Insights from ProPak Asia 2023

As ProPak Asia 2023 draws to a close, we catch up with Ms. Rungphech Chitanuwat, Regional Portfolio Director — ASEAN, Informa Markets Thailand.

What are your thoughts on this year’s ProPak Asia? Are there any particularly inspirational incidences you would like to share?

This is ProPak Asia’s 30th edition, so we’re trying to make a very big impression on every one. We are very committed to sustainability, and you can see we try to deliver the show by keeping sustainability in mind.

We’ve also expanded the visitor profiles. This year, we have 14 international pavilions. We’ve also included SMEs in the ASEAN region in the last two years. In the past, we only worked with big corporations. We want to help SMEs to grow and enable them to embrace innovation, which would help to strengthen the economy as a whole.

What do you think about sustainability?

I took over the reins for ProPak Asia in 2020, during the covid years. Prior to that, I was focused on other trade shows such as Food Ingredients Asia. During that time, there was a different focus for implementing sustainability. There was emphasis on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and being environmentally friendly. But in reality, sustainability is more than just that. The business model has to be sustainable as well. The local communities and well-being of the entrepreneurs are important too. I believe that we’re still at the learning stage, and learning is an ongoing process. In today’s context, it is imperative for businesses to embrace sustainability.

As an exhibition organiser, what we can do to help educate the industry is to share content and knowledge about sustainability through seminars and conferences. For example, we talk about how the processing sector has to reduce wastage via technology.

Packaging wastage was huge during the COVID period due to online order-in deliveries and e-commerce. The packaging sector needs to reinvent itself and move away from single-use packaging. Reusing, recycling and upcycling are now important. For example, we can do away with plastic sleeves for takeaway cups, which will cut material use and wastage significantly.
At the COP26 meeting, we made a clear commitment to achieve zero waste by 2030, which is challenging for exhibition industry. We do need to strike a balance between comfort, aesthetics and reducing wastage.

Informa is also working with communities such as universities, charities and foundations to support activities that promote sustainability.

In your opinion, what are the upcoming trends the food industry should focus on?
Trends are determined by consumers. I think health and sustainability are the two main themes that will run in the food industry. Health would be a major focus for consumer. Sustainability is also a big thing due to the pressures by government organisations. Also, today’s consumers, the Millennials and the Gen Zs, are more concerned about the environment.

There is also a drive to be self-sufficient. For ASEAN, we rely heavily on imports. So there is a need to focus on R&D, so that we can find sustainable ways to utilise local resources, and we wouldn’t need to rely so heavily on imports subsequently.

Looking ahead, what are the future plans or aspirations for ProPak Asia? Are there any new initiatives or expansions being considered for upcoming editions?
Asian Countries rely more on agriculture. So post-harvest technology is important, as we want to reduce wastage in this area. How should we handle the raw materials post-harvesting before sending these resources for processing? How should we reduce agricultural waste? These are the questions that we will be asking.

We also want to continue emphasising the importance of packaging material. Packaging is more than just a cover, it is also branding. Such needs are driving us to find out what are the sustainable materials to use, what other alternative materials are feasible, etc.

To end off, I’d like to say thank you to all our international participants and visitors, the delegations, and our partners for making ProPak Asia 2023 a success.

Key Takeaways from ProPak Asia 2023
Putting the consumers first. That’s the reason why we are so eager to go trend-spotting all the time. Trends tell us which direction to go towards based on what consumers want.

Food safety is of paramount importance. Packaging materials and techniques should be chosen carefully to maintain the quality and safety of the food. Inadequate packaging can lead to severe consequences for the end users, and will cause your brand reputation to suffer.

Constant innovation is essential for growth. Trends and consumer demands are always changing, and they evolve rapidly. Innovation allows the food industry to adapt to changing demands, introduce new products and services, and improve processes and sustainability practices.

Self-sustainability is crucial in safeguarding a nation’s food security. This refers to the ability of an individual, community, or system to meet its own needs without relying excessively on external resources or support. It involves creating a self-sufficient and self-reliant environment by utilising available resources efficiently, minimising waste, and developing sustainable practices. In the context of agriculture, self-sustainability may involve growing one’s own food, raising livestock, and practicing regenerative farming methods. Similarly, in terms of energy, self-sustainability can be achieved through the use of renewable energy sources like solar panels or wind turbines to generate power. Overall, self-sustainability aims to reduce dependence on external systems and promote long-term resilience and independence.

Integrating Sustainability into Products & Processes
Sustainability and environmental responsibility are becoming increasingly important in the industry. How should we integrate sustainability into products and processes? We get a brief overview of how to achieve this from Alan Adams, Sustainability Director, APAC region, SEE.

We take a very broad view of sustainability. How do we effectively think about things in a way that means that we genuinely
are aiming to leave the world better than we find it? So our mission statement is that we’re here to help our customers solve their packaging challenges with great solutions.

