



Six seconds to a sale

 Ben DiPietro

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Packaging can be the difference between making a sale and not making one, yet packaging is often a lost stepchild when companies are deciding how to market and sell their products.

"Sometimes packaging becomes an afterthought. Those decisions are often made at the last minute," Andrew Luke, vice president of business development, global packaging solutions, for MeadWestvaco Corp. (MWV), said at the **IntraFish Media Seafood Leadership Luncheon** on Sunday at the Boston Seafood Show.

The lack of time spent thinking about packaging can be costly, as MWV research shows the average consumer takes six seconds to make a decision on whether to buy a particular product.

The company's research found 63 percent of consumers look at packaging before deciding to make -- or not make -- a purchase, while 75 percent will push aside a damaged package in the frozen section, even if it is a brand they prefer.

"We have other data which suggests if they can't find another box of their preferred brand, they'll go to a competitor brand, or leave the category altogether," said Luke. "Then there's a real strong correlation to loss of brand trust and bad feelings toward the retailer."

Packaging needs to be an integral part of developing a strategy for a brand, even a foodservice brand, said Luke, who added in addition to the "four Ps" of marketing -- product, price, promotion and placement -- a fifth "P" needs to be added: packaging.

"It's an integral part of developing a positioning strategy for your brand, but it can also be a key driver of taking out costs," he said. "Going back to the questions on sustainability, it's a strong sustainability story."

So what type of packaging to use?

In some categories, consumers want windows to see the product they are considering, especially if it's a raw seafood product, but less so if the food is prepared since that doesn't look so good. There also is the trend of eco-friendly packaging, which despite advances in technology, remains a niche segment of the industry at this point, mostly because it usually costs more than traditional packaging options.

As an example, Luke told the luncheon attendees about how MWV developed the first post-consumer fiber allowed for use in a hot drink cup -- in this case, coffee cups at Starbucks.

"A lot of those choices are costly. That may change as technology develops and scale is created, but they're not cheap," said Luke. "Probably in some cases, the application has been a little bit nichey. But those that have decided to commit to that type of packaging have decided that's an important part of their brand identity and they are willing to pay for it."

The Virginia-based company had success in developing a new 12-pack package for Coca-Cola. Since switching to the FridgeMaster 2x6 package, Coke has reported increased consumption, an increase in repurchase frequency, and improved packaging efficiency, he said.

"Focus on how the consumer interacts with packaging," said Luke. "Packaging makes an impact. You've got six seconds. We're here to help."

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