Export in Focus

'Packaging for Export'
Packaging for Export

Selecting and preparing the product for export requires not only product knowledge but also knowledge of the unique characteristics of each market being targeted. Market research conducted and foreign representatives contacts should give any company an idea of what products can be sold and where. However, before the sale can occur, the company may need to modify a particular product to satisfy buyer tastes or needs in foreign markets.

One important aspect of the export product is its packaging - both presentation packaging and packing for shipment. The packaging design should be based on the consumer needs. In industrial products, the pack should be considered for its usage and for its amenability to storing, pouring, re-use, etc. For consumer products, the pack might have various functions: protective, informative, merchandising & conforming to legal requirements and buying habits.

Packaging protects and stores goods before, during and after shipment. When products are being packaged, their peculiar characteristics must be kept in mind. The product factors that need to be consider when deciding upon the best type of packaging include: fragility, durability, resistance to abrasion, value, susceptibility to moisture, chemical reactions such as oxidation and corrosion, chemical stability and deterioration or shelf life.

Various precautions should be taken by an exporter while packaging products. The labeling and packaging may have to alter to comply with the targeted country’s labeling or environmental regulations. Presentation of the product is very important particularly for consumer goods. The retail pack should be well designed and instructions, etc. should be translated into the local language. In packaging requirements, the exporter must conform with the
customer's requirements, international & specific packaging standards and regulations applicable in the market concerned.

Quality packaging for shipments is vital, even in these days of containerization and air-freight systems. Poor quality packing can mean poor quality product, costly delivery & storage and failure to meet legal requirements. To avoid misunderstanding with the customer, the contract should specify the type of packaging to be used to protect the goods during handling, transport and storage. In some cases, approval of the packaging and loading by an expert is recommended.

In the same context, consumers are concerned with both the product itself and the product's supplementary features, such as packaging, warranties and service. These issues might raise new considerations for exporters, such as:

- Are colors used on labels and packages offensive or attractive to the foreign buyer? For example, in some countries certain colors are associated with death.
- Can labels be produced in official or customary language if required by law or practice?
- Does information on product content and country of origin have to be provided?
- Are weights and measures stated in the local unit?

Packaging remains with the product at point of purchase until the product is used. It also gives the product a good visual image, and through display techniques, distinguishes it from competing products. Each target market can influence packaging in several ways. When deciding what type of packaging to use for the exported goods, exporters should keep in mind the following important factors:

- Importers' requirements for transportation packaging
- Buying behavior of customers
- Packaging of competing products
Packaging a product can have a big effect on who buys the product and how it is perceived after purchase.

In terms of the materials used for packaging, the following table illustrates the material, its different types and some examples of packages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Example of Packages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>Sheet metal, tinplate, steel</td>
<td>Drums, cans, containers, pressurized containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood</td>
<td>Rough sawn timber, planed timber, plywood, fiberboard, particle board</td>
<td>Cases, pallets, crates, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardboard</td>
<td>Flat, corrugated, double-sided, double-double, triple corrugated</td>
<td>Boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plastics</td>
<td>Polyethylene, polystyrene, PET, PVC</td>
<td>Bags, drums and bottle, bottle crates, rigid and semi-rigid containers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>Multi-wall bags</td>
<td>Sacks &amp; bags</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glass</td>
<td>Commercial, lead, Borosilicate, fibre glass</td>
<td>Bottles, flasks, cardboard, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For all exporters, care must be taken for the packaging of products for export, particularly, to developed countries. Some countries have strict regulations on packaging and labeling, particularly for nutritional, perishable or dangerous goods. For example, in Europe, consumers are environmentally conscious, as a result, using an eco-friendly packaging is recommended.

Packaging is also influenced by international guidelines such as Codex Alimentarius, ISO standards, national health, safety, environmental & consumer protection measures and regulations affecting the product & packaging concerned. The exporters can obtain information and guidance on packaging and labeling from the target countries' respective embassies and consulates.
In terms of packaging trends, environmental concerns and changing consumer behavior can dictate packaging trends. Consumers prefer packages that do not require difficult disposal procedures, are easy to carry and store, etc. Such trend information can be obtained from technical journals and exhibitions. Suppliers of packaging equipment and materials can also provide useful information.

The following aspects cover the major marketing and technical requirements for good packaging.

**Physical Protection**: ability to withstand mechanical stresses such as shock and drop.

**Quality Protection**: protecting the product’s shelf-life (colors, flavors, etc.) by safeguarding the product from physical and technical stresses arising from heat, cold, humidity, etc.

**Product Information**: facilitate product recognition by providing readable product information such as weight, name of manufacturers, shelf-life, country of origin, etc.

**Product Promotion**: display value, visibility, quality image, brand name promotion, printing and varnishing.

**Efficiency in use**: easy to handle, to open, to dispense, firmness, child proof.

**Physical Attributes**: temperature resistance, performance attributes.

**Machinability**: ease of capping, labeling and printing, filling speed, shape stability before, during and after use, glue compatibility.

**Storage**: fitness for pelletization, fitness for internal transport, stacking weight and strength.
**Transport**: maximum weight, dimensions, weight and volume ratio.

**Trade Aspects**: weight, identification of product, brand, marking and code, disposability, etc.

**Recyclability**: weight minimization and reduction, metals, no PVC, plastics, biodegradable natural materials (carton, paper, wood, etc.), returnability (glass, pallets).

Finally, it is important to know that packaging is the key to communicating the value added benefits of a products that addresses a consumer need. Also, it is a powerful marketing technique to move more products and add more value. In addition, packaging as a product related attribute is critical to the creation and communication of brand identity.

When coordination and co-operation exist, Saudi exports service providers could play an important role in developing export activities in overseas markets. Saudi exports service providers could also develop resources such as “packaging guide for Saudi exporters”. These kind of resources could be designed to provide researched information on foreign countries and overseas markets packaging requirements. Accordingly, Saudi exporters activities development will encourage exports and grow related employment.