We’ve recently re-branded from Sealed Air to SEE. The circle in our logo represents our constant drive to innovate and generate more sustainable solutions. We’re no longer just a packaging company. We’re a company about automation and digitisation, we’re about supplying sustainable packages solutions. So when it comes to the food industry and our customers, it actually starts with design. The best example of sustainability is great design, where we design out waste.

One of the examples I like to use is this packaging product, where we have a meat product with a tray and a lid film, and usually a pad that can absorb liquids from the meat. So we’ve redesigned the tray so it can hold the liquid and we don’t have to have a pad anymore. So that design is a great example of sustainability. We’ve removed a non-recyclable, non-recoverable component completely.

For us, it’s sustainability with trust and transparency. It is about ensuring our products are always safe. Never have any dangerous chemicals in them. And that means we have to track and trace our sourcing from our suppliers, who in turn have to track and trace their suppliers, and sometimes even further down the line to the suppliers of their suppliers.

Next is automation. How do we design out or eliminate waste via automation? When we look at the whole supply chain, from the start of our processes, all the way to the end of the line when we reach the consumers, at which points can we automate things? And by automation, we mean, how can we eliminate touchpoints? How can we streamline processes?

Because that normally helps us eliminate waste. And it makes it safer because there’s less interactions and lesser risk of contamination. It translates to a safer and better working environment.

And then, we get into what our products actually made of, what is the impact on our climate, like, our carbon footprint. So it’s really about resource efficiency. How can we effectively package a product in order to get it from point A to point B? Our objective is to do that with the minimum amount of resources possible. The less resources we use the lower the carbon footprint. So we aim to provide higher levels of protection and better shelf life, so that people get a great experience throughout the supply chain. We can achieve all of the above with packaging, along with SEE’s automation solutions and the digital aspects of them.

Lastly, the important question to ask is, what happens to the packaging after it has been used? For SEE, it’s about circularity. We have finite resources and therefore we should use them again and again. We’re collaborating and investing in partnerships that can help us advance circularity. That means designing our products to be compatible with recovery programmes. We’ve also directly invested in things like advanced recycling technology. For example, we want to turn used plastic packaging back into its original form and oil, which we can then re-refine and make new resins from. This true end-to-end approach gives us recycled content that we can put directly into food contact applications.
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Did You Know?

1. Did you know that the first-ever packaging machine was invented in 1890 by Samuel J. Butcher? It was called the "Butcher Paper Packaging Machine" and was used to wrap and package individual sticks of butter.

2. The invention of the potato chip bag with a built-in air cushion, known as the "pillow pack," occurred in the 1960s. The cushioning helps protect the delicate chips from breaking during transportation and keeps them fresh by preventing excess air exposure.

3. Have you ever wondered how potato chips get their iconic crunch? Well, food processing machines play a significant role. The thin potato slices are passed through a series of rollers that remove moisture, resulting in a crispy texture once fried or baked.

4. Popcorn packaging machines have an interesting mechanism. The heat and pressure from the popping process inside the machine cause the bags to inflate. As a result, when you open a bag of microwave popcorn, the packaging pops open, creating that satisfying burst of freshness.

5. In Japan, there are vending machines that can create personalized rice balls (onigiri) on the spot. These machines have various fillings and flavors, allowing customers to choose their preferred combination. It's a fun and convenient way to enjoy a traditional Japanese snack.

6. Food packaging and processing machines can sometimes incorporate fun and creative designs. For instance, there are machines that can shape pasta into unique forms like bowties, shells, or even cartoon characters, adding a touch of whimsy to mealtime.

7. Some packaging machines use a technique called "shrink wrapping" to tightly encase products in plastic film. This process involves applying heat to the film, causing it to shrink and conform to the shape of the item being packaged. It's like giving the product a snug, protective hug!

8. Food packaging and processing machines often undergo quirky tests during development. For instance, engineers may subject packaging materials to "drop tests" where packages are dropped from various heights to simulate real-life scenarios and ensure the products can withstand accidental mishandling.

9. Chocolate lovers would be delighted to know that there are packaging machines specifically designed for creating custom-shaped chocolate bars. These machines can mold chocolates into various shapes, including animals, letters, and even intricate designs.

SOLUTIONS BEYOND TOMORROW

Hall 98, Stand H21

KRONES
Designing for Tomorrow: Sustainable Packaging Solutions for a Circular Future

Aegis Packaging offers their take on sustainable packaging.

What, in your opinion, are the packaging trends to focus on? How will these trends affect the way packaging providers offer solutions to the food industry?

These trends will impact the way packaging providers offer solutions to the food industry. They will need to invest in research and development, collaborate with suppliers, innovate in packaging formats, and embrace digital technologies. By understanding and leveraging on these trends, packaging providers can meet the evolving demands of the food industry while addressing sustainability, convenience, and digitalisation concerns.

