

Flexible Packaging

When primitive man thought of packaging, leaves and animal skin came to his mind. Packaging has come a long way since then. Today when we talk about a flexible pack, it is a laminate, or in other words, a combination of layers of polymers, metal foil and paper, which are bonded together using sophisticated adhesives. The layers are specifically chosen depending on the product to be packed, whether it is a solid, powder, liquid or a mixture of these, does it form lumps in the presence of moisture, does it deteriorate due to the oxygen present in the atmosphere, does it require U.V. protection, and a host of other product characteristics. Some of the other parameters that need to be considered in designing a laminate are the shelf life requirement in the market place, the packaging machine to be used, speed of packing lines and issues of logistics.

Thus we have laminates that can be designed to package everything from processed food to automobile components, and from fruit juice to condoms, and protect them from environmental conditions. It is theoretically possible to produce an infinite number of combinations using different flexible packaging materials. We must therefore custom design every laminate. The customising process optimises design for achieving product protection, product filling, productivity, brand image promotion and overall cost effectiveness.

Consider a typical laminate for a pack of Instant Coffee. It has a high quality, thin polymer film surface for good printing characteristics. Beneath, the polymer layer is reinforced by a layer of metal foil, which provides a barrier against the attack of moisture and oxygen from the environment. It also does not allow the aroma of the coffee to escape from the pack. Finally, the innermost layer is a special grade of polyethylene that is in direct contact with the coffee and has good heat sealing properties. All these layers are bonded together by speciality adhesives. Each laminate is product specific. Thus a laminate that is ideal to pack instant coffee would be quite unsuitable for a bar of soap.

The advantages of flexible packaging over conventional forms of packaging range from basics like protecting products from the external environment to unusual advantages like creating markets where they did not exist. In fact flexible packaging continues to give marketers a continuously flexible price point option, from a full month's usage pack of tea, dairy whitener, detergent, etc to the now famous Re.1 packs of instant coffee, soft drink concentrate powders and biscuits, and the highly penetrative 50 paise shampoo packs.



Considering the flexibility of flexible packaging in meeting complex marketing issues, it continues to be a great fit in providing optimal packaging for various products.

The real power of flexible packaging is in its inherent principle of source reduction, that is, using a lesser amount of material for packing a given quantity of product, when compared to earlier forms of packaging. Some other advantages of flexible packaging are high-speed packing, savings in inventory space and transportation cost, reduced energy requirement, optimal print area for shelf throw and including informative text matter.

Flexible packaging in India had humble beginnings in the thirties, with products like pastry cup crimps, paper straws, milk bottle caps, laundry bags, etc, all firsts introduced by PPL that were major innovations of their time.

In fact throughout our history, PPL has been the pioneer in India of most new forms of flexible packaging, gravure printing, the flexible pouch, battery labels, certified barrier metallising, registered cold seal and hotmelt laminates to name just a few.

The evidence is overwhelming that a good package can make a good product sell better. Therefore, many successful marketers wisely pay as much attention to their packaging as to any other single factor in their manufacturing and marketing programme.

Flexible Packaging is a continuously evolving area of technology. And when we dream, again nature inspires us - ultra thin edible packaging - as in apples, grapes, pears... the final frontier!



And while doing all this, flexible packaging retains the aesthetic power to attract consumers to brands more importantly, makes it all possible cost effectively.

At times, we are faced with the argument that flexible packaging solutions are easier to find than what PPL makes them out to be. Yes there are shortcuts. The kind of shortcuts that end up with oil leaking out of pouches on the shelf, or potato wafers going soggy, or soft drink concentrates caking up, or poor graphics. PPL does not recommend these solutions. Because the downside risk is too heavy.