



# Of trade shows and sideshows

**T**he packaging industry's biennial *big event* has come and gone, and while exhibitors have been eagerly chasing up their leads, the *PKN* team has been compiling a comprehensive overview of AUSPACK 2009. Indeed, much of this issue is devoted to covering news emanating from the show, whether in the main review itself (starting on page 22) or on the news pages and in the FMCG Packaging feature.

It certainly was a newsworthy event on many levels. Awards were presented, logos launched, partnerships announced, deals clinched and orders written. An optimistic mood pervaded the halls, even though the aisles were not as well-trafficked as most exhibitors had hoped. And while the AUSPACK show couldn't rival major international exhibitions, and doesn't make any pretence to, this year's event did represent a fair gathering of the industry's key players (with a few notable absences) and a polished showcase of packaging technology, albeit with a strong machinery bias.

As the exhibition halls were buzzing and clicking in demonstration-mode, an interesting sideshow was taking place – the Australian Institute of Packaging's

National Technical Forum, which has in recent years become a feature of AUSPACK.

What this year's forum set out to do was create a platform for learning and discussion around 'mega-trends' currently influencing developments in the world of packaging. These include sustainable design, retail-ready packaging, bioplastics and the very topical 'ease of use'. The latter has been well covered in this issue of *PKN*, linked to design for an ageing population (see page 10 for news on the Ease of Use certification program) and the disabled (see page 18 for more on Nordson's Braille coding system) as well as plain old consumer convenience (see page 17 and 19 for technology designed to enhance packaging's functionality).

Attending a conference, and an exhibition for that matter, is thirsty work so I was grateful that in both places there was free bottled water available. At the forum this was courtesy of Cool Change Spring Water in a bioplastic (PLA) bottle, and on the show floor courtesy of Visy in its new lightweight PET bottle, both ticking the sustainability box. This brings me to my latest hobby horse. What would my options have been if the sorts of murmurs

coming from Bundanoon and other anti-bottled water quarters had already taken hold? If I hadn't lugged along my own container filled with tap water, I'd have had to find a bathroom for a tap – not so convenient, or buy a sugar-laced soft drink – not so healthy.

It seems unreasonable to me that bottled water is the subject of so much negative press when other PET-bottled beverages escape unscathed. It's the plastic water bottles not being recycled and ending up in landfill and polluting the environment that are the problem according to lobbyists, but by this argument all plastic bottles should be banned. Why target water when it's such a healthy drink and we should be celebrating that its consumption is on the rise? Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that the litter and landfill issues should be sidestepped. The challenges are to up the recycling ante for PET bottles, create more composting facilities for compostable bottles and, above all, educate the consumer. And that's where a meeting of the industry's minds becomes important, and the value of regular trade shows and technical forums is realised.



*Lindy*

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# Ease of use gives brands edge

Brand owners have been given a new option for gaining a competitive edge with the launch of the Ease of Use program and logo for consumer packaging.

ARTHRITIS AUSTRALIA AND Arthritis New Zealand have developed an Ease of Use program to recognise companies that design user-friendly and easy-to-open consumer packaging and products.

The program was launched during the Australian Institute of Packaging National Technical Forum, which was held alongside AUSPACK 2009 in June. Judith Nguyen, director and consumer representative for Arthritis Australia, was a speaker at the forum where she launched the program, a first for consumer products and packaging in Australia and New Zealand.

According to Nguyen, it is a recognised statistic that the world population is ageing and the wealth of older consumers is rising. By 2010, the 50+ population will have a disposable income in excess of \$120 billion, 25 per cent more than any other age group. One in three, or 8.5 million Australians and New Zealanders, will be aged 50+ by 2011, growing to 15.6 million or 44 per cent of the population by 2050. The 50+ age group is increasingly made up of Baby Boomers, those born between 1946 and 1964.

“With the unavoidable ageing population in Australia and New Zealand, now is the time for manufacturers to design products and packaging that actually consider openability and ease of use,” Nguyen said.

“The reality is that as a body ages upper body mobility, finger strength, dexterity and reach are limited. Eyesight also becomes restricted as we age. These limitations in function reduce a consumer’s ability to open packaging and this does have a major implication on design of products and packaging. The Ease of Use program will enable manufacturers who are already designing user-friendly packaging and products to be recognised for their efforts.

“The Baby Boomers are demanding, and will not suffer in silence with hard-to-use, difficult-to-open products and packaging. They are increasingly willing to switch brands when products or packaging fail to meet their changing needs.”

Nguyen said some of the packaging designs that cause ‘wrap rage’ (a subject covered previously in *PKN*, see June 2009 issue, page 3) include cans with pull ring tabs,



‘invisible’ or unaligned tear notches, hard-to-tear strips on cardboard packs, zip tracks that won’t re-seal, press and seal strips with nowhere to grip, jars with round plastic lids and no serration, tightly sealed foil lids, screw-tops on jars needing super-strength to open, minuscule instructions and containers that are child-proof and adult-proof.

“It is important, however, to note that Baby Boomers are also prepared to change to easy-to-open products and show willingness to pay more for packaging that is user-friendly,” Nguyen added.

