



## Flexible Packaging: Online Conversation Overview

### January-June 2019

As part of its ongoing communications program, FPA enlists G&S to monitor social media and online news conversations related to flexible packaging and the packaging industry at large. Online coverage of industry topics, while not all-inclusive, can help FPA anticipate pending opportunities and challenges for the industry.

### Summary of Online Conversations

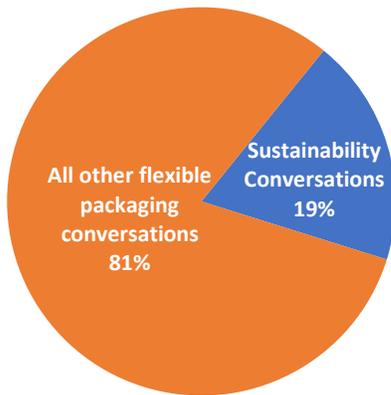
During the first half of 2019, conversations about flexible packaging often mentioned the increasing popularity of flexible packaging and noted that the flexible packaging industry is expected to grow. Several large companies, such as Amazon, are adopting flexible packaging. However, the increasing number of companies pledging to use recycled plastic could be a challenge for the industry.

- There were roughly **24,800 mentions<sup>1</sup>** of “flexible packaging” in online news and social media conversations, earning an estimated **150.3 million potential impressions**. The volume decreased from 34,800 mentions and 554.2 million potential impressions during the second half of 2018.
  - These mentions included news about companies that produce flexible packaging and conversations about the state of the market and market growth.
- The volume of online media and social media mentions decreased during this period due to less news about flexible packaging products and companies that make flexible packaging, though these were still a significant part of the conversation.
- Together, **sustainability and recycling/end-of-life topics about flexible packaging made up roughly 19% of online flexible packaging conversations.**

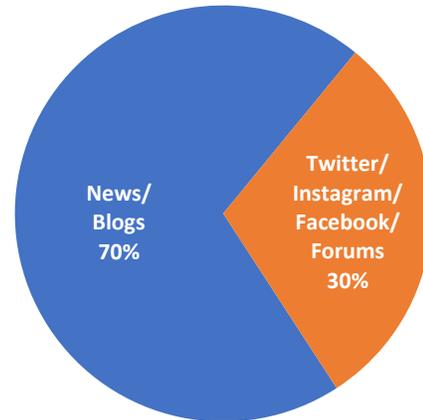
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<sup>1</sup> Includes mentions between January 1, 2019 and June 30, 2019.

Online sustainability/environmental mentions within "flexible packaging conversations"



Sources of mentions of "flexible packaging"



## Online Media Articles about Flexible Packaging

**Plastics News:** "[Recycling company puts flexible packaging recycling system to the test](#)" describes the Materials Recovery for the Future (MRFF) research project, which is working to find solutions so that recycling centers can handle flexible packaging.

**Baking Business:** "[Evolving snack formats intensify demand for flexible packaging lines](#)" shares some of the key snack food packaging trends from a PMMI report titled "Snack Foods – Packaging and Processing Market Assessment and Trends." One of the biggest trends in the report is the increasing demand for flexible packaging.

**Flexible Packaging:** "[Trends Driving Popularity of Flexible Packaging](#)" explores why flexible packaging is becoming increasingly popular across industries, such as how its light weight is beneficial for e-commerce, that consumers like resealable closures, and its sustainability benefits.

**Dairy Foods:** "[Flexible packaging is a success](#)" notes that the dairy market is embracing flexible packaging and explores some of the benefits of flexible packaging, such as the high-quality of printed imagery on flexible packaging, the ease of emptying flexible packaging containers, and how flexible packaging can help make food easier to eat on the go.

**Packaging World:** Three articles shared findings from PMMI's "2019 Flexible Packaging Assessment Report." The articles shared [sustainability innovations](#) in flexible packaging, [hurdles](#) facing the industry, and [demands for innovation](#) in flexible packaging.

