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Retailer seeks innovations

April expo gives suppliers opportunity to showcase sustainable developments in their packaging.

By -- *Packaging Digest*, March 1, 2010



When Walmart announced new goals in late February to eliminate 20 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions from its global supply chain by the end of 2015, this action represented the giant retailer's commitment to sustainability and its leadership position in industry.

"Energy efficiency and carbon reduction are central issues in the world today," proclaims Mike Duke, Walmart president and CEO. "We've been working to make a difference in these areas, both in our own footprint and our supply chain."

Showing how they can contribute to this effort will be the central challenge for an expected 175 packaging vendors who will attend Walmart's fifth annual Sustainable Packaging Exposition, to be held April 6-7 at the John Q. Hammons Convention Center in Rogers, AR, near Walmart's Bentonville headquarters. The expo will be open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday and from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday.

Attendance expected to be up

This year's expo will see an increase in the number of exhibiting companies, and is expected to draw more than 2,000 Walmart and Sam's Club associates, buyers and product suppliers, according to Amy Zettlemoyer-Lazar, Sam's Club senior director of supplier diversity and packaging. She says Walmart welcomes packaging professionals, logistics and manufacturing personnel as well as salespeople from its current product suppliers, who can obtain invitations to the expo through the Walmart buyers with whom they work. "The expo is targeted so our buyers and product suppliers can walk through together and be able to make some decisions on the spot," she added.

Ron Sasine, senior director of packaging, Walmart private brands, says they expect the packaging world to descend on Arkansas in early April. He adds that Walmart believes attendance will be up in all three areas that they measure: How many exhibitors are registered; how many attendees are registered; and how many attendees have signed up for the classes offered at the expo.

The classes are organized by Walmart, and draw from association, government, business and academic officials. Zettlemoyer-Lazar says Walmart has tightened the focus on the types of sustainability information in the classes, but they present both basic and more-detailed information for all levels of experience among Walmart buyers. She adds that sessions explaining how suppliers and buyers have successfully worked together are among the most popular, and these have been expanded at this year's expo.

Still, Sasine says, they also will focus on getting attendees onto the floor to see the developments displayed by exhibitors.

Exhibitors are getting better at "speaking the Walmart language," Sasine says, adding that they're also learning how to answer the questions that Walmart buyers will have for them. "Exhibitors are getting better at quantifying the benefits of their products. In the past we've heard a lot about sustainability stories around their packaging. That's good at a certain level, but now we're starting to see identifiable, quantifiable results. That's really where we have to take this."



In a new development, Sasine says, packaging vendors at the expo can take part in Walmart's quarterly sustainable milestone meeting on Wednesday, April 7, through a video uplink. Meanwhile members of the Packaging Sustainability Steering Committee will attend in person at the Walmart home office. Their attendance gives them a chance to hear from Walmart's most senior management what the company has going, its goals and how packaging plays a part, Sasine says.

At the expo, Zettlemoyer-Lazar says, Walmart is concentrating on measuring and quantifying success stories, and making sure those stories are innovative and provide value to our customers. "The focus on sustainability has not changed," she explains. "What has changed, fortunately, is people's knowledge around the subject and our ability to deliver results. "The expo brings potential innovations directly to our buyers and product suppliers so they can look at solutions together and pick the top two or three that are most viable to work on," Zettlemoyer-Lazar adds.

Sasine recalls one project that started at the expo when a group of Walmart logistics personnel were shown an idea. "They began working with a group of suppliers that day," he reports. "There is no event that gets people inside Walmart thinking more about how packaging relates to sustainability than this two-day expo."

Three visits to sell idea

Zettlemoyer-Lazar says one supplier came to the expo three times before the right Walmart buyer recognized the opportunity the exhibitor offered. As she recalls it, the exhibitor got better explaining his message and customizing his solution to meet the needs of Sam's Club.

Both Walmart leaders pointed out that suppliers don't have to be major consumer product goods companies to find success at the expo. If you've got an innovation, the sustainability expo is a great place to show it off with just two or three salespeople, says Zettlemoyer-Lazar. Family-owned companies and the little guy can do well at the expo because it's cost-effective, with a low fee compared to a major trade show, Sasine says.

He adds that the simple nature of the expo fits in well with Walmart's slogan of "Save money, live better."

2010 Sustainability in Packaging Conference

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When Sustainability in Packaging 2010 kicks off March 16-17 in Orlando, FL, more than 200 packaging professionals, plus a record number of sponsors and exhibitors, are expected to be on hand for one of the industry's leading events addressing sustainability.

This year's conference has much to offer. Pira International and *Packaging Digest*, the conference organizers, are proud to announce that R. David Hoover, chairman & CEO of Ball Corp. will be the keynote speaker. Viewing "packaging innovation through the lens of sustainability," Ball's focus has been to produce packaging that minimizes environmental impacts while meeting the requirements of their customers and consumers.

Since its inception three years ago, Sustainability in Packaging has attracted a wide range of companies and delegates representing the entire packaging supply chain, including consumer packaged goods companies such as Kraft, 3M, JCPenney, Unilever, The Kroger Co., GSK, Nestle, Colgate-Palmolive, Bausch & Lomb, Sara Lee, Sargento, Mars and many more.

The conference agenda explores issues such as recycling and waste management, supply chain management, and materials and design, with an updated session providing in-depth examination of bioplastics.

Offering plenary sessions and three breakout tracks each day, topics will range from strategic sustainability goals, materials, innovative design solutions, supply chain synergies,

waste management and recycling to brand image and communication with customers and partners. New industries such as furniture packaging, beverage packaging, transportation and logistics, and home accessories packaging are represented on the agenda.

"Sustainability has become a durable and pressing issue in the packaging sector," says John Kalkowski, *Packaging Digest* editorial director and conference chair. "Developments on the sustainability front are coming quickly, and this conference offers one of the best opportunities to stay on top of what's happening in packaging and network with industry leaders."

Visit www.sustainability-in-packaging.com for more conference information and an up-to-date schedule of events.

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