Meeting Amazon's push for sustainable packaging head-on

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Amazon's continues its big push to give customers the packaging that they want: minimal, protective and sustainable. How e-commerce vendors respond to this push will be important.

The Impact of Amazon's Packaging Guidelines and How to Respond

Amazon's Frustration-Free Packaging certification program responds to their customers' demands for packaging that is both sustainable and easy-to-open. To enforce these standards, Amazon requires its vendors who have packages that exceed 20 lbs. or 18" x 14" x 8" to be certified under Amazon's Frustration-Free Packaging program, or be financially penalized by $1.99/unit received.

It's no question that this big sustainability push from Amazon will drive the standards for all e-commerce packaging, so even vendors who don't sell directly through Amazon should consider the impacts on the industry. **The real question is, how should businesses selling direct to the consumer, respond to it?**

One important question to ask is this: Can the product support the integrity of the package or does the package need to support the integrity of the product? A flexible or fragile product is going to require a more rigid, more extensive packaging, while a solid and durable product doesn't need the same level of packaging. While a flexible product and a durable product may be the exact same size and weight, they don't require the same amount of packaging, so there's a big opportunity to cut packaging waste.

BEST PRACTICE #1: Help your customers look for opportunities to optimize packaging to reduce waste.
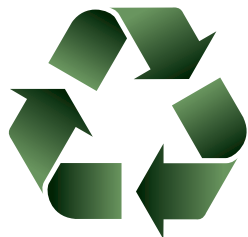
Sustainable packaging is a balancing act between using the least amount of packaging necessary, while also utilizing enough packaging to protect the product. To manage that, it's crucial to look for opportunities to scale back on packaging.

BEST PRACTICE #2: Identify a package's weak points to get Amazon certification.

To be certified under Amazon's Frustration-Free Packaging program, packages must pass the International Safe Transit Association (ISTA) Amazon 6 test, which exposes packages to potential conditions and hazards that could be encountered throughout the supply chain and delivery.

So how can your customers make sure their packages pass the test? It comes down to identifying and correcting the package's weak points, which is often the edges and corners of the package. It's likely that the e-commerce packages already have damage occurring NOW.

Determine **where** the damage occurs on the product and **when** it occurs. You also need to understand the distribution environment that the package will have to endure. Is the product on a skid, handled with a clamp truck, etc.?

Once you've identified the package's weak points and the environments it must pass through, you're better able protect them. Combine that knowledge with some testing, and you'll get your package to pass the test in no time.

BEST PRACTICE #3: Set up a second packaging line when e-commerce sales make up 50% of total sales.

Once your customer successfully optimizes the package to reduce waste and passes the Amazon certification test, the focus can get back to increasing sales. As you grow your sales, keep in mind that a higher volume of product sales will require a more efficient process.

The percent of total unit sales that goes through e-commerce is important as well. This will vary by customer, but if it's 10% or less, a vendor is better off setting up a re-packing method and not changing the primary packaging method. If that number is closer to 50%, then your customers may want to consider a second packaging line dedicated to e-commerce. This means you can start with one packaging method, and then move to multiple packaging lines as the ratio changes to sustain high sales with high efficiency.

How the *Amazon Packaging Support and Supplier Network* Helps

Whether or not your customer is an Amazon vendor, giving consumers the sustainable, damage-free

packaging they want is worth the challenge of adjusting your processes now. Fortunately for e-commerce vendors, Amazon has recognized the challenges their enforced guidelines would cause. So, Amazon formed a network of companies and labs to help Amazon vendors test, design, and supply protective packaging in line with Amazon's packaging certification requirements.

The Amazon Packaging Support and Supplier Network (APASS) is compiled of select companies that offer unique experience and tools to help e-commerce vendors meet Amazon's push for sustainable packaging head-on.

Great Northern Laminations is the only edge protection manufacturer on the APASS list. With the new Amazon guidelines being so focused on reduced packaging waste, Laminations' 100% recycled and 100% recyclable edge protection solution can help vendors align their packaging with the new guidelines.

To learn more about e-commerce packaging visit www.laminationsonline.com/ecommerce.