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Articles about flexible packaging often noted the increasing popularity and growth of flexible packaging across CPGs.

In addition to articles focused on the trends in flexible packaging, multiple articles focused on corporate innovations in flexible packaging, including articles in [EPPM](#), [Healthcare Packaging](#), and [Labels & Labeling](#). Many of the articles shared innovations to make flexible packaging more recyclable or biodegradable.

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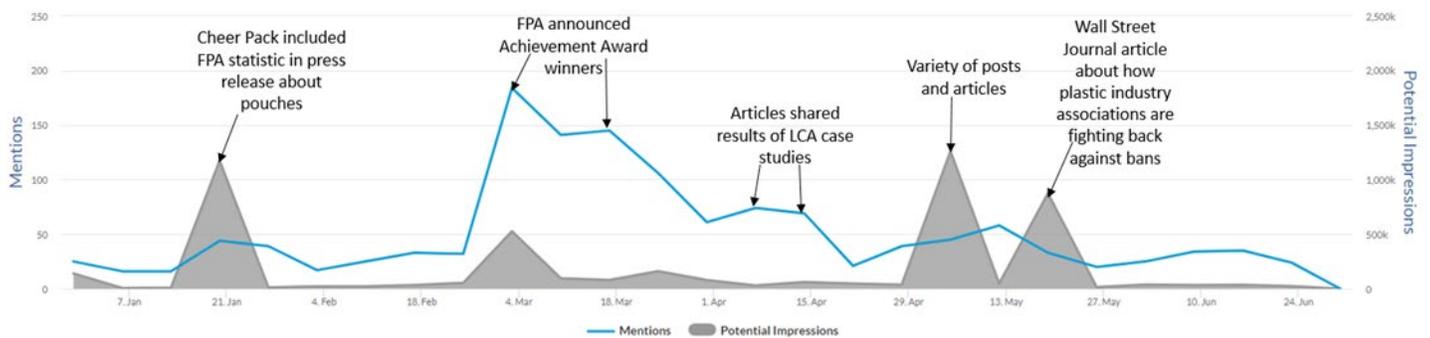
## Online Media Articles about Flexible Packaging Association

FPA released case studies highlighting the sustainability benefits of sustainable packaging. The case studies included information from a life cycle assessment comparing flexible packaging to other types of packaging across six different types of products.

FPA also announced the 2019 winners of the Flexible Packaging Achievement Awards.

The case studies and award winners were shared in multiple packaging and industry publications.

**Mentions of FPA**



During the first half of 2019, online articles mentioning the Flexible Packaging Association often shared proprietary data. They also frequently mentioned Flexible Packaging Achievement Award winners.

FPA was also mentioned in a [Wall Street Journal](#) article about how plastic industry associations are fighting back against plastic bans, which was shared by other publications. The article was relatively balanced and neither supported nor condemned plastic bans. However, a [“Letter to the Editor”](#) in response, which did not mention FPA, supported plastic bans.

**Wall Street Journal:** [“In Plastics War, the Industry Fights Back”](#) shares information about how plastic industry associations are combatting plastic bans.

**Packaging Strategies:** [“Passion for the Pouch”](#) discusses the increasing popularity of pouches. It includes information from FPA’s report “A Holistic View of the Role of Flexible Packaging in a Sustainable World.”

**Packaging Strategies:** [“2019 Packaging Outlook: Flexible Plastic Packaging”](#) is written by Alison Keane. The article explores the outlook and projected growth of flexible packaging in the United States.

**Label & Narrow Web:** [“Sustainability case study: The benefits of flexible stand-up pouches for baby food”](#) shares information from the case study about baby food pouches, including a graphic showing the results of the life cycle assessment study.

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**Flexible Packaging:** “[Stand-up coffee pouches offer environmental benefits](#)” highlights some of the environmental benefits of coffee pouches from FPA’s life cycle assessment case study.

