



Ideas for Green Packaging

Sustainable/green logistics has been a hot topic for some time. In recent years, almost all companies got on the “green” bandwagon. Open any publication, and you’ll see articles (such as this) and ads on going green.

For some, green is a great marketing point. For others who take sustainability more seriously, green is both an environmental responsibility and a way to think smart about efficiencies and reducing costs.

In a supply chain, there are many avenues to shrink your carbon footprint. Looking from a packaging point of view, I see two main areas to focus on: transportation and materials. If you reduce the volume and weight of your packages, you will reduce the amount of fuel used, resulting in lower emissions. Note that reduced volume and weight will result in lower transportation costs as well. On the packaging side, you can reduce

the amount of void fills by custom-sizing your boxes or using suspension-retention method. This will result in a smaller carbon footprint — and less landfill.

Recycle? There Are Better Options: Reduce...

As a real-life example, Amazon.com came up with “Frustration Free Packaging” in late 2008. The idea is to reduce the packaging materials on items that are designed for retail shelves and use packaging specially designed for parcel shipping instead. This action makes life easier for the customer who doesn’t have to fight with the wire ties and hard plastic cases. On the manufacturing side, the amount of packaging materials are reduced, which also results in lower weight and volume. The end result is a greener product, reduced transportation charges and happier customers. In my opinion, the number of manufacturers designing their packaging for e-commerce will increase with push from e-tailers like Amazon.

...Or Reuse

A Subaru manufacturing plant in Lafayette, Indiana receives parts from Japan protected by molded polyurethane foams. This packaging was recycled after each delivery until a few years ago, when Subaru decided to reuse these foams. Now they ship the foams back to Japan and reuse the same packaging material up to eight or nine times. This resulted in a cost savings of \$1.3 million year over year and a reduction of thousands of tons of CO₂.

The same idea can be applied to B2B shipments if the reverse logistics cost and fuel consumption is lower than the efficiency gained through reusing the packaging material. An operation can utilize reusable boxes and reuse molded foams and even void fills, if the price is right. ■

Paper, Plastic or Polyurethane?

You can choose your void fills and packaging from environmentally friendly materials. There are a variety of products on the market for different types of applications. Some of the things you need to consider when evaluating a packaging material from a “green” point of view are:

- ▶ Sustainability in its manufacturing.
- ▶ Weight and density: higher weight means more fuel consumed during transport.
- ▶ Sustainability at the end of product life: biodegradable or recyclable items are more sustainable than items ending up in landfills.

In order for “recyclable” material to be recycled instead of ending up in landfills, the end user needs to be educated on how to, and have systems in place to, recycle.

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