

Sustainable future for plastic preforms in North America

Consumers in North America are increasingly appreciating sustainable packaging options, but not ahead of price and convenience, so shows a McKinsey study that aims to 'get inside the minds of consumers' in the US. With the understanding that the packaging value chain will have to change to stay in step with the evolving demands of consumers, it makes interesting reading for plastic packaging producers.



It is clear that the Covid pandemic has pushed a new type of convenience alongside the 'on the go' and individual serving convenience of pre-pandemic times. Now, we also want to be sure that what we're buying, eating and drinking is clean, or at least can handle a swift going-over with an anti-bacterial wipe (which also needs to be packed in sealable plastic, ideally individually).

A recent study from Mordor Intelligence highlights how flexible packaging in particular is seeing a boost since Covid, with the ability to easily mold to brand designs while being lightweight and easy to fill means that it will take a chunk of the predicted 3.4% plastic packaging industry growth by 2027. This takes the value of the North American plastic packaging market to \$51.2 billion.

The huge opportunities for growth in the North American packaging industry is a key reason why multinational plastic packaging producer RETAL is expanding its facilities in Donora, PA, adding a further 6 lines, taking its capabilities to approx. 2.5 billion preforms a year with 11 lines. President and CEO Darius Janulionis explains why the company has decided to invest further in the North American market. "We've enjoyed rapid development since we opened in Donora, PA in 2016. It's a great place to be to connect with our global beverage brand customers and our local customers alike; the Pittsburgh region is accessible, packed with skilled workers and there's a real history of plastics expertise here."

Janulionis and his team are leading a campaign to highlight the 'American Made' plastic packaging capabilities at RETAL PA, with the focus on sharing how the company is standing on the shoulders of its plants across Europe, with extensive R&D and sustainability experience helping to offer a portfolio that's responsible and flexible. He adds, "We've just launched a dedicated landing page for our US capabilities to show how we're perfectly positioned to continue serving the US market as it grows and develops. We already work hand in hand with our customers in the US, creating and manufacturing preforms that meet their requirements, and we're excited to connect with more potential partners as we continue to serve our existing customers."

Proven quality

The challenge for many brands when it comes to choosing plastic packaging that is easy to fill, easy to transport and market ready is guaranteeing the quality required is achieved time and time again – even when requirements or regulations change. The RETAL PA team's investment in the latest equipment extends to its quality laboratory as well as its production, with the lab not only stocked with top-of-the-line intrinsic viscosity measurement capabilities and state of the art gas chromatography instrumentation, but also a team of dedicated and experienced quality professionals who have trained with RETAL's established experts in Europe.

Lead by Quality Manager Brittany Brooks, recently named as a 'Woman Breaking the Mold' by Plastics News in 2022, the quality department offers tours to explain how the equipment supports the complete service, with a recent household brand name customer vocal about how impressive the focus on quality is at the facility. Brooks says, "We're a really tight team, all focused on delivering the best possible product and service. We have European technical and design skills combined with US customer service and drive. We can plug and play!"

With the demand for reliable and flexible plastic packaging for food and beverages showing no sign of slowing down, it's important to note that sustainability is on the up – but not for sustainability's sake. Another McKinsey study is clear that consumers are not putting environmental concerns at the top of their list, but they still want to know that these issues are catered for somehow. Janulionis adds, "Thanks to further investment, we are already thinking forward and equipping all our machines with technology that will allow us to use up to 100% recycled content (rPET). We are already producing more than 50% of our total output from 100% rPET. Sustainability is certainly another area where the knowledge and experience of our group is implemented by our local team, allowing us to produce a high percentage of rPET with the highest quality, so brands can deliver what their customers are increasingly demanding."

While regulations for recycled content in plastic packaging in the US are still in early stages compared to parts of Europe, working with a packaging partner that has already ironed out how to meet changing regulations with multinational brand customers is a valuable way to meet customer needs, without costly downtime.

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