

Making the case for accessibility

In the second part of our look into safe packaging, Dr Rolf Abelmann, managing director of ivm Childsafe outlines the role manufacturers must play in creating accessible packaging for the elderly



Dr Rolf Abelmann

Elderly people living in industrialised nations are becoming older and older. Yet at the same time, they remain active in their old age, mastering their daily lives, enjoy culture, sports, travel and many other activities. Nevertheless, with increasing age, comes deterioration of vision, skill and strength. These are factors which make it vital for companies and packaging manufacturers to tackle the issue of senior-friendly packaging head-on.

But what are the properties that distinguish senior-friendly and also consumer-friendly packaging from other packaging? The EN 15945 ('Packaging, Ease of opening, Criteria and test methods for evaluating consumer packaging') is the first standardised method to simultaneously assess the ease of opening and the consumer acceptance of packaging.

For marketing and packaging development EN 15945 is a valuable tool when considering the relationship between the packaging and the consumer.

The packaging is essential for the consumer's purchasing decision since it is normally the first product feature the consumer notices. For 45% of consumers it is the packaging that is actually the main reason to repeat purchase.

Reversal of the age pyramid

In the past, manufacturers and packaging companies have created their range of packaging solutions mainly in line with the needs of the younger population. Due to demographic changes and therefore their considerable purchasing power, the 60+ target group has become more interesting and desirable as a potential customer base to drive success, now and in the future.

Demographically, society is on average getting older, mainly due to increased life

expectancy and a decline in birth rates. In 1950 for example, the number of people under the age of 20 years was about twice that of people who were 60 or older. By 2050 however, this ratio will have been reversed. Then there will be twice as many older people as younger. Even today in Germany, for example, there are already 18 million people over 60 years of age.

It is clear therefore that people aged 60+ are a growing target group. For companies, the task is to explore requirements for senior-friendly packaging that can be easily identified in a product- and packaging-specific way.

The 60+ generation's problems with consumer packaging

There are a number of factors that should be considered when designing a suitable packaging solution. To ensure satisfaction of the older consumers groups, it would first of all be desirable to provide packaging solutions which come with portioning possibilities, optimal shelf life, are attractive in design and are easily recognisable, to name just a few.

According to a study by the Federal Association of Senior Citizen Organizations (BAGSO) in Germany, the main issues for older consumers when it comes to packaging are the information on the packaging and its opening mechanism.

Over half the respondents said that the font was illegibly small. As a consequence, information about the expiration date, the product's ingredients and information on how prepare it was difficult to read. And 75.4% of respondents expressed that the packaging's opening mechanism did not work effectively.

More than 50% indicated that the tab or the tear strip couldn't be found, and 46%

said that a lot of force was needed.

In cases of such negative assessment of the packaging or negative experiences, the majority of consumers react in a straightforward way, resulting in the products associated with packaging problems either not being purchased at all, or not purchased again.

CEN/TS 15945:2011

What can be done so that packaging can easily be opened by the majority of consumers? Well CEN/TS 15945:2011 provides a method by which both the packaging's ease of opening and consumer satisfaction attributes can be assessed.

It takes into account that with age, not only visual acuity and motor skills diminish, but also that the power of the hands starts to decrease. Easy opening is defined here as: "Ease of handling during the opening process, which is supported by the product packaging to give the consumer the chance to reach his or her key objective."

The main objectives are effectiveness and efficiency while handling, and the degree of consumer satisfaction with the handling process.

Packaging is considered as easy to open if the majority of adult consumers describe it as effective, efficient and satisfactory according to the above criteria. ★

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