**Waste360:** “[FPA Announces 2019 Flexible Packaging Achievement Award Winners](#)” shares a list of the award winners, noting that sustainability and multisensory benefits were trends in the award entries.

**Beverage Industry:** “[Design, sustainability drive beverage packaging solutions](#)” explores why CPGs select certain materials when designing packaging. The article includes a statistics from a G&S/FPA survey.

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## Notable Packaging Issues in the News

Countries and organizations continue to implement and discuss initiatives to eliminate plastic waste and protect the environment. There have been a number of articles discussing the topic.

- Canada is planning to [ban single-use plastics](#) by 2021. The country will also “establish ‘targets’ for companies that manufacture or sell plastics to be responsible for their plastic waste.”
- New York State [passed a law](#) banning single-use plastic bags. There will be some [exceptions](#), such as food takeout bags, bags used to wrap meat or deli products, garment bags, and bags sold in bulk. Additionally, counties will be allowed to impose a five-cent fee on paper bags. The ban will go into effect in March 2020.
  - In response to the ban, Wegmans [announced](#) that it will be eliminating plastic bags in its New York stores by the end of 2019, before the ban goes into effect.
- Vermont passed the [most comprehensive plastic ban](#) in the country. The law will take effect in July 2020. The law “prohibits retailers and restaurants from providing customers with single-use carryout bags, plastic stirrers, or cups, takeout, or other food containers made from expanded polystyrene. Straws may be provided to customers on request.”
- Maine passed a bill [banning single-use plastic bags](#) at grocery check-out lines by April 22, 2020. Stores will be able to charge at least five cents for recyclable paper or reusable plastic bags.
- The legislatures in [Delaware](#) and [Oregon](#) passed bills banning single-use plastic bags at check-outs, which are expected to be signed by the governors.
- The London Marathon announced that it is [introducing several sustainability initiatives](#). It will replace plastic water bottles with edible seaweed pouches this year. It is also decreasing the number of drinking stations, using compostable cups, testing bottle belts where runners carry their own water, and it instituted a closed-loop recycling program to collect bottles and bring them to a recycling plant to be made into new bottles.
- Several of the world’s largest consumer goods companies, including Procter & Gamble, Unilever, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Danone, Mars Petcare, and Mondelēz International announced that they are working together on a project called Loop. As part of the project, products will be sold in [reusable containers](#), which will be picked up and reused at a later date, similar to how milk was previously delivered.
- Whole Foods announced that it will [eliminate plastic straws](#) from its stores by July 2019. The company also switched to smaller plastic produce bags and is replacing the clamshells for chickens with bags.

***“Drink Makers Seek More Recycled Plastic,” Wall Street Journal.*** Although numerous beverage companies have pledged to use a higher percentage of recycled plastic in their packaging, they are stymied by a shortage of discarded plastic containers that they can use. The shortage is partially due to inefficiencies in how governments collect and organize recycling programs.

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***[“Things You’re Doing to Save the Planet That Are Actually Terrible,”](#) Vice.*** The article explores four ways that seemingly environmentally friendly actions are bad for the planet, including using cotton rather than plastic bags, using “biodegradable” wipes, crushing cans prior to recycling them, and using ride-sharing services.

***[“There’s an Ugly Side to the Makeup Aisle, and It’s Killing the Planet,”](#) Bloomberg.*** The article is focused on packaging waste from beauty products. It also highlights some of the steps beauty manufacturers are taking to limit packaging waste, particularly plastic packaging waste. [CBS](#) also discussed the article in a segment with its author.

***[“Whales died with 50/88 pounds of plastic in their stomachs,”](#) National Geographic.*** The two articles shared two separate accounts of whales who were found dead with large amounts of plastic waste in their stomachs. The whales were found in Italy and the Philippines.

***[“Here’s How Much Plastic You Eat Each Year,”](#) Huffington Post.*** A recent paper that was published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* found that the average American ingests over 70,000 miniscule pieces of plastic each year.

