

# Bad Things Happen To Good Packaging

By JoAnn R. Hines, Packaging Diva



Last week, I got a call from Japan News reporting here in the US. They wanted to know what was happening regarding the use of the words 'China Free' on product packaging and labeling. The plans were for a big expose of 'contaminated' products coming out of China. I'm sure you have seen the news and are concerned about possible contaminants. But what about the consumers' perspective? A negative ground swell of public opinion could dramatically influence your product sales if it's coming out of China.

That's a bad thing and it could happen to your product.

Consumers are taking an interest in product packaging, how much, how to dispose of it where it's coming from and how much strain is it putting on the environment? It's hard to anticipate the voice and power of the consumers. Once an issue becomes mainstream in the media it could be detrimental to your sales. The fact is that most consumers haven't a clue as to the role packaging has to play in getting a product to the stores. All they know is the negative implications of 'bad, bad' packaging.

Think about the holidays and all the spin over 'wrap rage.' Reporters are still writing about it on a weekly basis. What if they pick your packaged product to rage about? Will you be prepared to face the onslaught?

Many times these packaging issues come out of the blue. Remember the aseptic ban on Juice Box packaging in Maine? It has since been repealed, but it came out of nowhere and was the result of consumer misinformation. Or what about the aerosol can ban in Chicago? I remember that one well as I had a client that manufactured spray paint at the time.

Bans can happen overnight taking the product manufacturers unaware with a serious impact on their business. Look at what is happening to plastic bags and the bans in various communities and the replacement of the T-shirt bag with reusable alternatives. I remember when the t-shirt bag was invented and the latest rage in the supermarkets, now its well on its way to becoming obsolete. Pity the plastic bag manufacturer.

Similar circumstances could happen to your product and its packaging. Another hotly contested issue is the use of plastic water bottles (by the way bottle water sales has outstripped that of soda). This battle is far from over. In fact, I will be addressing some of the packaging alternatives in my upcoming presentation Sustainable Packaging 'From Green to Great' before the Wal-Mart crowd in two weeks.

The point is that sometimes you can't ascertain what issue will stir the consumer into a frenzy about your packaging. You can, however, understand the issues that consumers are concerned about. In recent cases, it is mainly the environment. It's hot and getting hotter. So, it's imperative that you give some thought to your product and how it's currently packaged. Is it likely to be an issue of contention? For example, if you are providing a natural or organic product is your packaging 'natural' too? Sometimes there are no alternatives.

'Green' product packaging is in its infancy and there are some examples that aren't really 'green.' The bottom line is that it's going to be all about the consumer perception and how well your 'green' product packaging integrates with your brand. I have already learned of some examples where CPG companies thought they were solving the environmental issue only to be perceived by consumers as spouting 'packaging greenwash.'

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You may think your packaging is 'good' only to have it bashed by the consumer. It's all in the eyes of the beholder. So in reality, bad things can happen to good packaging despite your best efforts.

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