging, produced by PLPS, is made of biodegradable ReEarth films.

Joanna Cosgrove, Contributing Editor 07.22.24

For brands in search of compelling alternatives to conventional rigid packaging, flexible packaging like pouches and sachets can offer numerous advantages when it comes to delivering sample, primary, and refillable product options without sacrificing formula protection or integrity while keeping sustainability, creativity, and brand perception efforts on the cutting edge.

First, the lightweight nature of flexible packaging can offer big benefits in comparison to standard PET from an eco-perspective. “Compared to standard PET bottles, flexible

alternatives typically use fewer resources and generate less waste,” comments Lindsey Khosla, Marketing Director, **Arcade Beauty**. “For example, refill pouches made from flexible mono-materials significantly reduce fossil fuel, CO2 emissions, and water usage, [helping] reduce the carbon footprint associated with transporting empty containers for filling.”

Flexible packaging also puts creativity at the forefront, delivering plenty of surface real estate space for brands to communicate customized messages and graphics.

Leslie Gurland, Vice President of Sales and Marketing for **Premium Label & Packaging Solutions** (PLPS) points to the packaging medium’s smooth, printable surface, which is especially receptive to impactful, high-quality images for maximum visual impact on-shelf.

PLPS offers multiple flexible packaging solutions, both in traditional roll stock and pouches. It can produce multiple SKUs in runs as low as 2,000 pieces on state-of-the-art digital equipment capable of putting artistic nuances unique to the beauty industry on full display.

The company recently added a custom-built Gondoflex converting coating system that enables high-end, specialty finishes on its flexible packaging products, spanning matte varnish with spot gloss or foil with a spot matte varnish, all great for embellishing unique designs. Gurland adds that the company can also apply an overlaminated film to add protection to inks that may be prone to scuffing.

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One of PLPS’s recent flexible packaging endeavors involved working in partnership with a contract manufacturer to meet the needs of a top global beauty brand seeking unique color matches and a tight timeline to ensure the integrity of its formula’s sensitive ingredients.

“After several tests, we chose a multi-layer film construction that best showcased the high-resolution graphics and provided the barrier properties needed for several different and diverse ingredients,” recalls Gurland.

The brand owners required PLPS to match a bottle color instead of a chip, meaning the company had to adjust the color matching of different material substrates to achieve the desired results, eventually finding success with CMYK and Extended Gamut inks. Gurland says PLPS added an over-lamination to protect the inks from scuffing and to guard the print as the rolls ran through the customer’s fill and form machines.

For another project, PLPS turned to a unique material to create a signature package for a product called Perfectly Imperfect.

“Not all sustainable packaging needs to be green,” says Gurland, explaining that Perfectly Imperfect is a brightly colored yellow and purple 4x5 sachet made of ReEarth films, a proprietary, bio-based packaging material constructed with compostable components that break down over time with exposure to water, heat, pressure, and other natural elements. All of the components in ReEarth are certified industrial and home-compostable.

Customizable Shaping

Another attractive aspect of flexible packaging is its ability to shapeshift into almost any configuration.

“The world is the brand’s oyster, so to speak, and if the brand wants an oyster-shaped sachet, we can accommodate it,” exclaims Doug Rofheart, Senior Sales Executive, **JP Packaging**. “And with all the new digital print capabilities and the progress on the flexo printing side, there is very little that a brand cannot accomplish in terms of high-end art, looks, and finishes.”

Rofheart emphasizes how important it is to work with professionals that are well-versed in marrying a brand’s product to an appropriate package. “Material selection is critical to the brand’s success,” he says in a nod to staving off compatibility and stability challenges related to moisture, vapor transmission rates, and potential UV concerns. “This is where our years of expertise can benefit the brand as we understand the materials and, based on product ingredients, can recommend structures that we can put up in compatibility testing here in the lab at JP, to land on successful material selection.”

JP Packaging recently added an additional die-cut machine to help enhance its production of shaped sachet capacities. Rofheart says brands can produce a variety of shaped flexible packaging, including jar, tube, and bottle shapes that mimic a brand’s full-sized retail packaging, helping to create a unified presentation and reinforce the brand image.

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In addition, the JP Engineering Team has also designed a bespoke piece of equipment that will form, fill, and seal gusseted zipper pouches from printed roll stock (versus pre-made pouches), which reduces lead times, increases throughput, and allows brands to run multiple SKU’s with lower MOQ’s back-to-back.

Convenient Product Delivery

As a specialist in single-use, flexible cosmetic samples, Samplex Technologies has created Oneusedeo, a unique flexible package composed of polyester laminations and a polyester cover that’s capable of dispensing one use of a pasty substances such as stick deodorants, creams, and foundations.

Juan Manuel Arias, Commercial Manager, **Samplex Technologies**, explains that Oneusedeo is completely ergonomic for comfortable product application to the underarm. The exclusive system is divided into two parts to provide two full doses of the deodorant formula, one for each underarm. “This makes it ideal to complement the line of hotel amenities, the airline personal care kit for first class and business categories, or the personal hygiene kit in gyms,” he says.

Oneusedeo is fully customizable and can be produced in short runs. It’s also patented in the United States, European and Latin American countries.

