

Airless is more

Against a backdrop of economic austerity, cosmetics brands are continuing to invest in the power of airless packaging, facilitating an increase in natural products that have a longer shelf life and reduce waste. SugarBaby's **Lizie Clifton** and **Gillian Garside-Wight** of Your Packaging Partner explain to Rhian Owen why demand is set to surge as formulas become increasingly sophisticated.

The beauty industry has always considered itself to be recession proof. However, despite talk of the 'lipstick effect', where women supposedly purchase cosmetics to cheer themselves up during the financial crisis, the sector has not been sheltered from the downturn.

According to Euromonitor International, a poor performance in the US, the world's largest cosmetics market, led to a 1% drop in sales in the region during 2008–2009. The second prime market, Japan, also failed to maintain sales levels, as did Europe.

Companies tried everything to preserve their resources and protect their market shares – they cut as many costs as possible, downsized factory production and decreased media spend.

However, as businesses begin the slow process of recovery, identifying a new niche can be just as beneficial.

A report released earlier this year found that as the beauty industry begins to recover from the recession, strategies continue to focus on innovation, with value increasingly associated with experience and exclusivity.

It may not come as a surprise, therefore, that brands are still investing in the sophisticated technology of airless packaging, regardless of the economic environment. According to the Airless Pack Association (APA), it is the fastest-growing product category in the cosmetics industry. The trade group estimates the European market at half a billion units a year, and expects this to rise steadily.

However, this is not new technology. Airless packaging was adopted on a large scale by toothpaste manufacturers in the 1980s for technical and marketing reasons. It is the cosmetic industry that is responsible for taking it further. "Original developments were mainly with pump-based products, such as lotions," says Gillian Garside-Wight, packaging technology director at Your Packaging Partner, a Sun Branding Solutions business brand. "Scientific advancements now mean that it can be used in tubes as well. So, today, airless technology is becoming an extremely attractive proposition because it allows brands to adopt pump-based pack formats, which are generally easier and cleaner to use than traditional jars with lids."

Despite its lengthy history and the uptake in interest, there is still some confusion among brands as to the correct definition of an airless package. The APA defines it as: "A non-pressurised, tamper-proof dispensing system combining a mechanical activated pump and a container which, after filling and airtight sealing, delivers the product with no air intake. The



SugarBaby products use airless packaging.

Lizie Clifton

Lizie Clifton is product director and co-founder of the Australian-owned cosmetics firm SugarBaby, which produces make-up and body care products. Prior to setting up the company in 1998 with her sister Nici, she worked in the beauty industry as a product manager.

**Gillian Garside-Wight**

Gillian Garside-Wight is packaging technology director at Your Packaging Partner. Her responsibilities include working with retailer and brand owners, and providing outsourced packaging support. Prior to joining the company, she was a packaging technologist at Thorntons.



container is available with a soft pouch or a sliding piston.”

It can be difficult to tell whether some products use airless containers; the APA has previously stated that the market has been polluted with a lot of airless lookalikes. This is why in 2010 the group introduced a trademarked logo along with technical guidance to ensure quality. Membership of the APA is made up of five of the main global producers of airless dispensers: Lablabo, Lumson, Megaplast, Quadpack and Rexam.

While there are suppliers trying to capitalise on demand by offering products that are not truly airless, this is not an issue for consumers and brand owners as long as it is a reputable product. “The customer needs to have confidence in the brand and the knowledge that the product performs,” says Lizie Clifton, product manager of Australian cosmetic brand SugarBaby, which uses Yonwoo Jumbo packs developed by Quadpack.

increasing sophistication of cosmetic formulas. “As natural and organic products become increasingly popular, it will be essential to offer the products of this kind maximum protection from the atmosphere,” she says. “Airless technology is the best way to do this [as it prevents the air from compromising sensitive formulations] so I fully expect brands to adopt this form of packaging over the coming years.”

Clifton says that suppliers and consumers are being savvier about the look and the function of packaging. “I think everyone is well aware of the advantages of airless containers, which is why we are seeing more products, even on supermarket shelves, out there in the marketplace,” she notes. “SugarBaby decided it was necessary due to ease of use and longer shelf life for our formulas as we develop more naturally derived products.”

“Additionally, consumers can dispense cosmetics easier and more precisely, minimising waste,” says Garside-Wight.

“The organic and natural cosmetic space is outperforming overall industry growth – the study forecasts double-digit growth rates until 2014.”

Natural selection

Today, interest in airless packaging is being driven by consumer demand for natural formulations; products made from ingredients without preservatives and free of genetically modified organisms. According to Kline, a market research company, the organic and natural cosmetic space is outperforming overall industry growth – the study forecasts double-digit growth rates until 2014.

Garside-Wight explains that airless packaging is ideal for coping with the

“The main sustainability initiatives within the cosmetics packaging arena are around reduction and the introduction of some plant-based materials. However, it is important that any reduction in packaging does not impact on the final product; after all, packaging is there to protect the product above all else.”

Looking good

It is the look of the packaging that is also important and airless systems have many aesthetic advantages. This is

because the combined pump and container lends itself to sleek design, opening up a wide range of options for decoration and customisation.

Product design is vital to SugarBaby; it is important that the packaging features the brand’s signature 1950s look of feminine glamour. “Aesthetics certainly play a part – the packaging needs to be appealing,” says Clifton. “I think the use of airless containers adds value and the options are endless in terms of volume and range. I love that you can customise caps to really ensure that the item represents your brand. Our products are based on pin-up stars, but our packaging is about sourcing the very best available. We’ve been able to merge a sophisticated packaging option utilising modern airless packages with our vintage feel in sun care and I think the old and the new have married well.”

What types of cosmetics are best suited to this technology? While airless packaging can be seen more commonly in skin care products, other segments within the beauty and cosmetic sector are discovering the benefits too. “While anti-aging products and serums are two of the main product types that will benefit, the list is endless,” says Garside-Wight. “Airless pumps have been used for foaming products for some time, but today they can dispense more products that traditional pumps could not. Eventually, most liquid cosmetic products will use some form of airless technology in their packaging.”

Many brands, including SugarBaby, that already use airless technology are now widening their range of cosmetics that deploy it. “As time progresses and we continue to push the boundaries of our products we’ll become more reliant on packaging that supports stability and longevity of formulations,” says Clifton. “Airless packaging is ideal for this.”

With cosmetics formulas becoming more sophisticated and the trend for eco-friendly products being fuelled by increasing consumer demand, more and more brand owners look set to take advantage of this burgeoning technology. It might have had a sluggish start, but airless packaging is now a thriving option. ■