

2021 - The story so far...



As we emerge from lockdown and life and the economy begin to return to some sort of normality, John Weedon, Managing Director of the Weedon Group, offers his thoughts on what this new 'normal' might look like for business and the wider corrugated packaging industry.

Throughout the first half of 2021, demand for paper-based packaging across the globe outstripped manufacturers' ability to supply. Social media and the press has been full of it. Online retail soared at the expense of bricks and mortar shopping during the coronavirus lockdown. To explain the situation simplistically, if it takes one carton to get, say, 20 products on to a supermarket shelf, each of those products, if sent through the post, must be individually packaged. The maths is easy – by using online retail instead of buying from a store, we as a consumer society would be using 20 times the amount of packaging!

As we all know, one of the many attractions of corrugated cardboard as a packaging material is its recyclability. It contains up to 80% recycled material and can be recycled up to seven times before the paper fibres are depleted. But during lockdown there have been delays in getting waste corrugated cardboard back into the recycling chain. Offices, bars and restaurants, usually among the largest – and quickest – sources of recycling waste, have been closed for long periods. Collections of household recycling have been hampered by staff shortages, including those caused by the pingdemic. Recycling plants themselves have been hit by COVID cases and social distancing rules. As a result, waste paper is harder than normal to get hold of for cardboard manufacture and consequently prices are at an all-time high.

Paper prices have risen by 60%+ since January, driven partly by the inflated cost of waste paper, but also by the rising cost of energy, pallets, transport Many of the challenges facing the packaging industry – such as the shortage of lorry drivers, labour and parts – are common to all sectors. Some of our customers are struggling with dislocation of the supply chain. For example, container costs from Asia have quadrupled since January.

I expect demand for corrugated packaging to remain at current levels for the foreseeable future. In fact it could increase further when the Plastic Packaging Tax comes into force in April next year. This new tax will apply to plastic packaging that does not contain at least 30% recycled plastic. The Government's aim is to provide a clear economic incentive for businesses to use recycled plastic in the manufacture of plastic packaging, but it is likely that many manufacturers will seize the opportunity to change their packaging altogether and switch to paper-based packaging instead, increasing demand for corrugated packaging still further.

The challenges we are facing in the packaging industry do not need to be all bad news though. The key, as with any change in life, is how we respond. In the face of the rapidly evolving shopping trends of the last year, we, as a business, changed tack. A combination of flexibility, innovation and independence meant we could respond quickly to a new, potentially business-threatening situation. We rapidly expanded our eCommerce packaging range, introduced new products and launched an online packaging shop.

As we are an integrated manufacturing group with our own corrugator, we have focused our

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efforts on paper supply. We have expanded our paper supplier base, increased stocks and improved our paper procurement process, developing relationships with paper mills from all over the world. We are currently buying paper from European, Egyptian and US paper mills.

We have scaled up our business, expanding our workforce and increasing training, we have introduced new shift patterns to increase production output and we have embarked on the largest investment programme in our history to enlarge our capacity and fulfil new demand. (You can read about some of our recent equipment acquisitions on page 3.)

We are adapting to the brave new post-COVID world and are now in a strong position to support our customers, despite a very tight paper market.

Design Focus

In this column, we introduce some of the innovative ideas which our in-house graphic and structural designers have developed to solve specific problems for our customers.



The Benefits of a Total Cost of Ownership Audit A Case Study for Makita



Customer Profile

Makita Corporation is the world's foremost manufacturer of power tools. Based in Japan, with factories around the globe including the UK, the company has over 100 years' experience and its products are highly regarded for both their performance and quality.

The Problem

With the price of raw materials for packaging rising, Makita was looking to increase the cost effectiveness of both its packaging and its packaging processes. At the same time, the company wanted to improve the sustainability of its packaging. Makita therefore invited us to undertake a total cost of ownership audit, analysing its production processes, productivity, logistics and transportation to help create a leaner, more cost-controlled supply chain.

At Makita's request, we looked first at the packaging for a sander, which included a lot of empty space in the box and a separate corrugated cardboard fitting inside to support the product. This two-piece packaging was

expensive to produce and slow to assemble, which also resulted in high labour costs.

The Solution

We design packaging to minimise its impact on the environment at every stage of the supply chain. We proposed three possible solutions for Makita, of which one was a clear winner. The chosen box is a crashlock carton, manufactured from one piece of corrugated cardboard. The fitting is cut from the same sheet as the outer box, using material that would otherwise have gone to waste.

The Benefits

The new packaging is a clear improvement both in terms of cost and sustainability.

- It fits closer to the product and uses less corrugated cardboard than the existing box.
- Delivered flat, it takes up less space on pallets, in storage and on transport, with significant savings throughout the supply chain.
- It is easier to assemble, so packing speeds have risen, with an annual saving of 233 hours of labour cost and improved efficiencies.