Another of the company’s flexible packaging innovations is the Realfrag Design olfactory label. “This multicolor label allows you to place a sample of the fragrance contained in the container for sale, [and] the fragrance can be tested without needing to violate the product packaging,” explains Arias, noting that it’s ideal for use with perfumes, candles, and scented home care products. “Its exclusive design allows you to place the desired graphic in addition to the perfume, allowing you to test the fragrance through its lid opening system.”

The Realfrag Design label was used by Samplex’s client Craftmen, for its exclusive perfume brands Bless and Epica, to provide a fragrance sample at retail without having to provide a tester. Arias says the product is ideal for small points of sale and for brands that cannot purchase the minimum quantities of each SKU to receive a perfume tester.

Primed for Protection

Flexible packaging offers brands a variety of material choices, many of which do a great job of providing a protective barrier against moisture, oxygen, light, and other external elements, keeping formulas safely sealed and effective.

“Pouches can be easily shipped without the risk of damage or breaking open due to the material’s hermetic (airtight) seals and pliable properties,” says Mike Bergstrom, Account Executive, Brook & Whittle. “By combining high barrier films with a hermetic seal and adhesives for a multi-layer pouch construction, the shelf stability of your product can be significantly improved by blocking out light, moisture, and air, all of which keep the product fresh.”

Brook & Whittle produces flexible packaging in most sizes and shape configurations—from travel to retail and bulk—with no order minimums. Packages can also be decorated with various finishes (gloss, matte, soft touch, spot gloss, tactile, and foil) for a unique look, while achieving 97% of the Pantone range.

“Our approach to flexible packaging is collaborative,” Bergstrom says. “We work closely with our customers to understand the unique needs of their products, and then develop a custom flex pack structure that perfectly suits their end-use requirements, whether it’s for liquid, gels, or powders.

Bergstrom says that despite increased demand for these packaging configurations, traditional flexible packaging is not curbside recyclable because it’s typically constructed with mixed materials. “To meet this need, we have been pushing brands toward mono-material constructions such as an all-PE package, whenever a barrier is not required,” he says “The benefit of this type of structure is that it is easier to recycle and can be recyclable through How2Recycle’s Store Drop-off program.”

One of Brook & Whittle’s latest collaborations was with Fan Love Beauty, a brand created by cosmetic chemist Ginger King, that hinges on efficacious, vegan, and purposeful ingredients across a range of body, facial, and hand care products.

Brook & Whittle produced flexible pouches made of velvety Soft Touch PET with 3ml white PE. “We sized and ran five pouch sizes with 16 variations to accommodate their product line and pack-off requirements,” Bergstrom says.

“The main challenge was determining the size of each pouch for a wide range of products, including two flavors of Lip Balm, Hand Veil Gel, Body Chiller Mist, Facial Mask Kit, and Spotlight Kit. With the samples in hand, we were able to quickly help the client narrow down the pouch size for a proper fit.”

The flexible materials used for flexible packaging solutions from Arcade Beauty are compatible with various types of formulas, including skincare, cosmetics, body wash, shampoos, and conditioners.

The company’s versatile 3D Pouches, designed with mono-material and available in a wide range of fills and customizable shapes, can be sold at retail as a travel-size solution, single-use refill, or full-size product replacement. The 3D Pouches from 150- 600ml can be fitted with re-closable caps, while 30-100ml 3D Pouches can be fitted with a single-use breakable closure (for refill presentations) or re-closable/flip top closures for multi-use products.

Arcade Beauty celebrated its 10th anniversary earlier this year and marked the occasion with the announcement that by 2030, it would no longer manufacture non-recyclable products.

“Our vision is to enable smart sampling and responsible full-size products,” says Carl Allain, CEO of Arcade Beauty. “By 2030, just as we will no longer manufacture non-recyclable products, it will no longer be acceptable to throw away unused beauty products, whether in a sample or full-size format.”

In line with that mission, Arcade Beauty has set an objective; by 2025 100% of their products will have a recyclable alternative, will be water-soluble or compostable, and at least 75% will integrate recycled or certified material. To reach this objective, the company affirmed a laser-focus on eco-design: improving product packaging to reduce their impact on the environment; reducing packaging weight; and developing reusable and refill solutions.

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To that end, the company unveiled its Paper-Based Samples collection, which offers beauty brands four eco-friendly sampling alternatives for makeup, skincare, hair care, and fragrance. This launch includes the redesign of four of Arcade’s technologies with paper-based laminates: 90% Paper BeautiPod®; 76% Paper Thermoform; 48% Paper ScentSeal®; and 63% Paper Packette (80% Paper is currently in development).

What’s more, Arcade Beauty has launched a Single-Use 3D Refill Pouch, which is available with a breakable closure in fully recyclable mono-material, and enables full-sized original packaging to be preserved for multiple uses.

“Providing shoppers with a recyclable refill option for full-sized products is certainly a step in the right direction—it will help to reduce rigid packaging and in turn significantly reduce carbon emissions,” explains Lindsey Khosla, Marketing Director at Arcade Beauty, “and the single-use nature of the package will encourage shopper education on the purpose of refill packaging.”

The company has also inaugurated three new machines for producing flexible product refills: one at its South Plainfield, NJ facility in North America and two at its facilities in Thouars, France and Warsaw, Poland, with a new production line on track to debut later this year to support new developments.