



Make Sustainable Packaging a Priority

A quick-start guide by
RRD Packaging Solutions

Rethink: reduce, reuse, recycle. These long-standing tenets of sustainability matter more to the world now than ever before.

How should they apply to your packaging throughput and output? We have some ideas.

INTRODUCTION

Determine your sustainability objectives

Sustainable packaging does not involve making a choice between cost-effective or eco-conscious. It integrates the two. At RRD, we work closely with clients and suppliers to ensure that our sustainable packaging objectives translate into opportunities for positive, environmentally-friendly outcomes — in form, fit, and function.

At a high level, our sustainability objectives include:



Resource efficiency – We identify, measure, and improve how we use energy, raw materials, water, and other resources.



Waste minimization – We reduce, reuse, and recycle in all of our facilities, every day.



Responsible procurement – We help our supply chain adopt sustainable practices. We also collaborate with our clients in choosing sustainable options.



Stewardship – We find, learn, and share best practices and demonstrate our commitments to sustainability.

If you'd like to see specifics on how we're working toward these, check out our corporate sustainability page:

rrd.com/about/commitments/sustainability

As your organization continues to build its own sustainability story, consider how your paperboard packaging can meaningfully contribute to it. Upstream or down, there's a good chance it's destined for a larger role.

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING – AN OXYMORON?

We don't think so.

Two Sides North America is an independent, non-profit organization working to dispel common environmental misconceptions and inform businesses and consumers with factual information about the sustainability and versatility of print, paper and paper-based packaging.

Here's a peek at some of their myth-busting work.

Myth: Going paperless saves forests

Fact: North American forests are a renewable resource that is continuously replenished using sustainable forest management. In fact, in North America, we grow many more trees than we harvest.

Myth: Paper is a wasteful product

Fact: Paper is recycled more than any other product in the U.S. solid waste stream. Paper recycling extends the supply of a valuable natural resource (wood fiber), saves landfill space, and avoids greenhouse gas emissions (methane) that are released when paper decomposes in landfills.

Myth: Paper-based packaging is bad for the environment

Fact: The American Forest and Paper Association shows the U.S. recovers 68% of its paper products for recycling, and that number jumps to 92% for cardboard boxes. The United States

is close to the maximum achievable paper recovery rate because some paper products are permanently removed from the fiber cycle and cannot be recovered (e.g., hygiene products, medical supplies, and items that are stored for long periods of time like books).

Myth: Paper production is a major cause of global greenhouse gas emissions

Fact: According to the EPA, the pulp and paper industry contributes less than 1% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. In 2020, the U.S. pulp and paper industry was responsible for only 0.6% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. Recycling avoids the release of greenhouse gases when paper decomposes in landfills.

To learn more about Two Sides, visit: twosidesna.org



QUESTIONS THAT DRIVE EFFECTIVE SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING DESIGN

From paper to plastic to foil, at the outset of every packaging project, it's critically important to take enough time to ask the right questions as they will help lay the groundwork for an effective design process. For example, here are a few to tackle right off the bat:

- Are there any preferred/unacceptable materials to be taken into consideration?
- What sustainability goals are we looking to hit?
- Does the package have an opportunity to be reused?

To answer these questions confidently, you'll need to go to the source. The next time you connect with your packaging supplier, the questions called out on the next page can drive your most meaningful conversation around sustainable packaging.



☐ Can we use less?

Using less doesn't have to mean you're compromising a package's integrity or the end user's experience. Amazon, for example, places an emphasis on its ship-in-own-container (SIOC) initiative with a commitment to four packaging design principles:

- Design to reduce waste
- Use 100% recyclable materials
- Provide protection against damage
- Be easy to open

☐ Can we improve the perception of sustainability by incorporating other materials?

Plastic packaging vs. brown kraft paperboard container? To consumers, kraft will generally be perceived as being more environmentally friendly.

If perception is an issue for your products, incorporating a new material into the overall packaging design may help as long as that mix of materials can continue together in the recycling stream. Example of what not to do: gluing plastic or foam to a piece of paper and then suddenly it can't be recycled because there's no way to separate the two in the recycling stream.

