

VIEWPOINT

FLEXIBLE INSIGHTS

Supporting Your Customers Through the "Challenge of Change"

by Dennis Calamusa, Alliedflex Technologies Inc.



I recently took part in a packaging round table that was chartered with discussing the future of consumer packaging and in particular the move toward flexible packaging. This was a very interesting forum as the panel included a distinguished selection of who's who in packaging, including representatives of large and small consumer product companies, packaging material/machinery suppliers, and a few well-respected industry consultants.

As the meeting proceeded, it was quite

ing lines, distribution, marketing plans, plan-o-grams, retail shelf displays, etc.

The evolution and refinement of the customer's present packaging processes may have taken many years to get where they are today. We, as suppliers of flexible packaging, must be sensitive to this fact. We must offer creative solutions to assist our customers to "transition without chaos" to new innovative flexible packaging methods.

Experience has shown us that before we can change to anything new, first we must

The key is to help your customer understand that new packaging can, at least in the beginning, be implemented for example on new product introductions or maybe a new "value added line extension" to an existing product category. In the process of this new packaging innovation they will be creating a new consumer demographic or market that they may have not benefited from in the past. You will find much less resistance by the marketing or manufacturing group with this gradual "transition" approach.

Companies that have implemented innovation in their packaging have reaped enormous rewards, such as stimulating flat growth or mature products.

interesting to see a particular dynamic unfolding. The suppliers, particularly of flexible packaging, appeared visibly frustrated that the consumer product companies were not moving quickly enough toward "change" for their liking or maybe their marketing forecast.

During this forum, I realized something very important: the flexible packaging industry has an enormous responsibility to assist and guide—with *compassion* and *understanding*—our customers in the enormous task ahead as they begin to "transition" their packaging from the past and into the future.

Wow, you may say, "I just want to sell my material and grow my business." Well it's not going to be that easy unless we are prepared to support our customers through the "challenges of change".

Many traditional packaging methods have been in use for many, many years. Companies have created elaborate infrastructures around many of these packaging methods. What is infrastructure you ask? Well, it's just about everything from the product recipe to how the retail shelf is stocked and everything in between, i.e. process, packaging specifications, packag-

take small steps toward change, as opposed to great leaps, head first! Being pro-active with a "gradual transitional approach" as opposed to the "let's replace everything at once attitude" will make the customer/supplier relationship much more productive and less confrontational. Remember the easiest thing any of us can do is nothing, let's not give our customers an excuse to do nothing!

Now that we know why our customers are reluctant to change, why *are* they changing? Change, besides being difficult to handle and implement, has proven to create wonderful opportunity, particularly when it comes to dealing with consumer products and the consumer.

Companies that have implemented innovation in their packaging have reaped enormous rewards, such as stimulating flat growth or mature products through repackaging the same product in a new innovative way that can really kick start sales. There are numerous examples of this trend by both large and small companies. Market share growth and successful new product introductions is the name of the game; it's worth millions of dollars to the bottom line.

Innovative flexible packaging can have a dramatic effect on a new product's success at both retail and with the consumer. Consumer convenience plays a big part here—if the consumer is happy there is a good chance that they will purchase the product again and again.

Along with these new successful product introductions we as an industry will continue to reap the rewards of sustained market penetration and growth. Through these mutual successes we will become more than just a supplier, but more a partner with our customer as we learn to change together. ■

Dennis Calamusa is founder and president of ALLIEDFLEX Technologies Inc. a Sarasota, FL, based consulting-sales and marketing company providing global flexible packaging machinery solutions to the North American market. Calamusa has dedicated the last 20 years of his career to packaging and in particular has supported the global shift toward innovative flexible packaging solutions. He can be reached at ph: (941) 923-1181, e-mail: dfcflex@botmail.com, or visit www.standup-pouch.com.