

Boost brand recognition with customised bottles

Producing custom beverage packaging requires quick thinking and familiarity with how materials and products interact. Michael Schlegel, owner of **Systempack Manufaktur**, explains why his team is the perfect choice for complex speciality requests.

Finding a silhouette that will stand out is the first step of designing a customised bottle. Not only is there the shape and material to consider, but one must also look at the closure, interaction of multiple packaging materials and how the product inside will react with the entire packaging. It all adds up to a complicated process that requires unique expertise, as well as the flexibility to backtrack and try new ideas until the bottle is everything it should be.

With 120 years in the beverage packing business, and 20 years providing custom packaging solutions, Systempack Manufaktur has had time to develop its expertise. The German manufacturer began by making casks for local brewers and then diversified into glass products. Owner Michael Schlegel says designing and producing custom bottles accounts for the majority of its turnover.

"About three quarters of our turnover is speciality bottles and individual moulds," he says. This push has been led by producers of spirits and bitters, which have high exports and the need for a premium, distinctive bottle to go with a prestige product. However, Schlegel clarifies that Systempack does not intend to focus on any particular sector and can adapt to whatever the industry requires.

Schlegel adds, "Our strength is that we are fairly quick in our reaction time and, through our wide network of partners, can also accommodate a lot of different demands."

Meeting client specifications

Systempack's partners are based in Europe to provide fast and reliable service, but its client base extends globally.

"Value wise, 70% of our products go into export: the first client wakes up in the morning in Auckland, the last client goes to bed at night in Maui," Schlegel explains.

At the company's headquarters in Munich, Germany, the process of designing a customised bottle begins with the client's rough sketch of the packaging in their imagination. Schlegel's team then flesh out the concept, looking at the filling technology it will need, closure options and cost structure; they try to keep each bottle's cost below 10% of the product's retail value to ensure that it is still profitable for the client.

The most difficult part is developing the closure. All of the materials, with their varying flexibilities, thicknesses, textures and sealing properties must fit seamlessly together. Schlegel is currently working on a new bottle for an Irish-cream-style liqueur, which he says brought his team back to the drawing board after their first design did not work.

"That type of closure had not been employed with Irish cream before," he explains. "So the product reacted with the closure in a way that was not anticipated, therefore making the closing



Systempack Manufaktur work closely with their clients to produce customised glass bottles.

properties not what they needed to be. We had to find a plan B very quickly."

Schlegel adds, "Our clients make us push the boundaries constantly. Although it is not nice when that happens, I always believe that this is a good learning experience for everybody – and from that potentially comes another project."

An experienced team is there to help

Systempack's team members have hands-on experience in the beverage industry. They are given a high degree of freedom to develop their designs, and work collaboratively with their colleagues, as well as Systempack's expert partners. Schlegel has a background in the brewing sector, which enables him to draw on his technical knowledge of packing pressurised and carbonated beverages.

Glass remains a major earner as a material for the company, and there has been an increase in requests for glass bottles, together with a downturn in plastic packaging.

"I'd like to believe that the role of plastic in our lives is being re-evaluated by marketers and consumers," Schlegel says.

He adds that manufacturers and marketers are looking for new ways to present glass. "People like to play with different materials and textures on a bottle; they want something more to touch."

This poses another challenge for the design team, but with the flexibility and ability to think on their feet, they are a match for it. Whatever the world of beverage packaging demands in the future, Schlegel is confident that Systempack can deliver. ■

Further information

Systempack Manufaktur
www.systempack.de

