

drupa Essentials of Print



The print & packaging industry is a living world and once every four years, it is important for all its stakeholders to meet and share for a better future. At drupa, we promise you inspiration, innovation, knowledge sharing and networking. Each visitor will have his own places to go and must-see hotspots. On the way to this event, we release the “drupa essentials”, a series of articles from designers, brands owners, printers, converters, journalists and influencers. These articles will offer visitors an understanding of the print & packaging world that is transforming rapidly under the umbrella of digitalization, automation and sustainability. So, enjoy the reading and give free rein to your instinct and curiosity under the adage “to each his own drupa”.

We are happy to provide you with this expert article and we would be pleased if you publish it.

Be inspired!

Your drupa Team

Daniel Brunton: Corrugated packaging – threats and opportunities

**VITA
Daniel Brunton**



Daniel Brunton is the publisher of two fibre-based packaging magazines, aimed at converters of corrugated and folding carton board. The titles include ‘International Paper Board Industry’ and ‘Folding Carton Industry’. Active in the sector since 1994, the drupa event takes place in Daniel’s 30th anniversary of starting at Brunton Business Publications Ltd, a fifth-generation family-owned media business. He is well known within the converting and OEM market place for fibre-based packaging, and speaks regularly at industry and trade association events around the world. He can be reached on dan@brunton.co.uk
Dan can as well be reached under [LinkedIn](#)

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contributor**



Daniel Brunton: Corrugated packaging – threats and opportunities

To say that the packaging industry has been on a rollercoaster ride for the last few years would be an understatement! For the corrugated packaging sector, the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021 ended up being somewhat of a record-breaker. Like all industries, the sector had to seriously take a look at itself in the mirror in the opening weeks of the pandemic in March 2020, but within a matter of months and clearly identified as a 'critical supply' sector, the industry helped retailers convert to online business models and the boom in e-commerce is a well-documented outcome.

Since then, the sector faced the see-saw effect of supply chain pressures, with OEMs finding it difficult to get all the components needed to be able to complete the build of their hi-tech equipment – lead times went from 8 months in many cases to 18 months almost overnight – this played havoc with balance sheets, with some OEMs simply rolling over and declaring bankruptcy. For converters, the pressure of long lead times for paper or board meant delivery times went from 5 days to 5 weeks in some instances! Fast forward to 2022 and things started to get back to some sort of normality, but then started the conflict in Ukraine – and supply chains were then squeezed once more, with the outcome of rapidly escalating energy costs. Could the corrugated industry pivot once again?

Evolving Landscape

Today, the biggest challenges for corrugated packaging converters are as follows.

- Sustainability: environmental concerns and increasing consumer demand for sustainable packaging solutions have posed a significant challenge for the corrugated sector. The industry has been striving to reduce waste, increase recyclability, and develop eco-friendly alternatives to other packaging materials.
- Raw material costs: fluctuations in the cost of raw materials, particularly paper, can impact the profitability of corrugated converter. These companies often face challenges in managing and mitigating the effects of price volatility. The recent downward movement on price has been dramatic, but seems to have bottomed out as of June 2023.
- Supply chain: disruptions in the global supply chain, such as natural disasters, trade disputes, and transportation issues, affect the timely delivery of raw materials and finished products. Converters must develop robust supply chain strategies to minimise the impact of such disruptions.
- Technological advancements: keeping pace with technological advancements and adopting innovative manufacturing processes can be a challenge for corrugated converters. Investments in automation, digitalization, and advanced machinery may be required to remain competitive and meet evolving customer demands.
- Customization and personalization: increasingly, customers expect customized packaging solutions to meet their specific requirements. Corrugated converters must find ways to efficiently handle smaller production runs and accommodate customization requests while maintaining cost-effectiveness and production efficiency.
- E-commerce: the rise of e-commerce has created some interesting challenges for packaging converters. The industry must adapt to the demands of online retailers, such as providing packaging solutions that offer product protection, cost-effectiveness, easy handling, and efficient use of space during transportation.
- Regulatory Compliance: evolving regulations related to product safety, labelling, waste management, and environmental standards can pose challenges for the corrugated industry. Staying updated with regulatory changes and ensuring adherence to quality and safety standards is essential.

Importance of drupa

If you are interested in looking at digital printing equipment, digital cutting and short run box making equipment and anything that will give you an edge in the market, drupa is definitely for you! Software, workflow and so much more to look at and discuss. Let's face it, to make a difference you need to be agile – and to coin a phrase from a good industry friend of mine in Orlando, "We need to be technology businesses now – we are no longer simply box makers."

Over the years, commentators dubbed drupa with a headline: 'the printer's show', 'the digital show' and many other iterations. I wrote an article after drupa in 2016, and I christened it the 'Digital Print for Corrugated' drupa, as I was shocked at how many European corrugated converters I met in the aisles – so much so, I launched a quarterly magazine with the same name! Admittedly, they all said that digital print was their primary reason for visiting, particularly as digital print for corrugated was still very much in its infancy. Fast forward almost eight years, and some would say that digital print is now well established, although the numbers would not necessarily support this; interestingly, it is only in the last year or so that we have seen the 100th installation of a single-pass high speed digital press for corrugated packaging in Europe/North America – why is it taking so long to gain market acceptance? There are a multitude of reasons,

such as ink costs, speed etc, but all these are being addressed and maybe the advent of hybrid flexo/digital could be the answer the industry is looking for? The first solution is now in commercial production, with machines running in Europe, Africa and North America. Could this be the future, the best of both worlds? Time will tell.

The other thing the sector faced during the pandemic was the lack of chances to meet and share ideas. Well, that is in the rear-view mirror now and the plethora of shows and conferences bears testament to the need for our industries to meet. drupa gives us the chance to meet once more and to share experiences. For the European corrugated industry it is worth the effort to keep up to speed with everything that is new and digital.

Quotes

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