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INVENTING THE FUTURE

Prestige brands & sustainable packs

Green luxury

From refills to eco-designed products, more prestige brands are looking to make their packs more sustainable
by Alex Wynne

Packagers have ramped up their CSR initiatives in tune with growing pressure from brands, authorities and especially consumers to make their business more sustainable. But until recently, sustainable or eco-designed packaging was often seen as the last link in the chain, and demand, especially from prestige brands, remained low, given that "green" packaging has often been perceived as diametrically opposed to the image and values of premium products.

"Prestige brands, in terms of responsible packaging, are less impacted for the moment, for obvious reasons," says Albéa director of innovation, marketing and sustainability Gilles Swyngedauw. "The volumes are lower and they haven't had as much bad press [as consumer goods...]. In prestige, we talk more about an object than a pack."

But this is changing. "Brands across the board are now looking for an approach that is more solutions-focused and less corporate than in the past," explains Aptar Group EMEA marketing director for skincare and color cosmetics Patrick Bousquel. "Over the past year, I have sensed a change in mentality—it has gone from a discourse to a more concrete approach."

Arcade Beauty senior vice president, head of Europe Carl Allain agrees: "There has been an acceleration due to the commitments the brands have been making for 2020 or 2025 in terms of reducing their environmental impact and the notion of sustainable development on a corporate level."

Depending on their positioning and the raw materials they use (those working mainly with plastic are undoubtedly under the most pressure) suppliers are focusing on the three "Rs" of eco-design—reduce,



◀ Estée Lauder made the move back to glass for Advanced Night Repair for environmental reasons

▶ Guerlain has been praised for its sustainability approach and used a jar that was 62% lighter for Orchidée Impériale



reuse, refill—to varying degrees. "The first thing we are continuing to work on is reducing packaging consumption per milliliter of product," says Swyngedauw. "There are certain limits to this in prestige, because weight is often seen as synonymous with quality. [...] We think refilling in store will help prestige products evolve. The products will remain prestigious, and the discourse will not be about packaging, the communication will be around an object [...] We are developing solutions in all segments. The brands are working on these areas, so I think we're in the starting blocks."

While such solutions remain difficult for brands to implement at retail, the growth

of standalone stores and directly controlled retail is seen as a facilitator for this. Over the past year, several high-end brands, notably Yves Saint Laurent and Lancôme, have launched refillable skincare solutions. Lush's rechargeable Naked lipsticks, with packaging by Aptar, are another example. Several suppliers are working to introduce standard solutions to their catalogs that offer brands refillable packs or refills as demand grows.

Option refill

"We need to focus more on refills," agrees Verescence global marketing & communication director Astrid Dulau-Vuillet.

"It's starting to take hold, but it's slower than our other programs. In fragrance, we are working with various partners on leads for collars that would make it easier to refill fragrance bottles. It's moving ahead, but not so fast. Demand has not been as strong as we anticipated."

Going for glassification

Verescence has seen strong growth in demand for glass in the past 18 months, a trend the company terms "glassification", as plastic-bashing has pushed brands to seek alternatives. Nuxe and Estée Lauder are among brands that have repackaged certain products in glass, for example. "Lauder wanted to move back to glass [for Advanced Night Repair] for environmental reasons and also because it has a more premium image," she says. "The environmental stakes for groups like L'Oréal and Lauder and others are very high. That is driving the market, pushing brands and groups to seek out eco-design solutions."

Demand is also continuing to grow for Verescence's Infini Neo glass, which has 90% recycled content including 25% post-consumer glass, largely because its transparency is equivalent to that of virgin glass, thereby corresponding well to luxury codes. When it comes to reduced glass weights, meanwhile, demand is slower in coming. "It is difficult to change mentalities, especially for core [prestige] brands," says Dulau-Vuillet. She cites the example of Guerlain, however, which used a 62% lighter jar for its revamped Orchidée Impériale product. "It explained to the consumer that the product had a lesser environmental impact, and it sold more products," she says. "This is the type of thing that can move the market."

Recyclability, meanwhile, has increasingly become a core part of the discourse. This is due to the strict commitments brands are making—some because of legislation, notably on plastics, others by adhering to organizations like the Ellen MacArthur Foundation with its New Plastics Economy, which includes signatories like L'Oréal and Unilever as well as Albéa and AptarGroup.

