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The future of packaging: 3D printing as a source of innovation

New prototyping technologies enable agile and efficient package design while optimising resources

The packaging supply chain is all about efficiency. In a disruptive scenario where industries must offer sustainable and smart solutions, new 3D printing technologies allow them to provide real-looking samples, saving resources and accelerating the development process. In the second article of our series of interviews with experts and partners about the future of packaging, we interview Lior Elgali, Packaging Product Manager from Stratasys EMEA, Quadpack's partner in rapid prototyping.

What is rapid prototyping, and how can it add value to packaging?

Rapid prototyping is the process of creating physical models quickly and often through a digital workflow. Packaging designers can use visual prototypes to test ideas internally and with customers, communicating concepts more effectively with stakeholders. Full-colour 3D printing means designers gain value by controlling the process, going from digital files to visual samples in-house, in days sharing a 3D model instead of just emails and phone calls. Brand managers can understand the design intent better, allowing for more informed decisions. Marketing teams can create visual assets sooner with real-looking samples.

How is 3D printing evolving to provide solutions tailored to the beauty industry?

We are constantly learning our packaging design customers' top needs, researching and developing new solutions to enable even faster, easier workflows, that result in great looking visual prototypes. Among the main requests from the beauty industry are glass-like transparency, accurate colours and sharp text. In the past few years, we've introduced products that address these needs.

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What role will 3D printing and rapid prototyping play to help brands innovate in a post-Covid scenario?

Over the last year, we have had to adjust to working from home and on our computers, substituting physical interactions for virtual ones. The downside is that designers have had less hands-on time with their designs. The upside is that digital transformation has been accelerated and digital workflows for 3D files and renders have improved, moving towards becoming standard practice. Returning to the office and innovating using in-house 3D printers is made more transparent to the user, so they can focus on their design. On another note, as online shopping has heavily increased in the past 18 months, brands need to appeal to both online and offline shoppers, making visual samples more important to test in an agile design environment.

How can 3D printing support brands in their sustainable transformation?

In the case of additive manufacture, 3D printing technologies enable local production, restructuring today's supply chains and introducing production at scale and on demand in ways that better impact society. In the case of 3D prototyping, models are printed on the spot with no additional footprint. Time and materials are saved through multiple iterations of the final product and with minimal material required to create maximum results. 3D machines can also be repurposed to create an entirely new set of products immediately. For example, during the pandemic, Quadpack used its Stratasys printer to print personal protective equipment pieces. What's more, the machines can extend their own lives by printing spare parts to keep themselves running.

How do you envision the future of packaging?

I believe that, as this industry moves further towards digital workflows and additive manufacturing, and designers aim higher and higher, we will start seeing 3D printed bespoke products that once could only be dreamt about. A pack has many uses, from catching the customer's eye to becoming an integrated part of someone's home, and I believe packaging will be made finer and more precise thanks to 3D printing.

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The future of packaging is a series of interviews with Quadpack's partners and experts who share value and knowledge about trends and technologies that will transform our industry.

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About Quadpack Industries SA

Quadpack Industries is an international manufacturer and a provider of enhanced packaging solutions for beauty brand owners and contract fillers. With offices and production facilities in Europe, North America, and the Asia Pacific region and a strategic network of manufacturing partners, Quadpack develops bespoke and customised packs for prestige, masstige and mass market customers. For more information, please visit www.quadpack.com.

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