

Campaign Highlight

Paper-based Packaging Has a Great Sustainability Story

January 5, 2024

As seen in [Packaging Technology Today](#)

It Deserves Great Storytellers

In 2014 the U.S. Department of Agriculture put a question to U.S. manufacturers and importers of paper and paper-based packaging: should they join forces to help market and educate consumers about a great American natural resource?

The Paper and Packaging Board exists because they said “yes.” Three times.

Today, our consumer campaign is about sharing paper and packaging’s environmental story that is especially important in a world where more people than ever are concerned about doing the right thing for the planet.

Our campaign messaging is informed by careful research and close collaboration with our Board.

We know, for instance, that 84% of our most important consumer segment — we call them “Expressives” because they are united by their way of seeing the world as opposed to any particular demographic characteristic — are increasingly concerned about consumption of paper and paper-based packaging. In short, they feel guilty about waste.

But we also know their guilt is fueled by misunderstandings. In fact, 58% of these consumers incorrectly think forests are shrinking, not growing; and 61% think this natural resource is “fragile,” when it’s actually one of the most robust and replenishable resources on earth.

Focusing on sustainability

Still, there is good news, and a reservoir of good will for us to tap. Three out of four Expressives feel positively about our industry and products, and they prefer paper-based products over plastics by a two-to-one ratio. We can and must build on this.

Our latest research shows that we *are* building on it. It shows that when consumers learn the facts about our industry’s sustainability practices, they feel better about the industry.

And here is where a dogged focus on sustainability translates into an increase in consumer preference: when people feel like they are part of the environmental solution by choosing paper products, their likelihood of consuming them increases. Simply put, they feel good about what they’re buying, so they buy more.

We’ve also learned how to move the dial by connecting our industry and product sustainability benefits to consumer values and aspirations. We’ve pinpointed the specific language and messages that work. And with that roadmap in hand, our campaign has already begun telling a powerful sustainability story at a scale, the way only we can.

And while we always seek to highlight both paper and packaging, there’s no question that packaging—and sustainable packaging innovations in particular—are at the core of all our work.

P+PB initiatives

We're promoting multiple initiatives, along with other supporting materials, across multiple channels, including traditional television, cable, streaming, paid digital channels, magazines, podcasts, social media, and the campaign's own [HowLifeUnfolds](#) website. Here's some of the highlights:

The centerpiece, [Go Papertarian!](#) Initiative, built around comedian and actress Retta, is getting consumers to think about product packaging both before purchase and at the point of sale. Our spots see Retta at work, home, and the grocery store, pointing out the sustainable virtues of paper and paper-based product packaging, and using humor to gently correct underinformed foils, like her intern and neighbors, about the proper ways to recycle — all the while showcasing the industry's impressive diversity of products.

[PackIt! The Packaging Recycling Design Challenge](#) has contestants compete to design recyclable product packaging from the ground up in 10 hours, with a \$5,000 prize for the winner.

The [Box to Nature](#) residential recycling labeling initiative includes a persuasive recycling reminder brands can use on all kinds of boxes. And, we have multiple partnerships with recycling influencers showing consumers how to become “super recyclers.”

The [Future of Recycling video](#) showcasing the newest, biggest and most high-tech recycled paper mills in North America from Graphic Packaging in Kalamazoo, Michigan; and a bold and potentially game-changing experimental facility from Georgia-Pacific in Toledo, Oregon, where a paper company's recycling is not just paper and boxes but turning piles of ordinary household garbage into useful new products.

What's next?

We're hard at work thinking up the next iteration of our story, to ensure both that consumers continue to say "yes" to paper-based packaging and products, and to make sure that our industry says "yes" the next time they're asked whether we are delivering on our promise to them.

This moment needs products with a great sustainability story. And that story deserves great storytellers.