

# AHEAD OF THE PACK: A PACKAGING UPDATE

*Packaging requirements in the apparel sector can be as fickle as seasonal fashion trends, so it comes as no surprise then that leading packaging specialists are working a lot closer with their clients to help provide the best packaging possible that's both cost effective and easy on the eye. By Dan Ahwa*

## Current market

With multiple retail closures occurring over the past 24 months, small to medium sized boutiques have faced challenging times. Leading packaging companies have worked effortlessly to support their clients by providing better solutions with packaging that is relevant to the current market, understating the importance of marketing brands through packaging, particularly within an aesthetics- focused industry such as fashion retailing. "As a business we've continued to grow, and we've adapted to our clients needs. We've felt our retailer's pain and their struggles, so we try to support them as much as possible" explains Michelle Lamberton, sales manager at Sherpac, a highly respected leader within its field, providing a range of packaging solutions for the past 16 years and maintaining a high standard of business that's characteristically Kiwi.

"We're quite flexible and successful in that we've managed to find ways to stay true to what our clients' needs are while reducing costs at the same time. Rather than enforcing huge minimums, we help them achieve their packaging goals by allowing shorter runs", which is a huge benefit for some retailers, not only in cost and versatility, but also in terms of storage. Not having a lot of money tied up into their packaging needs is a common factor with many clothing retailers; however Lamberton stresses the importance of adding value to your brand by investing in small details. "Some of our clients don't want to commit to a big run, so their bags run out, and we've got to make sure we can supply them quickly. We've also structured the way in which our clients can do their ordering, allowing for more flexibility in the process, and giving them

the added bonus of saving money." Melanie Harbers of Babta Product Ltd. who make a range of carry bags, tissue paper and food packaging solutions, has also seen many ups and downs within the market in the ten years she's been in the industry, but believes that it's important that customers come first. "By treating each customer as an individual we have managed to successfully negotiate our way through a difficult climate without compromising our service. As we can offer small runs for our customers and a range of different materials we find we can adapt to our customers requirements and budget."

## Awareness and values

With the eco-bag debate bandied around for the past couple of years, what's becoming increasingly apparent is that with choice comes personal preference and it's up to retailers to make that call of whether or not they want to be persuaded by price or the environment. Having an educated decision is an important reality these days with choosing what packaging to go for, and is something the Sherpac team focus on heavily. "Not understanding what they are buying and not understanding what the prices are and the services that complete that loop are common pitfalls with retailers" explains Lamberton. "We ensure that all our clients are informed of their options and giving them correct information so that they can apply that to

their businesses and the decisions they make when it comes to their packaging needs".

Choosing a bag and design that reflects your business is another factor that companies need constant reminding, especially those that are driven by price. "When investing into carry bags the client needs to keep in mind why? Carry bags are an extension of your store, another source of advertising and completes the sale" says Harbers, "You

need to make sure that the carry bag will fit most if not all your product and that the bag suits your image. Educating customers to find what will work best for them and tailor making unique bags for them is our strength. Our long term relationship with all our suppliers on and offshore allows us to complete this sales cycle." And with regards to ethics, every company has their own approach, including these packaging specialists who are constantly taking in to account environmental issues. "When I started Babta Products I took a trip overseas to find factories that would work within our company's ethics. This took into account working conditions for our factory workers and also pay and living conditions" says Harbers. "Working with factories that would also be working towards a greener world, so all waste is disposed off correctly. All materials are reused whenever possible, and shipments consolidated and also put through on slower vessels, are all factors our customers would prefer in a reputable supplier. We also belong to the Sustainable

Business Network and record our entire carbon footprint with the InStep program."

Fostering relationships with their offshore suppliers, has given Sherpac a competitive edge, with the company focusing working with their Asian partners for the past 16 years. "Because we've built a lasting relationship with some of our paper suppliers offshore, we're able to get minimums our competitors can't get. It's also been important for us to run our businesses by New Zealand standing and ethics, and that's something that our offshore partners respect".

## The price of quality

Everyone's looking for the cheapest most cost effective option, an ideal that rings true within the fashion retail industry in particular. When it comes to packaging, are people still driven by price?

"Businesses should use the bag that best reflects their image. Many make the mistake of looking at cost when they should be looking at what value is added" says Harbers. "Sometimes cost can be a deciding factor between a paper or plastic bag. But with bags being individually designed you can still have a plastic bag that looks just as fantastic as a paper bag by adding a different handle, creating fantastic artwork - lifting the customers image." For Lamberton, the key is to accept that retailers are driven by price and to work with them to achieve the best results possible. "We believe you can have a good looking product without spending a ridiculous amount of money on it. The goal is whatever the budget, we can make it look good, and that goes without saying. It's important for us to be transparent about our costs and what our customers will be getting, so that the final price is justified."



bags by babta



melanie harbers

## Package and post

With retailers expanding their product and services into the realm of e-commerce, it's only natural to consider the packaging of these products and working that into the supply chain process. Personalised courier bags have picked up with the rise of e-commerce, and is something Lamberton and the Sherpac team are excited about. "It's definitely a growing market, and we've worked on some very cool artwork with some of our clients with degradable plastic courier bags. For the same price of using courier companies to use their bags, you make your own, which is proving very attractive for some of our clients who have expanded into the e-commerce area."