But recycled materials still have their share of challenges, with collection schemes in many geographies still under-developed and

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Neopac head of marketing Cornelia Schmid

technical limits on what can be recycled, even before the question of aesthetics comes into play. "Today, there are only three [plastic] raw materials that can be effectively recycled: PET, PE and PP, so it's important to move over as much as possible to these plastics to begin with," says Swyngedauw. "For us, the biggest priority for the circular economy is PCR," he adds.

In this respect, the development of new

materials (see article page xx) that improve the aesthetic qualities of PCR content are essential to create packs that meet prestige brands' criteria. Certain brands with a sustainable positioning—Lush is one example, Unilever's REN, with its ocean plastic bottle, another—are incorporating sustainability into their marketing and seeing success with consumers as a result. "At the moment, demand [from sustainable prestige brands] is growing faster than the luxury brands, but it is also a smaller market," says tube manufacturer Neopac head of marketing Cornelia Schmid.

Growth from such brands—driven by millennial and GenZ consumers—is seen as key in changing mindsets. "The attraction among consumers for sustainability initiatives will force [brands] to demonstrate their efforts," says Cosfibel chief operating officer Stanislas Peronnet

But for the moment, this still remains a barrier for much of the premium market, and suppliers are working on new solutions to help counter this. Albéa is for example working on a tube with maximum recycled content but a layer of virgin plastic on the outside to conform to demand for aesthetics.

Decoration & mono-material packs

Decoration is another barrier. "Every decoration you do is very bad for the recyclability of a tube," says Neopac's Schmid. "We are working on specific ideas of how we can separate these two things, packaging and decoration."

Encouraging mono-material packaging, meanwhile, is a key area of focus for most suppliers—whatever raw material they work with—to promote recyclability. "We are concentrating on recyclable mono-materials," says Arcade Beauty's ■■■

Prestige brands & sustainable packs



▲ Refills are seen as a key way of making packaging more sustainable. Aptar's refillable lipstick for Lush (left) and Texen's refillable skincare pods for Lancôme (right) are two examples of recent launches

■■■ Allain, echoing other players. Arcade Beauty is for example working on mono-material sample sachets, despite the current lack of recycling schemes for such products, anticipating demand. Cosfibel, meanwhile, is promoting mono-material gift boxes, and both Albéa and Aptar are working on new mono-material solutions in core categories like pumps to improve recyclability. Using solutions that remove the need for gluing different packaging parts together are another step that most suppliers have integrated to make packs more easily recyclable.

"There are areas that will not change, for ultra-luxury products, which will perhaps remain mixed materials, but if we can prove, with a simple information sheet for example, how to take something apart when we want to throw it away, that would be a step in the right direction," says Peronnet.

Counting the cost

In many cases, however, the cost of eco-designed solutions remains a key barrier, involving investment for the supplier. "[Eco-design] is not necessarily more expensive, but there is a lot of R&D involved and we have had to invest quite

a lot in this, but we cannot pass the cost onto the brand," says Dulau-Vuillet. "They are willing to take [more sustainable projects] on board providing we can offer solutions at a similar price point, and if

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AptarGroup EMEA marketing director for skincare and color cosmetics Patrick Bousquet

the aesthetics are not hindered," says Cosfibel's Peronnet.

"When [brands] are able to communicate to consumers that a product has been eco-designed and make that a value, they will be able to invest more," says Allain. "If they cannot valorize eco-design, I'm not sure."

Others, meanwhile, suggest that the costs of eco-design can be compensated for by savings in other areas. "Increasingly, we will produce a brief with an eco-designed solution with fewer components, so while the raw materials may be more expensive, because there are fewer parts there is less tooling and potentially less assembly, so the total cost is not necessarily higher," says Texen industrial director Olivier Mascaï.

But the biggest barrier in prestige, for the moment, still remains aesthetics. "One of the challenges that we've got is that imagery is so powerful in beauty, and we've got to enhance the narrative and the results of our efforts in a way that equals that imagery," says US-based brush manufacturer Anisa's chief operating officer Fred Lewis.

As new solutions become available and pressure from consumers continues to grow, the sustainability credentials of packaging become easier to measure—notably thanks to the implementation of LCA tools, which most suppliers are now working with. This is also set to see more sustainable packs hit the market. And this, in turn, will potentially bring costs down in key areas. ■