

## FLEXIBLE INSIGHTS

# The Shape(s) of Things to Come

**A**s marketers continue to look for the “magic” that can make or break a product introduction or even re-invent a traditional



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product category the use of “shape” as an integral part of the package design can really communicate the distinctive brand message or provide an

inviting sensory invitation to the consumer. Many of us have grown up with the image of the Coca-Cola “shaped” bottle. This “classic” glass bottle shape was to become so important to the brand that it was copyrighted. The same was true for the Capri Sun standup pouch and more recently the Minute Maid and Saddle Springs packaged beverage products.

Shape combined with great graphics and vibrant colors can really bounce a product off the retail shelf. In flexible packaging we are continuing to see the addition of convenience features including spouts, zippers and slider zippers, further enhancing the functionality of the flexible packaging format.

## Shape as a strategy

The technology to produce “shaped” pouches is continuing to evolve and the particular converting methodology used will depend upon many factors most of which will be dictated by the volume of pouches required and the magnitude of die-

cutting to be performed. “Shape” can be simple or very dramatic depending on the design and presentation desired.

Pouches can be produced on traditional pouchmaking machinery in single- or multiple-up formats and die-cut in-line with the use of platen or rotary die-cutting stations. This approach is typically the most expensive from a capital investment perspective, however on-line die cutting offers the lowest cost of production for the converting operation. These systems are typically utilized for high volume dedicated converting applications.

Off line die-cutting is probably the most popular and practical method available to most of today’s converters who need the flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of short and medium production runs. Dies can be quickly changed and setup to accommodate a multitude of shapes and designs. The cost of the dies are also typically less expensive for the off line die-cutting machine as compared to the on-line approach, however production costs will be higher as a result of the multi-step process which will require additional labor, handling and quality inspection. These additional handling costs and lower output capability will typically be reflected in a higher cost basis i.e. price per thousand as compared to the on-line die-cut / shaping approach.



## A viable alternative

With the advent of new control technology and improved servo web handling systems being incorporated into today’s technologically advanced horizontal form/fill/seal machinery we are beginning to see more and more “shaped” pouch applications coming forward as part of the in-house packaging process. This is being welcomed by many of the larger laminator-printers who are very rollstock oriented and who would prefer that the pouch making process and the associated investment be absorbed at the packaging level by the consumer product company.

As you can imagine producing quality “shaped” pouches on line from rollstock as an integral part of the packaging operation can dramatically reduce total costs as compared to running pre-made die-cut pouches on fill/seal machinery, however each situation may warrant a different technical approach. Choices are very much appreciated by the packager.

The more options we can provide our customer the more they will be willing to look to flexible packaging as a viable alternative to their more traditional packaging methods. ■

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