

INNOVATION WILL ENSURE PACKAGING MANUFACTURERS GET 'BACK TO BLACK'

When I first heard Amy Winehouse sing I was struck by the uniqueness of her voice and her ability to seamlessly change the tone of her singing to match the mood of the lyrics. Her extrovert appearance and self confidence personified everything I have ever loved and respected about British music. From the Beatles to the Rolling Stones..The Sex Pistols to the Stone Roses there is a self assured 'up yours' attitude that has transcended criticism to push the boundaries and take music to a different level . (with the exception of the Eurovision Song Contest of course but I am not sure that can be classed as music!)

This non- conformist attitude coupled with a stoical, self determination to succeed against all odds is one of the most endearing of British traits. We continue to produce people who provoke argument and force us to question our beliefs, people that fight complacency and inspire change and progression. Whether it be music, industry, finance or politics we are a nation that has the determination and spirit to dig deep and survive when times are tough but more importantly, given the right support we have people with the ability to ensure that we can maintain our position at the forefront of innovation and creativity.

Gary Briscoe, Managing Director of Manchester based thermoforming Company, Mister Blister comments " For the last few years the UK packaging sector has faced many financial challenges as it has not only had to navigate the stormy waters of the recessionary climate but has also had survive the onslaught of cheap, pre-packaged Far Eastern imports decimating its business opportunities"

During the last few years as markets have contracted and margins have been reduced the company has focused its attentions on reducing its costs and improving efficiencies.

Briscoe adds " As well as making our own tooling on site and continuing to upgrade our thermoforming machinery we have made significant investment made into our own extrusion and recycling facility at our Manchester site which has enabled us to have a greater level of control on our raw material costs. By recycling all of our waste in house (as well as controlled waste from other thermoforming Companies) we are also making a positive contribution to the environment. "

The Company has registered its new **PVSea**® logo to promote the fact that the material it makes derives from a sustainable 57% salt based compound and is 100% recyclable.

Briscoe believes that the manufacturing Companies in the packaging sector that have survived the last few years there is a more optimistic future and particularly in the non- food sector they are experiencing renewed interest in their products. He continues "Over the last couple of years there have been significant increases in production costs in the Far East which coupled with escalating freight prices and the lack of flexibility that long distance supply affords is leading to opportunities for the UK packaging sector".

He adds," UK retailers are once again appreciating the benefits of having a strong UK supplier base where lead times are reduced and communication, flexibility and above all quality are enhanced but, it is essential that the growth of the manufacturing roots are nurtured with support from the banks and the Government as well as the retailers themselves".

The reality of the post recessionary trading climate is that profit margins have been squeezed in every sector. Briscoe continues " With the support of the Government, more accessible funding would enable packaging manufacturers to invest into the machinery, processes and personnel required to keep costs at competitive levels and lead times to a minimum which will enable retailers to recoup some of their reduced margin. "

Briscoe also believes that the retailers themselves can help the packaging sector in a number of ways "Manufacturing margins are often small compared to the retailer and simply settling invoices on time can mean the difference between profit and loss on some jobs. The manufacturer needs margin not only to survive but also to invest into the innovation and ideas that open new markets , increase sales and reduce costs ".

Briscoe points to Mister Blisters award winning **Virtuweld**® security closure as an example of this " We became aware that a lot of our customers were having to weld our blister packs to match the security aspirations of the retailer...a function that is both costly and inflexible as well as using unnecessary energy."

The patented **Virtuweld**® locking system enables the back of the blister to clip into the front using dynamic retention to give a secure undetectable seal . The stitching effect incorporated into the **Virtuweld**® designs completes the illusion that the packs are actually welded, without automation or additional costs.

Briscoe concludes " It is this kind of innovation and approach that will transform the fortunes of the packaging industry and balance sheets that are currently in the red will soon be (as Amy once sang) '**Back to Black**'."