



Worldwide innovation in the spotlight

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Immo Sander, Head of Packaging Development at Werner & Mertz, and Thomas Kahl, Project Manager EcoSolutions from Mondi Consumer Packaging, presented the development of recyclable flexible packaging at the second Packaging Summit in Munich.



Immo Sander, Head of Packaging Development at Werner & Mertz (photo) and Thomas Kahl, Project Manager EcoSolutions from Mondi Consumer Packaging, introduced the new, completely recyclable foil pouch at the second Packaging Summit in Munich. Photo: Packaging Summit/Martin Kroll

Joint development

Sander told the international audience of packaging specialists how Werner & Mertz, working within the scope of the Recyclate Initiative, made previously untapped secondary raw material sources like the Yellow Bag usable in material recycling. The accomplishment has been attributed to constructive cooperation along the entire supply chain.



In this particular presentation the focus was on the joint development by Werner & Mertz and Mondi, the global leader in packaging and paper solutions. The product is a completely recyclable stand-up pouch made of a monomaterial (polyethylene) with a removable wrap-around label (also of polyethylene), designed according to the Cradle-to-Cradle® Principle. "With this groundbreaking design for recycling, we have taken a giant step toward closed-loop circulation of plastic packaging," said Sander. After use, the patented innovative stand-up pouch can be recycled 100 percent into recyclates of nearly the same quality as the raw material.

Four-year development history

This innovation is the fulfillment of an idea which has long been on the Werner & Mertz agenda. "Back in 2014 we at Werner & Mertz were looking for 'single-material concepts'", said Sander as he told the development story. The goal was a pouch of monomaterial – instead of the usual multi-layer product – which could be printed and filled by using existing technologies. It quickly became apparent that the goal could be achieved only in cooperation with a packaging specialist, Sander added. Werner & Mertz found exactly that in Mondi.

"Nowadays it is hardly possible for just one company to come up with such an innovation on its own. It takes a network to develop packaging for the circular economy," said Kahl, "and we, Mondi and Werner & Mertz, were prepared to take up the challenge."

In 2015 the two companies established a project group together with the Green Dot, EPEA Switzerland and cyclos-HTP. The three partners supported the development with advice on material selection and confirmation of the pouch's recyclability and integration in existing recycling structures. The first thing the project participants did was to find out exactly what "Design for Recycling" meant. Even the experienced packaging experts had to learn to think the product through from the other end.

At the conclusion of an intense development phase in 2017, a stable and fully usable stand-up pouch made of polyethylene was realized.

After overcoming all bureaucratic hurdles, Mondi and Werner & Mertz presented the new development to the public in 2018.



Thomas Kahl (photo) and Immo Sander see that flexible packaging is gaining ground. Photo: Packaging Summit/
Martin Kroll

New goals for flexible packaging

The completely recyclable pouch is just the beginning of the development of recyclable flexible plastic packaging. "Our goal is to have flexible plastic packaging that is not only fully recyclable, but is itself made of recycled materials," said Sander. He also outlined the planned steps up to the year 2025 that range from the introduction of the current innovative packaging to other developments with printing inks, barrier properties and the use of recyclates. "We have now laid the cornerstone on which we can build our other goals."

Flexible packaging is advancing

In general, both Sander and Kahl see a development in the market toward flexible packaging. More attention is being paid to alternatives to plastic, such as paper, as people are becoming more aware of the flood of plastic. "Whenever possible, use paper and wherever it makes sense, use plastic," said Kahl. "And when it is reasonable to use plastic for packaging, we have to commit to making sure that it can be fundamentally and completely recycled."

At the second Packaging Summit in Munich representatives of leading companies presented new developments and solutions from the world of packaging.



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