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PACKAGING

VIEW POINT

Stick-Pack Shakes Up Product Innovation And Drives Flexible Packaging Sales

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Have you noticed that there is a new "slender" pouch format beginning to make dramatic inroads in the North American market? That new package is the exciting Stick-Pack format which is being adopted by both small and large Consumer Product Companies (CPCs) as one more packaging innovation tool to provide convenience and better position new value-added product introductions.

While companies continue to contemplate value-added line extensions as a way to appeal to a multitude of new and changing demographics, they are finding that unique packaging can be creatively utilized to target a specific user and re-invent or re-position a mature brand.

Some products in "sticks" include sweeteners, instant teas and beverages, baby formula, vitamin and nutritional powders, and a multitude of other powdered products. Do not expect the innovation to stop there, as we will also see the expanded introductions in condiments, puddings, gels, pastes, and liquid beverage concentrates. Virtually any product that offers single-serve or portion-controlled serving is a candidate for the Stick-Pack format.

One of the most innovative Stick-Pack applications that is literally "shaking up" the beverage industry has been the introduction of single-serve powdered beverage concentrates. These products are being positioned as convenient "grab n' go" packs that can transform any bottle of water into many of your favorite flavored drinks. The perfectly measured product is simply added to any 16-20 oz. bottle of water and, like magic, you have a refreshing, convenient, custom-prepared beverage of your choice, anywhere, anytime.

The slender profile of the package and its easy-open tear notch enable easy dispensing of the powder into the narrow neck of the bottle opening. These products are marketed to busy consumers who are infatuated with their water bottle, like everyone! This category is poised to explode as bottled water already represents one of the most popular beverage choices, second in popularity only to carbonated beverages. Now that you can customize your water, any time, any place, the sky's the limit!

Some of the products and brands that have been introduced to the market in Stick-Packs include Crystal Light[®], Kool-Aid[®] Singles, Countrytime[®], Lipton[®] Iced Tea to Go, Lipton[®] Green Tea to Go, Celestial Seasonings[®], Zingers to Go[™], Cappuccino Coolers, Splenda[®] Flavor Blends, Enfamil[®], H2O Blast[™] Dietary Supplement, and Disney[®] Nutri Stix Multivitamins.

Most of these products are multi-packed in 5-, 10-, 16-, and 30-count cartons; perhaps a transparent standup pouch would show them off a little better on the shelf. Some of these products are marketed as individual Stick-Packs in airport, hotel and convenience stores where they capture premium price.

Stick-Packs are not so new: They have been mainly prominent in Japan, Europe, and around the world for years; however, we are finally seeing acceptance and increased application in the U.S. market. Innovative companies like T.H.E.M., the North American Marketer of SANKO, one of the world's leading producers of VFFS Stick Pack machinery, has been focused on educating the market on the benefits of marketing in the Stick-Pack package format for the past few years with good success. However, with any innovation, one must travel a long, difficult road to change the market. T.H.E.M. has recently been joined by other companies, including Duma, Hassia, and Mespac.

The technology is centered around a multi-lane VFFS platform with 4 to 20 lanes producing hundreds of Stick Packs per minute from a single roll of pre-printed rollstock. Material is slit into multiple lanes in registration, formed, filled and sealed. Packaging substrates include basic paper/poly and paper/poly/foil/poly, in addition to more complex barrier laminations. Fillers include volumetric cups, multi-head servo augers or pumping systems dependant on product handling characteristics.

As we mutually look for new and exciting ways to grow our business and delight the consumer, the innovative

Stick-Pack format and the machinery technology which supports it appear well positioned to efficiently create a multitude of opportunities for both the converter and the packager.

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