



TRICORBRAUN®

# THE LASTING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PACKAGE DESIGN





## FOUR TRENDS SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PACKAGING

The pandemic has taken us all for a ride. We went from old normal to new normal, but nothing has really been normal. We've baked bread, foraged for toilet paper, and drank quarantinis. We've carried minipacks of cleaning wipes and tiny bottles of hand sanitizer. And we've washed our hands—a lot.

It's clear the pandemic has reshaped our view of the world and how we interact within it, but how exactly has the shift in our behaviors and our routines impacted package design?

From prioritizing health and hygiene to designing for ecommerce, here are four packaging trends that every consumer packaged goods (CPG) company needs to understand.

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### Packaging designs that highlight hygiene and safety.

What does "safe" mean? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said that touching surfaces "is not thought to be a common way that COVID-19 spreads." But the CDC also said that it is possible for someone to get infected "by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or eyes."<sup>i</sup>

It's no surprise that consumers in 2020 looked at their packages with fear. As a result, we quarantined our mail before opening it and wiped down every can of soup as it entered our homes. Now, we better understand the low risk associated with viruses on packaging surfaces but our perception of our safety has fundamentally changed, and packaging needs to adapt to ease our anxiety.

How CPG companies address this moving forward will vary—but, regardless of product category, hygiene is top of mind. Single-use plastic packaging has been reprioritized for products purchased or consumed in public spaces. Packaging vegetables in plastic, for



TricorBraun Stock Solution  
63mm Wide-Mouth PET Packer



example, reassures consumers that their food is unexposed and isn't being handled multiple times before consumption. Single-use plastic also ensures your on-the-go items, such as snacks, supplements, and beverages, stay free from harmful germs and bacteria. Meanwhile, scientists are continually exploring new ways to keep our food safe, including the use of antiviral and antibacterial materials in packaging.

Consumers want to be reassured their products are safe. Tamper evidency is essential in the nutraceutical and food sectors in particular, where consumers require evidence that a package has not been previously opened. Targeted on-pack messaging that highlights health and safety claims is equally important. This means hand hygiene and household cleaning products should emphasize germ killing efficacy and products made with clean ingredients in nutraceuticals and personal care should clearly label their benefits to consumers in easy to read fonts.

## 2 Sustainable packaging remains an industry imperative.

When the Coronavirus hit, sustainability took a back seat to safety. But it has been re-established as a priority. As consumers reliance on ecommerce and delivery grows, they are becoming more acutely aware of their environmental footprint. Everything from single-use plastics in their takeout orders to the packaging of their online groceries creates waste. As the direct-to-consumer shipping model shows no signs of slowing, consumers and brands alike will be forced to reckon with all the waste.

Meanwhile, leading CPG companies have pledged to have 25-30 percent of post-consumer recycled (PCR) content in their plastic packaging by 2025. Resource Recycling reports that companies averaged just 6.2 percent PCR content in 2019, meaning they have a long way to go in the next few years.<sup>ii</sup> But how should companies balance sustainability with the ongoing demand for hygienic packaging?



TricorBraun Stock Solution  
Paper Push-Up Tubes



TricorBraun Success Story: Truman's Household Cleaning Products

One answer: Sustainable packaging will refocus on eco-friendly materials. Recyclable and biodegradable packaging is ideal for single-use. Other sustainable materials range from polyethylene and polypropylene PCR to bio-based resins and paperboard to aluminum. Each has pros and cons regarding functional requirements, cost, availability, and environmental footprint that companies will need to assess to select the options best suited to their unique packaging requirements.

Meanwhile, reusable and refillable packaging will remain a strong option as long as hygiene can be assured. TerraCycle's Loop Initiative is leading the way for hygienic package options in this space. From Gillette to Haagen-Dazs and Tide to Tropicana, major brands participate in the program that allows consumers to shop online, use, and then send back their packaging to be professionally cleaned. The process requires sturdy package formats that can be shipped, such as aluminum or plastic, and that can withstand high cleaning temperatures before being refilled and reshipped to consumers' doorsteps. The process ensures the refilled product is free from germs and bacteria and eliminates the need to purchase from high trafficked stores.

The use of refillable packaging is also increasing in the personal care and home care markets, where concerns about contamination are lessened. In these markets, consumers are increasingly seeking refillable options to cut down on plastic waste—and CPG brands are responding. For example, personal care brands Dove (deodorant) and Olay (moisturizer) have launched consumer-refillable options. In home care, Blueland's cleaning products are sold as tablet refills that are dissolved into a reusable bottle with water to create the cleaning solution. Monteur Pilon sells its dish soap powder in powder refills that are poured into a reusable elegant glass and silicone bottle. And Truman's home cleaning products are sold with an empty PET bottle and concentrate tubes that dispense their contents once the trigger sprayer is threaded on. Brands that can incorporate eco-conscious messaging and sustainable materials into their refillable packaging allow consumers to feel even better about their purchases and their impact on the environment.



TricorBraun Stock Solution  
HiVis Refill or Dispensing System





### 3 Designing for ecommerce.

Dish soap. A package of lentils. Two cans of soup. A 4-pack of light bulbs. That's the mishmash of sizes, shapes, and package weights typical in the randomness of the average online shopping cart. And, yes, it presents a problem: How do you pack a mix of dry, liquid, and fragile items so everything arrives without leaking or breaking? Moreover, how do you do it with a minimum of packaging waste?

