

drinktec 2017 puts focus on sustainable packaging

drinktec 2017 will be focusing not only on the topic of water and energy management, but also on packaging design. Almost half of all exhibitors will present specific packaging solutions for the beverage and liquid food industry.

Alongside filling and packaging technology with aseptic systems, this also includes cleaning, filling and sealing technology, inspection and sorting machines, labelling and equipment technology and, most recently, digital direct printing, unpacking and packing machines, multiple packing machines, palletisers and depalletisers as well as conveyor systems. Containers, packaging materials, packaging accessories and closures, multipacks and multi-unit packages represent a second focal point. Consequently, drinktec 2017 will also feature enormous variety in the packaging segment.

"Sustainability is evolving from a secondary concern into a necessary component in the design of new product innovations," the market research institute Mintel wrote in its study *Global Food and Drink Trends 2016*.

In addition to environmental impact, food safety and health consciousness, the lifestyle-appropriate presentation of food and beverages plays a major role in consumer purchase decisions. In the area of safety, criteria such as hygiene, durability and traceability are crucial. Seamless information about transport stations and active packaging that is equipped with RFID antennas and transponders, for example, are becoming increasingly important as internationalisation progresses.

The convenience of a particular beverage packaging is of key importance in product presentation. On-the-go consumption has increased steadily in recent years. The convenience factor is becoming increasingly important for consumers, and they are willing to pay more for such products if they make life on-the-go easier.

Packaging is also an important marketing and sales tool. Attractive package design is a must. Is the packaging design or the design of the label on the beverage container more important than the contents? No, but it is also clear that attractive, interesting and clever packaging and labels play an important role in a product's commercial success. According to a survey conducted by the auditing company PricewaterhouseCoopers AG, there are four core areas in innovation management that packaging material manufacturers must particularly focus on: design, functionality, process and workflow improvements, and material innovation. Two significant trends in consumer behaviour today are the growing demand for smaller package units and for recyclable packaging. In the area of innovative materials, this would mean using renewable resources such as bio-plastics based on corn starch. For those who want to know more: the top issues of the future in the packaging field will be discussed in the Innovation Flow Lounge networking platform which, following its successful launch at drinktec 2013, will be back for a second appearance at drinktec 2017.

Glass, cans and PET

Advanced technology is behind all modern packaging. The technology and materials used to produce today's packaging are high tech, and the packaging itself is high tech. Glass, the classic among the beverage containers, has always protected products perfectly because it is inert and impermeable.

One of the continual challenges for the glass packaging industry is the production of lightweight glass containers. This goal has been accomplished. A total of 1.86 billion beverage cans were sold in Germany in 2014, an impressive 30.4% increase over the previous year according to BCME (Beverage Can Makers Europe). Beverage cans have been much in demand in Europe as well in recent years. Sixty-three billion cans were sold on the entire continent in 2014 alone. Cans are also a very popular product and marketing vehicle among young craft beer breweries in the US.

And what is the situation with PET? The PET segment is seeing a lot of activity in the area of lightweighting and using recycled PET and plant-based raw materials. Engineers are also developing interior coatings with a glass skin that promises a longer life for especially sensitive beverages even in small containers.

Dry section blocks

The trend in packaging machines is toward forming blocks of several machines or 'compressing' different units into a single packaging line. This is made possible by modern robot technology. In addition to reducing space requirements by up to one-fifth, this increases the flexibility of the processing facility. Conversions to other types of packaging are automatically carried out at the touch of a button. Conventional packaging machines for PET, cans and glass bottles can be combined with a grouping station and a palletiser to form a dry section block, a step that increases the efficiency of packaging operations substantially. At the drinktec forum, leading experts from research and

professional practice will present many ground-breaking ideas and practical solutions for future issues in this area of packaging technology.