***[“Single-use plastics a serious climate change hazard, study warns,”](#) The Guardian.*** The article shares the results of a [report by the Center for International Environmental Law](#), which explores how the product and disposal of plastics impact the environment beyond pollution.



## Organizations/Activists and Notable Packaging News

During the first half of 2019, the conversation among organizations and activists was driven by Greenpeace, though other organizations shared information and released reports. For instance, Surfrider Foundation released its 2019 [Clean Water Report](#) and Michelle Pfeiffer launched a fragrance that she developed with the [Environmental Working Group](#), which comes in a recyclable bottle. However, the number of campaigns driven by activists appeared to be minimal.

**Greenpeace International:** Greenpeace began using the hashtag [#PlasticMonster](#) in posts and press releases urging corporations to use less plastic. The organization also created a 15-foot tall plastic monster puppet, which is situated in front of the headquarters of various corporations.

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## Brand Owners and Notable Packaging News

During the first half of 2019, multiple brands announced that they would be introducing or had introduced initiatives to make packaging more sustainable. Below are some of the larger companies that announced sustainability initiatives, but there are also dozens of announcements from brands such as [Hellmann's](#), [Gillette](#), and [Poland Spring](#).

**Amazon:** Amazon has been switching its packaging from traditional [cardboard boxes to flexible plastic](#) mailers as part of its overall attempts to reduce packaging waste and be more sustainable. However, the company has received some negative feedback due to the change. In particular, several articles say that the packaging is [causing problems](#) at recycling plants by becoming tangled in their equipment and that the packaging is difficult for consumers to properly recycle.

**Samsung Electronics:** Samsung Electronics announced that it will begin [removing non-recyclable plastic](#) from its packaging in 2019. It will be replacing plastic packaging with recycled or bio-based packaging. "By 2020, only paper made of materials certified by global environmental organizations – such as the Forest Stewardship Council – will be used for Samsung's packaging and manuals."

**Walmart:** Walmart announced new [plastic waste reduction commitments](#) for its private brands. Commitments include switching to packaging that is "recyclable, reusable or industrially compostable," adding the How2Recycle label to packaging, and including a higher percentage of recycled content in packaging.

**Trader Joe's:** In response to customer criticism, Trader Joe's announced new changes it is making to [decrease the amount of plastic packaging](#) it uses. It announced several changes at the end of 2018, but it has since expanded the changes, such as selling more produce loose instead of bagged and replacing plastic coverings for flowers and greeting cards with compostable/renewable materials.

**Unilever:** Unilever announced that it plans to include [50% recycled materials](#) in its packaging by the end of 2019. The company also plans to include the How2Recycle label on all its packaging by 2021 and partner with Walmart to provide consumer education of recycling.

**Coca-Cola:** The company announced that it wants to collect and [recycle 100% of its bottles and cans](#) by 2030. Coca-Cola is also hoping that by 2030 its bottles will be made using 50% recycling materials.

## Methodology

To analyze online conversations related to flexible packaging, we used our social listening and media tools to capture and review mentions in online news channels, blogs, forums, social networks, comments, and reviews. Primary search terms for the analysis included words like “flexible packaging,” “flex packaging,” and “#flexiblepackaging.”

For conversations specific to companies and organizations, we analyzed general packaging terms (“packaging,” “packages,” etc.) and added terms related to specific NGOs, environmental organizations, influencers, and companies. The majority of these terms originally came from an FPA report titled “Review of Non-Governmental and Other Environmental Stakeholders with Interest in Packaging” (obtained in 2015).

All analyses are “directional” as they are defined by the search terms and sources available in the social listening tools.

Note that mentions refer to the number of times a search term is mentioned in online conversations. Sustainability conversations were defined as conversations about flexible packaging *and* topics like recycling, sustainability, environment, composting, biodegradability, lifecycle assessment and end-of-life issues, recovery, source reduction, waste, energy, and greenhouse gas emissions.