

Get set to differentiate

The local market for pouches and sachets in pharmaceutical and personal care applications has grown steadily. Consumers now demand more innovative packs that offer greater convenience and on-shelf appeal. **By Nikita Geldenhuys**

The recently released results of a study by Reportbuyer indicate that global demand for pouches is projected to increase 6.1 per cent annually to US\$35.8 billion in 2018. The company's analysts forecast that growth of this packaging type will be driven by consumer and producer preferences for stand-up pouches over more traditional rigid packaging.

South African flexible packaging industry players have been tracking this trend in the local pharmaceutical, cosmetics, personal care and home care markets for the past few years. The preference for pouches seems to be driven by brand owners, who enjoy cost savings when they switch from rigids to flexibles, and by consumers, who are attracted to these packs by their high impact and on-shelf appeal.

According to Paul Adams, GM of iMAS, the first local pharmaceutical and personal care brands to package their



According to Barry Le Roux a plethora of decorative effects can be achieved utilising flexible packaging substrates and gravure printing technology

products in flexible materials most likely did so because of the lower cost benefit and single-use application possibilities of this medium.

The benefits of using pouches and sachets stretch further than a simple reduction in raw material overheads. 'Other advantages include a better carbon footprint during transportation, improved distribution cost benefits and easier storage of raw materials in reel form,' says Dave Lord, partner responsible for new sales and technical support at Electropak, a distributor of European packaging machinery.

Material matters

M-Tech Plastics has seen an increase in the use of pouches and sachets right across the local FMCG market, from medicines and personal care products to home care, food and beverages.

According to Barry Le Roux, MD of M-Tech Plastics, one of the reasons for the positive local and global uptake of this packaging medium is the multitude of decorative effects that can be achieved on laminated pouches: 'While it's next to impossible to print on every inch of a glass or rigid plastic container, a pouch can easily be fully covered in graphics.'

He points out that while shrink sleeves allow a decorated label to cover a container in full, the total package cost is not as cost effective or efficient.

Printing technologies are ever evolving, offering brand owners higher quality graphics and a growing range of creative effects. Le Roux points out: 'Gravure printing is becoming more popular and affordable locally, allowing print service providers to offer their customers high-definition graphics that far surpass anything that can be achieved with flexographic printing.'

Apart from the creative possibilities of printing on flexible packaging, M-Tech Plastics' customers enjoy the variety of barrier properties available through the use of these materials.



The Minivaldose machine by iMAS combines flexible film with thermoformed materials in eye-catching peelable single dose packs

'Flexible packaging structures containing Aluminium Foil for instance, offer far superior barrier properties and are once again more cost effective than rigid packaging alternatives. Aluminium Foil provides practically 100 per cent barrier to gases and water vapour and is an ideal way to protect pharmaceuticals that are vulnerable to atmospheric contamination and moisture,' comments Le Roux.

A dose of creativity

As the use of decorated pouches and sachets has now been adopted in markets worldwide, brand owners will have to start using innovative shapes and designs for product differentiation.

Adams explains: 'Sachets and pouches are increasingly being used for cosmetics and personal care single dose packs, samples and testers, but for these packs to stand out they need to be eye-catching.'

Enabling packaging manufacturers to achieve product differentiation and increased shelf-shout, the Valmatic Minivaldose machine from iMAS produces peelable single dose packs in all shapes and sizes. These packs are encased on the one side in a thermoformed material and on the other in any of a variety of flexible films.

The unit can fill liquids, semi-liquids, creams, gels or powders into single and twin servings. 'Projected in accordance with GMP standards, this machine is also compact and strikes a good balance between quality and capital investment,' Adams adds.

Allowing local manufacturers to latch onto the single dose stick pack trend, Electropak supplies the full range of Aranow stick pack machines, including the Aranorth multi-lane unit.

The supplier's stick pack equipment is proving popular in the local market as it can reach high production speeds and has a very small footprint. 'We have supplied both sachet and stick formats to leading local pharmaceutical manufacturers. Many of these machines allow for high-speed production of over 340 sachets per minute on horizontal equipment and 750 sticks per minute on vertical machinery,' comments Lord.

The AraNorth liquid and paste stick pack solution is said to offer a perfect balance between performance and effective cleaning and maintenance systems. With a capacity of up to 1 200 sticks per minute, the



An example of what can be achieved on the Aranow stick pack machines

machine includes automatic nozzle heights, centralised lubrication and tool-free cleaning. Other key features are a pressurised and heated hopper, a covered unwinder, tip-up vertical jaws and temperature adjustment through the use of a touch screen.

Time to innovate

The Reportbuyer analysis forecasts that consumers in global markets will continue to favour more expensive, value-added product packaging such as retort, spouted, resealable and shaped pouches. These consumer demands require manufacturers to rely on specialised technology to create more sophisticated packs.

Equipment supplier IMC Distributors Africa is ready to assist packaging producers that have a need for customised machinery. Its offering for the pharmaceutical and specialty chemical industries is focused on filling, packaging and processing machines.

'Our customers are interrogated by leading technical and packaging specialists to identify their requirements. Together with a technical solution, we provide solutions for the total management of the manufacturing process, from design to delivery and beyond,' comments Raven Govender, MD of IMC Distributors Africa.

The company offers a pre-made pouch packing machine as well as stand-up pouch equipment to cater to the growing demand within the local market. According

to Govender, a number of customers are using these machines, which are supplied under the company's Global Machines brand.

While advanced packaging equipment and materials for flexible pouches and sachets are available locally, professionals in the packaging industry believe the country has some catching up to do when it comes to implementing the latest flexible packaging technology.

'This is especially true if one considers the major breakthroughs being achieved in stick and sachet solutions in Europe and the US,' comments Lord.

Le Roux adds: 'South African packaging manufacturers do eventually embrace new materials and technology, but their adoption of these innovations is slow.'

Laminated aluminium foil pouches have been available in European countries for the last 10 years. Yet these packs have only recently penetrated the local flexible packaging market. 'An innovative product such as the laminated aluminium foil pouch has great opportunities to grow in the local market, especially in pharmaceuticals, but the industry is often too cautious and unwilling to try new things,' he concludes. □

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