

**A**s senior manager of market development at closures firm Fresh-Lock, Todd Meussling is no stranger to the packaging world. With 30 years' industry experience, he knows that customer requirements come in many shapes and sizes, and he has seen how the growing drive towards a sustainable future is leading to new thinking and fresh ideas.

"When we look at sustainability, we have to listen to what our customer is looking for, but we also have to consider the consumer," advises Meussling. "Most consumers don't care about the packaging too much until they're interacting with it and they find that the product is not in the condition that they wanted it to be, or there is something wrong with the closure. We know that reclosability is the doorway to the product. It's the biggest interaction that the consumer has with a pouch. So, we have to look ahead and try to build in some of the things that we know are coming in the future."

This is where analytical skills are essential, Meussling suggests. "One of the things we're trying to do is to understand what path people want to take on their own journey and try our best to have a product that will help them get there," he explains. "I think my main focus right now is, if we can get a product to be recyclable, we know that somewhere down the road there's going to be future generations who are going to try to add it to the recycling story. Let's get the package ready now so that when we have it, and when the brand starts to give the correct information to the consumer, the packaging has already been taken care of."

Meussling suggests the market has moved on from what was being promoted as sustainable just a few years ago. He says one of his main objectives now is to try to help customers achieve sustainability without sacrificing the user experience. "Otherwise, we might just as well move back into paper bags," he muses. "If the product goes bad sooner, it goes bad, but at least it goes bad in a paper bag!"

For the Fresh-Lock brand, Meussling says the starting point towards sustainability will depend on the customer. Some, he adds, may only care about recycling

# Opening doorways

The Fresh-Lock team recently won a Flexible Packaging Association Gold Award for sustainability with a child resistant closure sold by a warehouse club chain in the US. **Printz Holman** caught up with Todd Meussling to find out what is special about this new closure



*Child-Guard is designed for resealable flexible packaging to give adults more time to react to potentially dangerous situations if small children get hold of the pack*

and may not even be prepared to talk about packaging that does not meet the correct criteria. Some may choose a completely different approach and look towards compostability, if they think that their current packaging does not lend itself to being recycled.

Other customers may wish to move from multi-material cartons to flexible pouches, but are concerned that reopening and closing the pouch may be too big a change from what they are currently doing. They might also have financial concerns, Meussling notes, since switching a packaging infrastructure that was set up for cartons requires major investment.

Although there is almost no end to the reasons why customers consider change, the different needs, products, markets and expectations require the ongoing development of the types of packaging previously took for granted. This can be clearly illustrated by a challenge delivered to the Fresh-Lock team by Costco (via manufacturer Radienz Living) in the US, which was selling its flagship laundry detergent packaged in plastic tubs containing 152 doses. The company's sustainability group asked if it was possible to replace the tubs with recyclable pouches that were capable of holding exactly the same number of packs



as the tubs. They also specified a recyclable pouch for in-store drop off, and a certified child resistant closure.

"That was a bit tricky," says Meussling. "It's one thing to get a closure that's recyclable and quite another to meet the regulation requirements of child resistance. Child resistance requires a test involving 50 kids that are under five-years-old not being able to get into the package for ten minutes. By comparison, seniors (aged 50-70) must be able to find their way to the product within that same time. Once you know how to do it, it's very easy to do it a second time."

To make things even more difficult, a pouch containing 152 packs had to be opened and closed 152 times in order to prove that it could survive the entire open and close lifecycle while still retaining its child resistant properties. The remaining conditions were achieved by refabricating the PP slider in PE and removing the ethylene-vinyl alcohol that had been used to

give added stiffness to the track, as it was not compatible with the recycling stream.

The project was successful, resulting in a new package with 80 per cent less plastics, an 85 per cent reduced carbon footprint and one that uses post-consumer recycled content. The package won the Flexible Packaging Association Gold Award for sustainability. An added bonus came in the form of the feedback received from Costco, which was pleased by the number of additional pouches that could be packed into space previously occupied by the larger tubs. Store staff also found the pouches easier to handle and to move around.

Now that the large, recyclable, child resistant pouch has proved itself in commercial production and in the marketplace, there are opportunities for the concept to be transferred into other sectors such as household cleaners, and nutraceutical and pharmaceutical products. Many of these may appear in smaller formats while still offering materials, environmental and sustainability advantages.

"We have our challenges to get to sustainability just like everyone does", says Meussling. "So far, we like what we're seeing, we like the projects that we're working on and the collaborations that we're working with. We have many chances to get into projects that don't feel as sustainable as they need to be and we don't prioritise them. We want to make sure that what we make attains a higher level of sustainability." **EP**