Packaging providers need to focus on key trends in the industry, including sustainability and eco-friendly packaging, convenience and on-the-go packaging, and digitalisation and smart packaging.

In summary, the key packaging trends to focus on include sustainability and eco-friendly packaging, convenience and on-the-go packaging, and digitalisation and smart packaging. These trends will significantly impact the way packaging providers offer solutions to the food industry.

Aegis Packaging, as a coating provider, plays a crucial role in enabling high barrier mono-material packaging solutions that enhance recyclability. By collaborating with packaging providers and manufacturers, Aegis Packaging ensures seamless integration of their coating process into packaging production. This focus on high barrier mono-material packaging contributes to a more sustainable packaging industry. In addition to these trends, packaging providers will need to invest in R&D, collaborate with suppliers, innovate in packaging formats, and embrace digital technologies to meet the evolving demands of the food industry.

Sustainability has been a major trend for at least several years. How do you foresee this trend evolving in the near future?

As explained above, Sustainability is THE trend to follow as it will become a key criterion to survive as a Packaging company. More and more converters add sustainable products to their portfolio. For now, it is mainly for marketing purposes, and most of the flexible packaging is anyway not recycled. But governments are facing difficult situations (see the failure of REDcycle program in Australia) and are becoming increasingly serious about sustainability as we are producing more plastic than ever. As a result, there is more environmental legislation than ever before in the packaging sector.

Unfortunately, these things take time. Converters need new machines. Very often they need to slow down their production. In the end, adapting to sustainable products so far was accepting new methods with lower rentability.

So, Sustainability is already a major trend but most of the companies still need to get onboard. So I expect a larger emphasis on packaging requirements from government bodies, starting with EPR proper recycling labels, carbon tax, education and consumer awareness.

Key developments include a shift towards a circular economy approach, focusing on waste reduction, increased recycling rates, and the use of renewable resources.

Packaging material innovations will emerge, such as bio-based materials, bio-plastics, and compostable materials, providing environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional plastics.

Carbon footprint reduction will be a priority, with packaging providers optimising energy consumption, adopting renewable energy sources, and minimising greenhouse gas emissions throughout the supply chain.

Growing consumer awareness and demand for sustainable packaging will drive the need for transparency, clear communication, and education on proper recycling practices.

Government regulations and industry standards will play a significant role in shaping the future of sustainable packaging, potentially introducing stricter regulations on single-use plastics and recycling targets.

Collaboration and partnerships across the value chain will be crucial to driving sustainable packaging initiatives, including the development of innovative technologies and the improvement of recycling infrastructure.

Packaging providers must stay agile, invest in research and development, and adapt their operations to align with the evolving sustainability landscape.

Which is more important and why: Reliable, sustainable packaging or aesthetically pleasing packaging solutions?

It depends on who you are talking to but quite honestly here are the three must-haves: Reliability for practical reasons, Sustainability for compliance, and aesthetics to stand a chance against competition.

And, let’s not forget price, as you cannot talk about these three elements, especially sustainability, without considering the price.

Now if the question is “what should we focus on today?”, the answer is sustainability without any hesitation. Because we are already able achieve reliability and aesthetics at a competitive price.

The challenge is to achieve reliability, sustainability and aesthetics while respecting our planet’s resources. With mono-material packaging produced with barrier coatings like our O2X coating, we are, for the first time able to reach great barrier properties (reliability) on a packaging that looks good (aesthetics) for a good price.
### Is Microwaving Plastic Safe?

In the 1950s, the first-ever microwave-safe packaging was introduced, revolutionising convenience in food preparation. This innovation allowed people to cook or reheat food directly in the packaging, reducing the need for additional dishes or utensils.

The two key culprits to dangerous plastics are the man-made chemicals Phthalates and Bisphenol A (BPA), which are often added to plastic to help it keep its shape and pliability. In high volume, these substances have been linked to several negative health outcomes including hormone disruptions, respiratory issues and cardiovascular diseases. Pregnant women and children may be at greater risk of harmful effects.

Microwaving provides enough heat to degrade or even melt certain types of plastic. So is it actually safe to microwave plastic? According to MindBodyGreen, not really. Contrary to popular belief, the "microwave safe" label on plastic containers isn't a get-out-of-jail-free card. While there’s a hierarchy of which types of plastic are a bigger threat to our health, this label doesn’t have anything to do with our health. "Microwave-safe" doesn’t mean chemicals won’t leach from the container into your food while microwaving but rather, that the plastic can withstand the heat of a microwave oven without melting.

Food Network recommends: Follow USDA guidelines and only use clearly indicated ‘microwave safe’ plastic containers that have been labelled accordingly.

What do you think? Do you believe that it is best to avoid microwaving plastic altogether?

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