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# Live! Coronavirus coverage: Packaged food manufacturers turn to direct-to-consumer channel

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Renata Smataviciene, EU & US Quality Director at RETAL recently spoke with Packaging Europe about the effects the pandemic is having on her company.

***What measures are you taking to ensure you meet the challenges presented by the pandemic?***

We will continue with our coronavirus protocol for the foreseeable future to keep protecting our production staff and our business. Many non-production employees that previously worked in our plants have found it very positive and productive working from home, so we will keep discussing how we can harness that once the restrictions are lifted. It is crucial to keep our risk assessment and protocol up to date as the situation changes, for the support of our people and our business. We will also continue to stay in closer contact with our customers, as we've found that staying customer-orientated in response to quickly-changing demands has been really positive.



### ***How do you see coronavirus impacting more generally on packaging / FMCG, and do you have any suggestions as to how the industry can mitigate these impacts?***

The value of food safety has certainly been brought into focus, with it clear that consumers need reassurance that the food and beverages they are buying with their hard-earned money are reliable. Plastic packaging has played an important role in food safety during coronavirus as people are encouraged to wash their supermarket shopping, which is far more easily done when the product is plastic-wrapped. Consumers are more concerned with the direct impact of their choices, so the primary need to feed their family with safe food and beverages is taking precedence over environmental issues, particularly when the practical difficulties faced by the recycling industry during this crisis are being widely reported.

But of course, that doesn't stop sustainability from being part of the equation, especially as it was one of the industry's key drivers before this crisis. Larger format packaging for water products has been particularly in demand, coupled with a slower demand for on-the-go products. Brand loyalty vs brand availability is also an impact. So plastic packaging manufacturers have an opportunity to create and produce reliable food and beverage packaging that is mindful of the circular economy; Design for Recycling, utilising recycled materials, encouraging closed-loop activities...none of these stop for coronavirus, and nor should they!

### ***Are there any broader lessons about packaging that industry – or society – should draw from the pandemic?***

We've noticed a lovely trend throughout RETAL that reflects the increased need for personal connection. There's been a blurring of 'work persona' and 'home persona', with people sharing more about themselves, their talents, their challenges. Our sales director even shared a video of him singing and playing the guitar on our RETAL Social intranet page! We are also discussing the best alternatives to events, trade shows, communicating with customers and each other while we are unable to travel as planned.

So while we are all keen to return to 'normality', there are certainly ways of communicating that we will continue as it has been very positive to learn about colleagues that we did not previously know, whilst realising we are all part of the same global team. We need to be able to keep what is good about this challenging time, rather than just wait until it's over and carry on the same. This seems to be true for RETAL as a company and for society at large.

#### Comments

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