

Steel for Packaging: Trusted Experience – Value for the Future

Strategies to meet new challenges

The 5th International Steel Packaging Congress, organized by APEAL, representing the European steel for packaging industry, focuses on the key challenges this industry faces and the strategies to meet them.

Packaging as a marketing driver in the food segment

A qualitative survey conducted by international market research institute Euromonitor amongst key food brand owners in Europe revealed that for the food market, two main consumer trends are having an impact on packaging: evolving habits characterised by busy lifestyles, minimal time spent on food preparation, eating on-the-go and ease of preparation become main drivers for packaged food. The second trend: growing wealth, means that consumers can afford convenience, driving growth in Central and Eastern Europe as well as the uptake of premium and exotic foods. In addition to this, three other drivers are growing: health concerns and ethical consumption without forgetting environmentalism. According to Euromonitor, these trends open up a number of packaging opportunities: single serve, semi-prepared, microwaveable, opening convenience in Eastern Europe, re-closable containers.

Build on current position

Steel packaging has built its current market position on clear values. Economic and reliable performance in protecting and preserving a wide range of products have been the main benefits that resulted in today's market position. The challenge for this industry is to maintain its current position and build on it. Rising commodity and energy prices add to that challenge. It is however an issue all supply chains are currently dealing with. All industries and all packaging solutions are being affected, directly or indirectly, in a similar way. Steel for packaging delivers "trusted experience" AND "value for the future". Strategies for developing new business include differentiation and the delivery of new consumer value. Today, there is a clear demand for shaped formats and improved opening convenience.

Two mainstream developments in steel help build new business

Two mainstream developments in steel offer the potential to improve existing performance, but also build new business which responds to consumer and market trends: the development of new steel grades and the development of new coatings. Metallurgical research presently focuses on two types of steel grades: harder steels, which allow improved ease of opening and reduced thickness and softer steels, which greatly increase the shaping potential. The second mainstream development, polymer coated steels, combines the best of steel and plastics, delivering a number of benefits such as: improved pack integrity and appeal, the ability to use the same specification for a wide range of products including foodstuffs, which leads to increased flexibility in can-making. These benefits are more and more visible in the market place. Can-makers are increasingly transforming these steel developments into concrete market successes.

A unique sustainability positioning

Sustainability has become one of the major challenges society and industries are all facing. In this context of low carbon economy and increased environmental pressure on all economic actors, steel as a packaging material, holds – due to its NATURAL properties – a unique position.

Thanks to steel's natural properties - magnetic, infinitely recyclable, 100% protective and strong – it is a unique enabler for sustainability ... naturally.

“Steel for packaging ... Naturally”

Steel for packaging cares for the environment....naturally

Steel is the world's most recycled material. Because steel is naturally magnetic, it is simple, efficient and economic to sort for recycling. Today some 66% of steel packaging are recycled in Europe – a figure that has doubled in the past 10 years and is still on the rise. This is good news for the environment, since the higher the recycling, the lower the CO₂ emissions. Indeed, every steel packaging recycled saves twice its weight of CO₂ emissions. What's more, steel is eternally recyclable. Unlike paper or plastics it loses none of its strength or inherent characteristics, no matter how many times it is recycled. This ensures the preservation of resources for future generations.

Steel for packaging protects products....naturally

Steel offers 100% protection against light, water and air, ensuring highest product integrity. No other packaging solution can offer this degree of protection with one single material. For foodstuffs, steel packaging naturally ensures retention of essential vitamins and nutrients without the use of additives. And it is also tamperproof – something of vital importance in today's world. Food packed in steel can be stored at room temperature and does not require refrigeration nor energy hungry equipment. Steel packaging is easy and convenient to transport, as well as compact, stackable, unbreakable.

Steel for packaging delivers for business....naturally

Brand owners recognise that steel constitutes one of the most reliable and efficient packaging options. The natural strength and magnetic property of steel allow for high-speed filling lines enabling a swifter production process and reduced delivery time from floor to store – something not possible with other, more fragile materials. In a context of constant search for increased environmental and economic efficiency, canned food has demonstrated that it stands out as an optimal packaging solution in terms of eco-efficiency, as confirmed by TNO, a renowned environmental institute.

Common industry response to retailers' low carbon agenda

Carbon footprints being more and more insistently required by retailers, the steel packaging industry is developing a model which provides insight into the environmental impact of metal packaging, taking into account several key parameters such as packaging weight and recycling performance, with a specific focus on global warming potential / CO₂. The model demonstrates that the combined effect of recycling and light weighting has delivered an impressive carbon footprint reduction of 36% over the last 20 years.

Steel industry's global commitment to reduce CO₂ emissions

In addition to steel's sustainability performance which comes naturally, the global steel industry has committed itself to further reducing its CO₂ emissions through a number of concrete initiatives. Amongst those, an ambitious R&D programme aiming to develop radical new steel making technologies producing less CO₂ emissions.

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