



Sustainable Labeling & Packaging Trends



Sustainability is the ability to maintain or improve the conditions for the long-term survival of humans and nature.

Sustainability is not a new concept, but there is a growing awareness from both consumers and businesses to do their part in putting sustainability into practice. Nowadays, consumers are more likely to pay attention to the brands they are buying and base their purchasing decisions partially on the brand's commitment to sustainability. Research shows that consumers, especially younger consumers, are even willing to pay more for products that are more sustainable. In addition to consumer demand, switching to more sustainable practices can also be beneficial to the health of employees who are working with these products daily.



When it comes to labels and packaging, there are many areas where sustainability can be a factor. How the packaging is created, including the graphics, inks, materials and adhesives used, as well as the ability for the packaging to be reused or recycled should all be considered.



Consumers have their own opinions about their packaging preferences. Here's what participants from a recent GlobalWebIndex survey said that they wanted from sustainable packaging.

64%

want recyclable packaging

53%

want reusable packaging

46%

want to reduce overpackaging

39%

want biodegradable packaging

36%

want packaging made from
renewable resources

35%

want it to be easier to separate
packaging materials for disposal

Sustainability Trends

There are many different ways to make your packaging more sustainable. Below are current trends in sustainability that some

1. Inks

One component of labels and packaging that has an impact on sustainability is the type of ink that is used. Different types of inks emit different levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) when drying and can create poor air quality for the employees who work with them. Water-based inks are a more sustainable option than solvent-based inks. Water-based inks use water as the primary solvent, rather than harsher substances like acetone. They emit lower levels of VOCs than solvent inks and can be safer for employees to work with.



2. Materials & Adhesives

The materials and adhesives that are used in labels and packaging also have a large impact on sustainability. Materials that are made from recycled materials, are designed to be recycled, or that are biodegradable are all options that are growing in popularity. Adhesives have an impact on sustainability because they may inhibit the recycling process if they are not able to be removed from their container. Water-based adhesives that dissolve at high temperatures or wash away with water are more sustainable because they allow labels to separate from their container, which can then be recycled properly. Better recyclability means less products going to the landfill and more resources being reused.



3. Size & Design

Another facet that can affect sustainability is the design of your label. One way to minimize your label's environmental footprint is to reduce it in size. Consider the maximum size your label needs to be to still achieve your intended effect. Even if it is just slightly smaller, over time you will be using less materials, inks and adhesives. If you have too much information on your label to reduce the size, consider replacing some information with a QR code that links to a webpage. This could allow you to make your label smaller while also reducing clutter.



You can also assess the ink usage in your design. Designs that have full color images, backgrounds and text are going to be using more ink than a label that is text only. There may be areas of your design that you could simplify without compromising the overall look. Even converting backgrounds or text that are rich black (CMYK) to black only can reduce ink usage.

4. Consumer Education

After your product is sold, the responsibility of sustainability switches to the consumer. It is up to them what they do with your packaging, but there are still ways that you can point them in the direction of sustainability. If your label is on a container that could be repurposed for something else, consider including a QR code on your label that will take your consumers to a website with fun and unique ideas for reusing your packaging. For example, if your product comes in a glass jar, your consumers could repurpose it as a vase or container for art or office supplies.



If you are encouraging reuse, ensure that your label is using an adhesive that will remove easily, if appropriate. If your label is on a recyclable container, consider adding a simple "recycle me!" or some short instructions if it requires it. Some products may be able to be recycled with their label, while others may need the label to be removed first. Educate your consumer through a QR code or instructions directly on your packaging if you have the space.

5. Product's End of Life

Unfortunately, label incompatibility causes recycling centers to reject millions of containers every year. That's why it's important to consider your products' end-of-life, or the likelihood that it will be able to be recycled. If you don't consider the compatibility of materials, adhesives, and facestocks of your product, you could be contributing to the reason containers are not able to be recycled. For example, if you have a recyclable container but not a recyclable label, you are relying on your consumer to know that they will need to remove the label before recycling. Ideally, your container would be recyclable, and your label would either be easily removable or dissolvable during the recycling process.



Learn More

Sustainability is not always easy to incorporate into your brand, but it is essential that businesses look for ways to improve their sustainability for the long-term survival of humans and nature. Not every trend is going to work for your brand, but find what makes sense for your brand to be more sustainable. If you're not sure where to start, Whitlam Group can help you assess your packaging and offer solutions that are more sustainable. We can help you implement these changes and conduct any necessary testing to make sure that it will still work for you.



Sources:

<https://www.gwi.com/hubfs/Downloads/Sustainable-Packaging-Unwrapped.pdf>

Memberships and Affiliations



Certifications



intertek intertek

About Whitlam Group

Whitlam Group is a leader of engineered label solutions and functional parts, solving complex label challenges for the world's largest corporations. Serving the automotive, industrial and consumer goods market for over sixty years, as a strategic partner. We understand the needs and processes of our customers and we proactively help them to achieve their objectives.

Learn more at www.whitlam.com



24800 SHERWOOD AVE.
CENTER LINE, MI 48015

(586) 757-5100
WHITLAM.COM