By doing away with a separate internal fitting, Makita is reducing its impact on the environment too. The new one-piece design has resulted in considerable ecological savings:

- 2812kg CO₂ saving from transport emissions – it would take 130 trees a whole year to absorb this amount of CO₂.
- 21 pallets saved per year = 5.25 trees saved.
- 550 metres of pallet stretch wrap saved each year – it takes 1.2 years for a single tree to absorb the CO₂ emissions from this amount of stretch wrap.
- 204 metres of plastic pallet banding saved each year.

This is for just one product in Makita's vast range. The company is now working with us to use this packaging as a template to improve its other product packaging.

Read our other [case studies](#) to find out how we have used our expertise to solve specific packaging problems for our customers.

Dave Gives Us the Edge in Secure eCommerce Packaging

We have recently developed a new easy-assemble box for eRetailers which provides greater security for online purchases. Nicknamed 'Dave', the box can also speed up eCommerce packaging lines.

Dave is super-quick to assemble – considerably faster than crashlock boxes – and easy to close, with peel & seal tape top and bottom.

Because there are no gaps between flaps in the packaging, the box provides enhanced security during transit, with protection against tampering.

Dave has been designed with a flat top and bottom, which provides a good surface for attaching labels. This also makes the box easy to use on roller-veyors and increases stability when stacking on pallets.

Dave's economical design also means it uses less corrugated board than a comparable crashlock box, making it cheaper to manufacture. Our [video](#) shows just how quick and convenient Dave can be.

John Weedon, Managing Director of Weedon PSC, commented:

"With the growth in online shopping, our customers are looking for ways to simplify their packaging processes to save time and labour costs. Dave is an innovation in design which reduces packing time and produces a package which is easy to handle.

"Security is a key issue, with often expensive products passing through numerous touch-points on the way to the doorstep.

Dave's compact shape and neat design makes it very difficult to penetrate in transit."



New Investment in Equipment to Increase Capacity

With the use of corrugated packaging soaring during the Coronavirus lock-down, we have invested in two new pieces of equipment to boost our output.

We have acquired an additional Century large-format die-cutter for our Weedon PSC factory, where it will enable us to expand production capacity by 33% to meet increased demand for online retail packaging. The new die-cutter, which will run twice as fast as our existing equipment, is a flat-bed machine which cuts large sheets, and strips as it cuts for speed and efficiency.

With the growing awareness of the damaging environmental impact of traditional plastic packaging, online retailers are looking for a more eco-friendly solution. Corrugated cardboard offers a fully recyclable, sustainable, practical alternative. We have introduced a number of corrugated cardboard alternatives for postal packaging, including Flexie-mailer, our innovative postal pack which can expand from envelope to pop-up mailer to accommodate items of different sizes. Many of the green

eCommerce alternatives, such as Flexie-mailer, rely on a die-cut solution. The installation of our new die-cutter will help us keep up with the rising demand for corrugated cardboard postal packaging.

The second machine, a new strapper, has been installed at our Weedon Corrugated Products factory in Audenshaw, Manchester, where it will be used predominantly to bundle transit cases. It will provide stability and pack security to all outgoing pallets, compressing flat-packed boxes with up to 2000kg of force and strapping bundles of boxes at a speed of up to 60 pallets/hour.

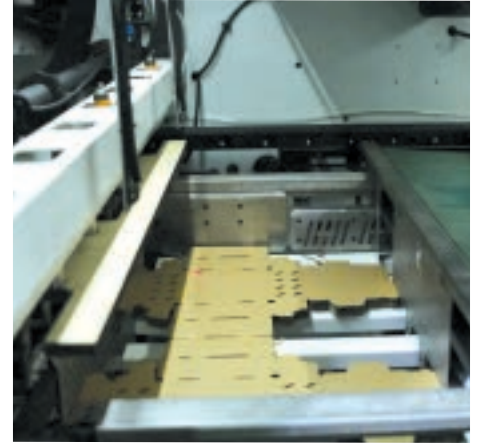
Our two new machines represent significant investment and will support our plan to expand across both our sites in response to changing retail patterns and the growth in online shopping.

Group Operations Director Peter Weedon commented:

“Shopping habits have changed. With High Street shops closed for long periods, consumers have turned in their droves to

online retail. Demand for packaging has rocketed as a result.

“We are adapting rapidly to meet this challenge with investment in new equipment, so that, as businesses begin to work their way to recovery after the pandemic, our customers can make the most of every new opportunity.”



The new die-cutter



An Audience with...

Mark Wood

Production Manager, Weedon Corrugated Products

others function. I also enjoy the opportunity to influence directly the day-to-day running of the factory, from helping on a machine, assisting in a tricky job, to sitting down and talking to somebody about their future development within the business. I feel real pride in the group of people who work here in Manchester. They never cease to amaze me as we all pull together to overcome difficult times. Our output too seems continuously to break records, with our sales figures helping to drive the business forward.

Q) How long have you been with the Weedon Group and what is your role within the company?

I have worked on this site in Audenshaw, Manchester, for 15 years and started as a general labourer. I progressed through different roles from machine operator to shift supervisor and, within the last few years, have been given the opportunity to step into my current role of Production Manager.