## Paper vs. Plastic, the debate continues

With paper bags becoming increasingly popular amongst clothing retailers, the added benefits of using paper over plastic means this renewable resource can be recycled into new paper, posing less of a threat to the natural environment. "Paper is moving really fast into the eco side, 100 percent bamboo paper and stone paper are exciting new developments" says Harbers. PP (polypropylene) Non woven bags in particular have come under scrutiny for their inability to break down and recycle effectively. Re-usable they may be the popularity of the non-woven bags are slowly on the wane, as most fashion retailers opt for paper over plastic. The problem with the PP non wovens is that they are petrol, chemical based non-renewable resource. So the onus is on retailers to do their research and if deciding on a non woven option, to really consider making it long lasting. "The biggest thing you can do with non-wovens is make them reusable. With our non wovens, we make an effort to ensure they last the distance" explains Lamberton. "Most promotional non-wovens are not hard wearing. Some of the green non-woven bags you see at supermarkets may not be everyone's favourite, however they do the trick because they are very durable and can



sherpac bags for icebreaker

# SHERPAC: PACKAGING AND THE PEOPLE

*When you come across a company that values its people as much as its product, the results can be infectious...*



Tucked away in Auckland's North Shore's Mairangi Bay, the packaging specialists at Sherpac have been providing quality retail packaging solutions for the past 16 years, and the secret to its success and longevity is its small but dedicated team of highly talented professionals who like to

mix fun with business. "We have a great time doing what we do, with a team of intelligent, creative people who do the right thing by our customers by forming strong relationships with them" explains Michelle Lamberton, sales manager for Sherpac.

It's this close relationship with its customers combined with a strong company morale that has given Sherpac a distinctive edge over some of its competition. Case in point, European menswear retailer Menon in Auckland's fashionable shopping district of Newmarket had their bags made at Sherpac. On closer inspection, you only have to notice the attention to detail to this stylish interpretation of the humble shopping bag. "We worked closely with Praveen (owner of Menon) to come up with a bag that he was happy with. We looked at his store and the kind of customer that he had. We then took inspiration from the store interior and wallpaper and translated that wallpaper design onto a luxurious high end shopping bag that reinforces the quality of his product" explains Lamberton. In a world where corporate social responsibility is a driving motivator for customer loyalty, Sherpac make an effort to emphasize its ethics and approach to environmental issues, encouraging degradable products and working alongside factories that manage waste and embrace environmental practices. By genuinely promoting the importance of protecting the environment, Sherpac also extend this goodwill and social responsibility by actively engaging in community support such as the Look Good Feel better initiative for women undergoing cancer treatment; the Outward Bound - supporting the future of our youth, and a number of conservation projects including NZ Landcare and Kiwi Conservation. All encompassing and forward thinking in its creativity, it's this passion for packaging that make the people at Sherpac a winner.

For a quote or to speak to someone at Sherpac about your packaging needs, visit [www.sherpac.co.nz](http://www.sherpac.co.nz).

ultimately be used again and again."

Rather than encourage society's throw away mentality, packaging specialists are constantly working on improving the non-woven options to ensure wastage is reduced, something Harbers and the team at Babta also agree on. "By making a good non-woven bag they will last for years (in fact I have a bag that has lasted me over seven years) and that is why we make bags that are durable. Our non-woven bags have a small recycled content and we also offer non-woven bags made out of 80 percent post consumer waste. Paper is moving really fast into the eco side with 100 percent bamboo paper, stone paper are exciting new developments for us." Proving to be a re-usable (and fashionable) option are calico bags with fashion/clothing retailers and beauty retailers making the most

of customising calico bags and even implementing these into their seasonal deliveries. Auckland based Carried Away bags have a variety of calico bag options, with the benefits of custom making any size and print offshore with a 1000 run minimum.

## It's all in the details

If there's anything to be said about shopping bag trends targeted at fashion retailers, it's clear that the 'return' of the bio-degradable paper bag is proving popular, with companies focusing on improving small details. By working on improving paper bag options, companies are able to help convert those users importing bags and those using plastic bags/ non wovens, addressing the issue of cutting down on shipping cargo emissions and the use of non-renewable petrol chemical based bags. "By making sure that we have a quality control system in place both on and offshore we can make sure that the final product is perfect. Delivering a bag that has gone through our quality system reassures our customers. Our motto of "Do your customers love your bags?" is about making sure that our customer ends up with the bag that they love and this is passed onto their customer to love. Further branding for our customer with a bag that is perfect" says Harbers. Lamberton and the team at Sherpac have worked particularly hard on improving the printing quality on their bags, opting for gravure printing as opposed to flex printing; as well as fine tuning the small details that make up a quality shopping bag. "It's small things like not having the backs of bags showing on the front; frayed ends on handles and using PP handles instead of cotton/fabric handles; using quality paper and putting thicker card around the handle area on a paper bag- all these small details that make a difference and enhance the quality of your product. We follow this through with after sales service and make sure that our clients are ultimately happy with their final decision." For further information visit: [www.babta.co.nz](http://www.babta.co.nz); [www.carriedaway.co.nz](http://www.carriedaway.co.nz) [www.sherpac.co.nz](http://www.sherpac.co.nz)



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