“The Ease of Use program is an opportunity for manufacturers to seriously start considering ease of opening as a critical element of their packaging and product design. It will give participating manufacturers a unique advantage. The Ease of Use trademark on products will send an immediate user-friendly signal to consumers as well as an assurance of quality,” she said.

Any product or packaging that has user-friendly, easy-to-open design may qualify for the Ease of Use trademark. This covers everything from food and beverage packaging through to household, garden and sporting goods.

According to Nguyen, manufacturers who earn the Ease of Use trademark will gain a powerful business tool assuring consumers that their needs are being recognised, and the logo will also differentiate user-friendly, easy-to-open brands in-store quickly and easily.

*To learn more about achieving the Ease of Use certification for your business, contact Fergal Barry at Arthritis Australia on 02 9552 6078 or email: eou@arthritisaustralia.com.au; or Rob Mitchell at Arthritis New Zealand on +64 4 4721427 or email rob.mitchell@arthritis.org.nz*



ABOVE: Judith Nguyen of Arthritis Australia and Emeritus Professor Harry Lovell, FAIP, shared ideas about openability at the AIP National Technical Forum in June.

# Enriching the AUSPACK experience

For members of the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP), AUSPACK presented a double bill attraction – a top quality technical forum combined with a technology showcase in the exhibition halls. AIP national president, **Craig Wellman**, MAIP, shares his view on both events.

**T**he AIP has been running its National Technical Forum alongside the Australian Packaging Machinery Association's AUSPACK since 2005. The forum has continued to gain prominence with strong attendances again this year.

The great benefit of the forum is that delegates are able to hear about the latest developments in packaging technology and then go downstairs to the exhibition to actually see packaging lines and equipment running, with suppliers on hand to answer the many technical questions arising from the presentations. This creates a rich and valuable experience, particularly for the newer members of the industry and those who may not have a direct packaging technology role.

Over the course of the two days, and with the help of 22 speakers, AIP canvassed a wide range of topics under the theme *Packaging Megatrends*. But the headline issue was that of 'openability' and easy-to-use packaging, which was touched on repeatedly throughout the various sessions. The forum allowed Arthritis Australia to launch its "Easy to Open Packaging" certification program (see News Extra, page 10). This excellent initiative raises awareness for FMCG pack design and how it interfaces with the consumer, especially the growing demographic of over 50-year-olds who will increasingly demand packaging that meets their needs and physical limitations.

Other areas covered included the primary role of packaging in the new product development program, sustainable materials and bioplastics, nanotechnology, an update on private labels and a red-hot session on in-store merchandising.

For the topic of bioplastics, the panel-style approach was well received, with six experts in the bioplastics field responding to questions from delegates. Due to the strong interest in this format for bioplastics, this session will be repeated around the country



FAR LEFT: Craig Wellman (left) and Dr Bradley Fain, senior research scientist at Georgia Tech Research Institute, USA, who led the session on openability.

LEFT: AIP national vice president, Pierre Pienaar (left) and James Tupper, ECR learning and change manager, IGD, UK.

in the near future, with Melbourne identified as the first port of call.

It's a shame that we didn't have more time as many of the topics we showcased were large enough in themselves to warrant much more attention. This was particularly the case with James Tupper's presentation on in-store merchandising, which picked up on the training session that he ran on behalf of AIP just before the Auspack Technical Forum (see News, page 8).

It is the AIP's hope that delegates have walked away with an appreciation of the topics covered and some inspiration as they apply their science to their day-to-day roles.

## On the exhibition floor

Down on the AIP stand in the AUSPACK halls, graciously manned by a revolving crew of AIP volunteers, the AIP saw a strong flow of visitors not only to its stand but also to all other exhibitors.

My own observations from walking the halls was that the show was very well prepared and well attended and

exhibitors were reporting strong interest despite the slower economic conditions being reflected across the media.

There were many interesting talking points including, for example, Le Mac's labelling solutions with full digital and backless printing online and its shrink sleeves for milk drinks featuring a black backing for UV barrier which provided phenomenal depth and colour to the graphics.

The continued convergence of RFID, robotics and AGVs presented a fabulous future for in-plant and warehouse automation, with 100 per cent stock visibility and batch control. It was interesting to watch the AGV Pallet Wrapper doing its rounds.

And, personally, while doing my own rounds, I was thankful to JL Lennard's soft-serve ice cream machine!

From the perspective of the AIP, AUSPACK was a great success and a credit to the continued excellence in organisation and commitment of the APMA as it re-invests in the industry to maintain Australian competitiveness. Congratulations to all involved.

## Recognising industry contribution

THE AIP NATIONAL Technical Forum coincided with the AIP AGM, which reported a strong result for 2009. The AGM also saw AIP acknowledge national secretary Ron Mines, MAIP, with a Distinguished Service Award and honorary national treasurer Ian Fletcher, FAIP, (pictured right) with a Lifetime Membership Award. Both Mines and Fletcher stood down this year from the AIP National Board after many years of service to the AIP.