Q) What do you enjoy most about your work and what do you find most challenging?

I particularly enjoy my current role as it gives me an insight into all the different aspects of the Weedon Group. I get to see how each department has a direct influence on how the

Q) What do you think makes the Weedon Group unique in the marketplace today?

As far as unique goes I believe the high service levels our customers receive and the speed with which we are able to react and turn rush orders through the plant – to see an order taken over the phone, documented and then run through the corrugator and conversion machine before heading out the door, strapped and wrapped, on its way to the customer in a matter of hours is impressive.

Q) What innovations do you see making a real difference to our customers?

In my role, innovations are connected more to what's happening on the shopfloor rather than

new designs or eCommerce. I guess the fact we are actively pushing ahead with a new night shift to run the corrugator on three shifts will make a big difference to both our existing and potential new customers as we will be able to shorten lead times and increase production to meet the industry's ever increasing demand for corrugated packaging.

Q) What makes a 'good day' for you?

Strange as it sounds but a good day for me includes a few problems as I really enjoy the challenge of overcoming an issue and helping somebody in need, whether they are struggling with a job, and we brainstorm over the solution, or re-plan the machines to make what would seem an impossible ask an achievable one! Also, plenty of laughter is a must!

Q) What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

In my spare time I enjoy all things outdoors. I love going fishing which really helps me switch off and relax. I also enjoy playing and watching football. We are very blessed in the North West to have very good football teams in Man City and Liverpool but my blood runs Blue and I'm proud to support the best team in the land and all the world!

Upgrading our Universal Fruit Trays



At this time of year, the unpredictability of the British weather means that fruit and vegetable harvesting can sometimes be erratic. When there is a sudden glut, pack houses need boxes quickly – very quickly – if they are to get produce packed and delivered to store before it spoils.

To meet this need, we developed a range of corrugated cardboard fruit trays in a choice of sizes for different types of fruit or vegetable. Quick and easy to assemble to accelerate field-to-store time, our trays feature one standard graphic design suitable for different types of produce, to minimise production time and expense when the produce to be harvested cannot be predicted.

This year we have upgraded our trays, offering a water-resistant coating which will prevent the boxes deteriorating with moisture from the fruit or vegetables, and will keep the produce fresher for longer.

Our trays offer a number of other important features. Standard fruit and vegetable boxes usually used by pack houses arrive flat and are assembled on a tray-erector. However, the tray-erector cannot run fast enough to keep up with the pace of packing when there is a sudden glut. Our fast-erect trays can be assembled by hand more quickly than the machine can manage.

Manufactured from EL corrugated board, our boxes are robust enough to survive packing (and rough handling) in the field, and sufficiently strong to be stacked on pallets in bulk. They are easily recycled and made from sustainable board. This type of corrugated board also provides a good surface for high quality printing to enhance our customers' branding.

What's New Going for Gold

When Halewood Artisanal Spirits wanted to achieve gold, they came to us!

The company is one of the UK's leading independent distillers and producers of artisanal spirits. Halewood were looking for a high quality Point of Sale display unit to launch their latest product, J.J. Whitley Artisanal Russian Vodka. They wanted the unit to be gold to mirror the gold branding of their vodka, its gold bottle and the fact that the spirit is gold-filtered.

After extensive research into different types of gold boards and various methods of printing gold, we settled on a glossy gold reflective mirri board. We then worked with our ink suppliers to formulate a special gold litho print ink. Finally we used laser cutting forms for precision and a special type of tooling with rounded bends, so that the printed board could be die-cut without cracking on the folds and showing through white.

The result was a stunning display, with the gold print coupled with an excellent reproduction of the vodka bottle printed on the side of the display, giving the brand powerful in-store impact.

The key to the success of the project was the collaboration between the board manufacturer, our ink supplier, the toolmaker and our own manufacturing

team, working together to meet the customer's brief.

In addition, we arranged the co-packing of the display units in a bonded warehouse to complete the job for Halewood. In this way we were able to control the schedule from design through to delivery, taking all the hassle out of the process for our customer and ensuring that timetables were maintained.



Industry Insight The cardboard conundrum

In an [article in The Grocer](#), Andy Barnetson, Director of Packaging Affairs at the Confederation of Paper Industries (CPI), argues that industry and government need to collaborate on recycling.

Pre-COVID, the cardboard industry had already successfully established a circular supply chain infrastructure which helped achieve recycling levels of over 80% for cardboard packaging. But a number of factors, including the growth of online shopping, means we can no longer rely solely on stores to provide the recycled

paper and cardboard needed to create new corrugated cardboard boxes.

Cardboard production is up 11% on 2020 as the industry aims to keep pace with demand, but we need recycling rates to keep pace too. We need to persuade consumers to recycle in greater numbers, and to do this we must continue to lobby government – both locally and centrally – to end the disparity in recycling across the UK. Everyone has a part to play in establishing a truly circular packaging supply chain.

Weedon

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