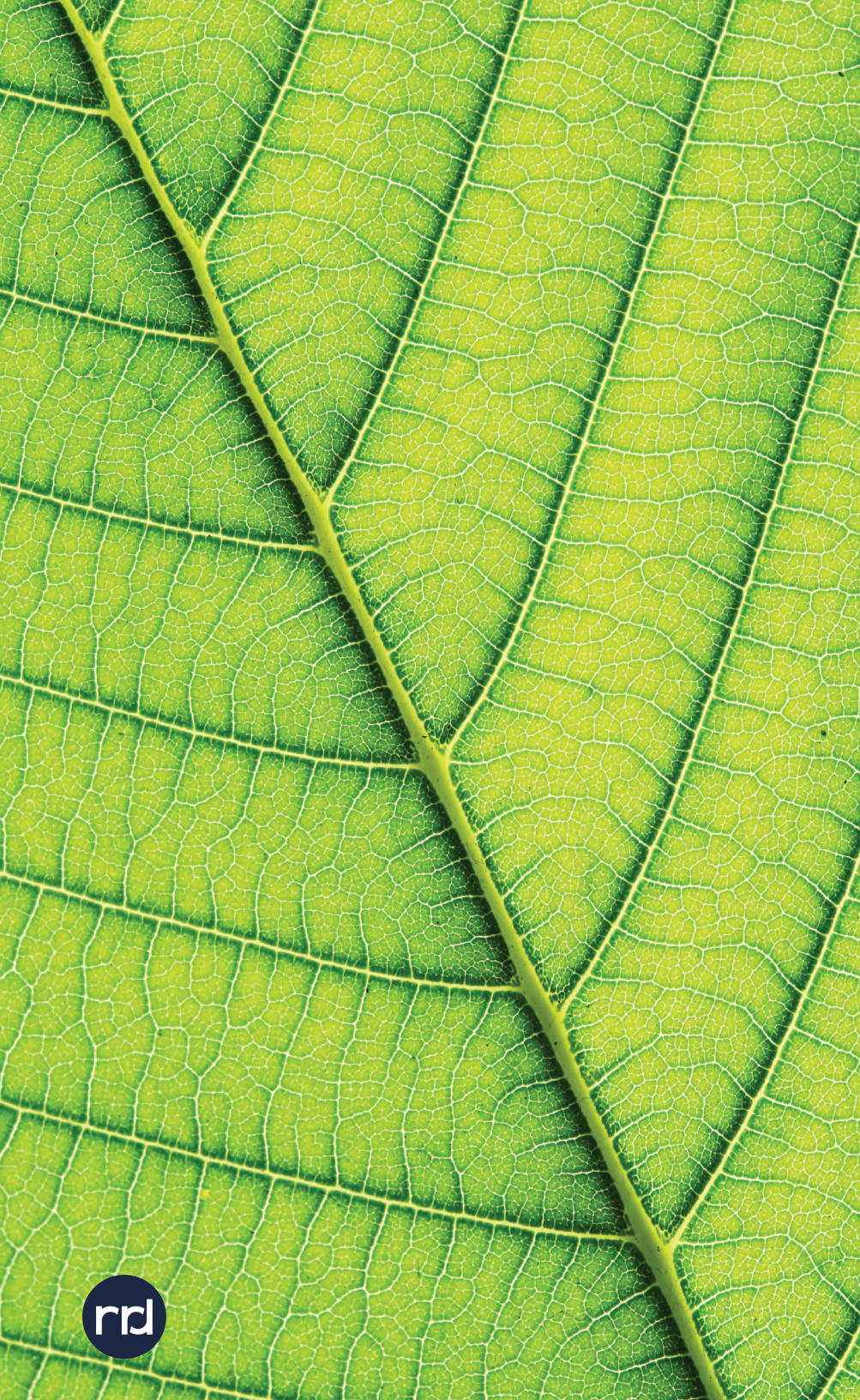
☐ Do your sustainability efforts have a place in your product's story?

More and more consumers are going out of their way to purchase (and recycle) products in environmentally friendly packaging. There's a good chance the suppliers you work with have a sustainability story of their own. Take the time to hear it. It may create a valuable opportunity to align with — and share.

For example, here at RRD, several of our packaging facilities have installed on-demand corrugated box making equipment. This enables onsite production of specific box sizes to match the product shipped, which results in less virgin corrugated material, less waste material, and minimized use of non-recyclable box fillers.

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

Click here to read “5 Questions that Drive Conversations Around Sustainable Packaging Design.”



SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING INITIATIVES

According to research from AMC Global*, more than 25% of consumers expect their behavior post COVID-19 to include an increase in purchases from brands that are committed to being environmentally friendly. Roughly the same percentage also expects to purchase more from brands using sustainable packaging.



Sustainable packaging can be one highly effective way a business can reduce its carbon footprint. And with a growing number of eco-minded packaging options becoming available, brands are no longer forced to pit cost savings, brand perception, and increased sales against each other.

* Packaging World, Sustainability Update, 2020

Here are five brands who have made packaging a critical element in their efforts toward greater environmental responsibility.

MCDONALD'S

As of 2021, approximately 82.7% of McDonald's primary packaging materials, and 96.8% of its primary fiber packaging comes from recycled or certified sources. The fast food giant is aiming for 100% certified, recycled or renewable materials by the end of 2025.

