

Furthering sustainability in refill and reuse packaging

Simon Jennings, director of **Nomis Consultancy**, shares his thoughts on the opportunities metal presents for driving refillability and reusability in the packaging world

Reduce, reuse and recycle has been the underpinning of the waste hierarchy during my long career in packaging.

The drive to reduce the amount of material used in each pack and the razor focus on efficiency in the metal packaging industry is well-documented, and there will no doubt be further improvements. Technology continues to evolve with introduction of AI tools, new manufacturing techniques and line control processes, driven by the high calibre engineers who are the backbone of the companies and suppliers to the sector.

As an industry, we are also the leaders in the field of recycling. Metal packages, both steel and aluminium, are recycled around the world at levels other sectors can only dream about, and we still strive to increase those levels. This has long been driven by the underlying economics of the value of scrap metals with its lower processing costs than



virgin materials, and of course the added benefit of sustainability.

Reuse is not, however, something that initially springs to my mind regarding metal packaging. Perhaps this is a result of spending many hours – virtually since the first day I started work – finding, promoting and selling alternatives to refillable packaging. I needed to widen my horizons from just thinking that metal packs are only (in virtually) every case, the best single-serve packs in terms of consumer preference, sustainability and technical capability, and look at metal packaging as a great reusable storage and refill container solution.

It's evident that metal packaging has played a major role in the reuse sector. Without metal crowns, there would be no refillable glass bottles. Fancy cans and cans with lids are used widely as storage containers for their original products and for secondary use. Metal closures on glass jars and bottles made these packs reusable and suitable for primary and secondary storage.

Fortunately, it seems that many brands and their metal packaging suppliers are looking to reuse and refill packs as a route to meeting their ESG goals. The durability, absolute barrier and infinitely recyclable nature of metal packaging, makes it a realistic alternative to other materials. There are plenty of examples, of which I have chosen a few.

In the beauty segment, where packaging and branding is perhaps one of the most complex, there have been many initiatives. Bodyshop, owned by Natura, has a range of haircare, shower gels and handwashes, where there is a need for unbreakable containers. Bodyshop has a range of aluminium bottles with dispensing pumps, which, after their initial purchase, can be refilled from stations in around 800 of its stores across the globe.

As part of its range of refill solutions, Brazil-based O Boticário has a 100 per cent recycled aluminium deodorant container from Trivium which can be refilled from a lightweight pouch, reducing plastic usage by 85 per cent. >

Image: Sav-Ty

Image: Harris Gin Company





Image: Trivium Packaging

Another example is the move by Ere Perez Natural Cosmetics in Australia to further reduce the environmental footprint of its packaging. The company has recently launched a reusable three-part round aluminium compact (base, retaining ring and a polished inner slip lid) to replace a complex multimaterial pack which was difficult to recycle (as well as perhaps more expensive) as it included various plastics, magnets, glues, hinges and mirrored glass.

The premium spirits sector is a market where metal secondary gift packs have been long used, providing decorative benefits and protection to often high value spirits in expensive and heavy glass containers. Now, some brands are looking at ways to reduce their carbon footprint and are looking at refill packs for their decorative and distinctive glass bottles. In a way, this is moving toward the historic fashion of using decanters to improve sustainability. The Harris Gin Company has introduced a 500ml aluminium bottle with its high recyclability and lower carbon footprint as a refill for its glass Isle of Harris Gin bottle, instead of customers throwing it out. Others have or are working on similar approaches.

Fortunately, the tap water in most of the developed world is drinkable. If it has been filtered, then there cannot be any reason for complaint; the issue is getting access when on-the-go. The use of reusable aluminium bottles seems to many a far better idea than the use of hundreds of billions of single-use plastics bottles.

Several companies have been promoting refill flasks for water, including Itsu, which offers free refill. Others, such as One Water and Rain Forest Water, are filling aluminium bottles at source but then promoting the container's reuse.

The Ball Aluminium cup, though strictly not a pack, uses DWI technology to bring a reusable alternative to plastic, bringing all the benefits of metal packaging to drinking occasions at sports and other venues.

These are all trends that have plenty of milage to improve sustainability and help meet ESG targets. The One Foundation has not only used sustainable metal packs but has so far raised over £20 million, changing the lives of over four million people by giving them access to clean water.

There does seem to be more of a resistance to introducing refill and reuse for fast moving consumer goods (FMCG). There are several operations scaling up platforms to widen the reuse and reuse model for FMCG brands. Consumers say they are keen on the idea of refillables (up to 85 per cent has been quoted in some surveys) but they also need to see convenience and costs benefits which will come from scale.

Loop is working with a range of major brands including P&G and Unilever, together with both e-commerce and physical retailers, to help bring a range of products to market, including refillable options which include aluminium bottles and cans with lids.

However, this seems to be an uphill task, as for the past 50 years, retailers and their suppliers have honed their systems to maximise the economic use of their shelf space with single-use packaging, but with the drive for sustainability and the coming-of-age of Generation Z consumers, who really have much stronger views on this matter, there will have to be progress.

It is clear that refill and reuse can be extremely economic in the right circumstances. Refillable systems do bring lower unit costs at scale, as is the case with refillable beer bottles with crowns. What is needed from metal packaging are refillable cans that are stronger; this is what gave me the idea of using the Sav-Ty Resealable End on a DWI food style can – read more at www.sav-ty.com. **CT**



Image: Ere Perez