Indeed, retailers increasingly faced this challenge as consumers stayed home in 2020 to avoid once highly-trafficked stores. As we've adjusted our routines, we've learned to appreciate the convenience of having everything from apples to vitamins delivered to our cars or dropped off on our doorsteps. Even as the public health crisis abates, expect consumers to spend less time in stores and more time shopping online. The continued growth of ecommerce means designing for multiple touchpoints and protecting packages that are jostled, stacked upside down, and tossed on doorsteps. And optimizing for shipping rather than shelf display has significant implications for packaging design.

Brent Nelson, senior manager of customer packaging experience and sustainability at Amazon, once said that "packaging designed to stand out on a retail shelf is often oversized with expensive 'romance' design aesthetics, redundant features to prevent theft, and not capable of surviving the journey to the customer."<sup>iii</sup> Not designing for ecommerce will lead to leaks, crushing, and breakage—and increased customer service time, return logistics and costs, reduced customer loyalty, and negative brand impressions.

As companies look to rethink their packaging for ecommerce, strengthening packaging integrity will be critical. Selecting plastic or aluminum rather than glass, for example, is both lighter to ship and reduces breakage. Ecommerce-friendly closures offer secure, leak-free seals. Another option: pairing a traditional liner with a closure to create a secure seal.

While package integrity remains critical, the brands that stand out will be the ones that also optimize their designs to connect with customers (while considering the environmental footprint of the packaging—and shipping—materials they choose). The opportunity lies not only in the product design but also in the unboxing experience. Birchbox shipments, for example, include internal wrapping paper, colored to go with the visual theme of the box. Box décor and layout change monthly. Dollar Shave Club users get a card with various messages, like "Have a bloody good shave" and "Scratch off lottery tickets. Not your face,"

in the box with their razor blades. Other brands add samples and incorporate stickers, add-ons, graphic applications, and textures to surprise and delight their customers.



## The Unboxing Experience

If consumers are shifting their buying to online, what does it matter if your product pops on the shelf?

**Unboxing is the new shelf.** The unboxing experience lets consumers engage with your product and explore your brand story. In so doing, unboxing offers another way for CPG companies to connect emotionally with their customers and make that WOW impression.

Controlling costs works best when package design is married with manufacturing and shipping considerations.

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### Cost-efficient design to meet consumer price sensitivity.

The financial fallout at the beginning of the global pandemic caused a lot of people to rethink their priorities and strengthen their savings accounts. Then, a bounce back in consumer spending occurred in 2021, fueled by government stimulus checks and the end of lock downs. In 2022, the economy is set to moderate. The stimulus checks have run out and consumers are expected to be more price sensitive. That means that brands that can control costs stand to gain market share. Private label brands, in particular, can capitalize on their value propositions. And those that adopt strong on-pack messaging about their health and hygiene benefits have new opportunities to stand out.

Controlling costs works best when package design is married with manufacturing and shipping considerations. For example, light-weighting by using less material or substituting plastic for glass in packaging design reduces shipping costs. Designing square packages rather than round ones optimizes space and allows more product to be shipped on a pallet or in a shipping crate. Other design strategies can speed up fill times and reduce breakage at the manufacturing site, saving time and money while increasing the efficiency of the overall process. Designing for cost savings not only ensures that your pricing remains competitive, but it can also help buffer you from increased expenditures elsewhere in your supply chain.



TricorBraun Success Story: Hello Bello Square vitamin bottles with CR closures



## CONCLUSION

The challenge for consumer packaged goods companies as they consider the lasting impacts of the pandemic on delivering their product to consumers will be to adapt their packaging designs to address these sometimes-competing challenges. That's because consumers want safety, and sustainability, and price-conscious design—and they want to be wowed. Each first impression is an opportunity to make a positive experience for the user and, ultimately, create brand loyalty.

Of course, not every package can be designed to address all these trends. Nor should it. It depends on what you're selling and how it gets into your customers' hands. Price will always be a factor, but prioritizing safety and hygiene is perhaps the most critical requirement for consumer packaged goods products. And then, we must not forget that designing for ecommerce is key and the focus on sustainable packaging, whether recyclable, refillable, or anything else, is not going away.

The more CPG companies understand and incorporate these trends into package design, the more responsive you will be to the anxieties, needs, and desires of your customers—and you will gain and retain their loyalty long-term. And when you're ready to refresh your existing packaging or design something new, TricorBraun is here to help.



<sup>4</sup>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. How COVID-19 Spreads. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-covid-spreads.html>.

<sup>5</sup>Colin Staub. Major packaging users hit 6.2% average recycled content. Resource Recycling. November 10, 2020. <https://resource-recycling.com/recycling/2020/11/10/major-packaging-users-hit-6-2-average-recycled-content/>.

<sup>10</sup>Lisa Pierce. Amazon on creating ecommerce packaging that's great for all: customers, companies, and the environment. Packaging Digest. January 25, 2018. <https://www.packagingdigest.com/optimization/amazon-creating-ecommerce-packaging-thats-great-all-customers-companies-and-environment>.



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