WALMART

In 2016, Walmart publicized a global goal to achieve 100% recyclable packaging for its private brands by 2025. In 2019, the retailer expanded that goal to 100% recyclable, reusable, or industrially compostable packaging for private brands. At the end of 2020, Walmart has achieved 55% of this global goal.

NESTLÉ

In 2022, 85.8% of Nestle's total packaging was recyclable or reusable. Set up in 2019, the company is putting into practice a five-pillar packaging strategy that consists of: reducing the use of plastic packaging material, scaling reusable and refillable systems, designing packaging for recycling, supporting infrastructure that helps to make recycling easier, and sustainable packaging training for employees.

STARBUCKS

This Seattle-based brand has shared its commitment to become a resource positive company by storing more carbon than it emits, eliminating waste, and replenishing more freshwater than it uses. It has also formalized its 2030 environmental goals to cut its carbon, water, and waste footprints by half.

AMAZON

For shipments that require packaging, Amazon has incorporated the use of science-based systems to determine the type and size of packaging needed. According to the e-commerce giant, over the past five years, machine learning has reduced the use of corrugated boxes by over 35%. Algorithms are also helping Amazon fulfillment centers determine optimal fit as a way to reduce packaging for shipments with multiple items.



LOGOS WORTH A SECOND LOOK

You've seen them around — and so have consumers — but what do they actually mean?



Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®)

FSC® is an international non-for-profit organization that promotes environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. FSC developed the first independent system for forest products.

FSC Certification requires adherence to 10 Principles of Forest Stewardship that define good forest management.



Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®)

SFI Inc. is a comprehensive, independent certification program that works with environmental, social and industry partners to improve forest practices in North America and fiber sourcing worldwide.

More than 280 million acres are certified to the SFI forest management standard in North America – making it the largest single forest standard in the world.





Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC)

PEFC is an independent, nonprofit, nongovernmental organization promoting sustainably managed forests through independent third party certification.

Covering 149 governments and 85% of the world's forest areas, the PEFC is a global organization designed to assess and recognize national forest certification schemes.



Chasing Arrows

Internationally recognized for recycling activity, this symbol is in the public domain, it is not a trademark, and there is no formal approval for its use, which means it is an unregulated symbol that anyone can use.

The use of the “chasing arrows” on a product’s packaging may assist recyclers with sorting, but it does not guarantee an item can be recycled through curbside collection or industrial collections (even though 54% of Americans think it does*).

FYI

For all three certifications — FSC, SFI, and PEFC — RRD maintains Chain of Custody (CoC) certified locations in the U.S., Canada, Latin America, Asia (except SFI), and Europe.

MOVING FORWARD WITH SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

Here's what we know: Paperboard packaging has an opportunity to play a larger role in your brand's sustainability initiatives. If you're nodding your head in agreement, then what's your next move? Here are three suggestions to keep things moving.



1. DETERMINE THE SCOPE OF YOUR STRATEGY.

Which packaging materials will be in scope? Are there any preferred (or unacceptable) materials that need to be taken into consideration? Which product lines will be impacted? Will this include all packaging types (e.g., primary, secondary, tertiary)?



2. SET (REALISTIC) MILESTONES.

Once you've set your parameters, work within them to identify manageable targets. Examples of some targets we've helped our clients set in their sights include:

- Reducing a package's weight
- Integrating eco-friendly material and coating alternatives
- Improving the percentage of a package's recyclability



3. START SMALL ... AND SLOW.

Transitioning to sustainable packaging requires a thoughtful process — aka don't succumb to the urge to change everything at once. Work closely with your packaging provider to identify low-hanging fruit. Rely on them to suggest actions that have minimal impact on operating costs as well as the form, fit, and function of a package.

Opportunities to develop existing packaging are just waiting to be discovered, whether through addition by subtraction or innovative material substitutions.





SUSTAINABILITY: AN OLD CONCEPT NOW MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

According to recent research, more than half of consumers take sustainable packaging into consideration when selecting a product. And nearly three-fourths are willing to pay more for sustainable packaging.*

Communicating your organization's sustainability narrative through packaging makes a lot of business sense. And it will for the foreseeable future. According to McKinsey, this will require having three critical elements in place:



A proven methodology to benchmark packaging products in terms of not only cost and convenience, but sustainability as well.



Understanding the full opportunity and value at stake across the product portfolio from increasing sustainability requirements.



Having the right partnerships in place to respond to consumer and customer packaging demands going forward.

One last bit of advice: In your pursuit for sustainable packaging, don't go it alone. If you have a high level of trust in your packaging partner(s), lean on them to help you identify and capture any sustainability opportunities that lay ahead.

* [Trivium Packaging](#), Global Buying Green Report, 2021

** [McKinsey & Co.](#), "The drive toward sustainability in packaging...", 2020

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greater sustainability.**

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custom paperboard packaging solutions.



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