

Market Trends

PACKING IT IN

Form and function both come into play when packaging snack food and bakery products. Now, more than ever, manufacturers are finding ways to reinvent their packaging for multiple purposes beyond just advertising the product within.

Jen Roth, contributing writer

For years, that crinkly cupcake wrapper or the familiar pop top on those potato crisp tubes has been the best ways to get a fresh product from the store shelves to consumers' mouths. But as consumers' taste buds change, so do packaging initiatives.

That's why manufacturers are now finding new ways to use packaging to not only keep their products fresh, but also deliver them to consumers in innovative fashions.

Single-serving size packaging has been present in many snack and bakery categories for years. As consumers look to companies to provide portion control and a portable bite, Boulder County, Colo.-based cracker manufacturer 34° has met that need with flair.

"We recently introduced a 'snack-pack' version of our crackers," says Craig Lieberman, president. "We received a lot of feed-

back from consumers who wanted a smaller size pack of our crackers that they could use for picnics, school lunches, hiking, etc."

The company ensures that all the varieties of its *Crispbread* crackers are perfectly packaged for maximum enjoyment anytime, anywhere.

"We use a moisture-resistant film that allows the product to be refrigerated and used for cheese and deli trays [along with] boxed lunches," says Lieberman. "We also provide full-color caddies in each case that allows retailers to merchandise the snack-packs at store level, but also encourages them to refill the caddies to cut down on waste."



Another company getting in on portable-portion packaging is Ralcorp Frozen Bakery Products of Downers Grove, Ill. The manufacturer's new *Krusteaz* Mini Pancakes and Waffle Sticks are individually wrapped in microwavable bags, ensuring that the consumer gets a hot breakfast on-the-go.

Ralcorp also uses its packaging to boast that each serving of its mini pancakes and



waffle sticks offer 0 g. of trans fat and 16 g. of whole grains. The bags even include the official seal from the Whole Grains Council, making it an easy breakfast choice for busy moms.

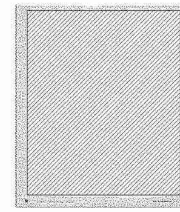
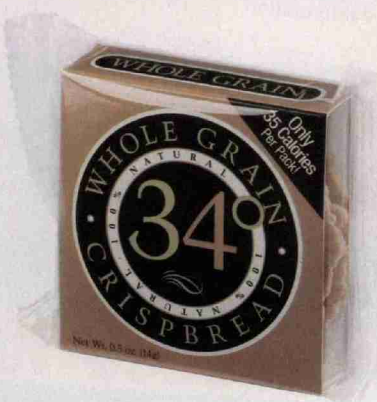
While packaging a product in a portable structure is one must, American Pop Corn Co. found a way to make its packaging do double duty — literally. The Sioux City, Iowa-based company recently introduced the *Insta-Bowl* for its *Jolly Time* popcorn line.

"*Jolly Time's* new *Insta-Bowl* is the most innovative item to be introduced to the microwave popcorn category since the 100-calorie and single-serving popping bags," says Garrett Smith, president. "This popping bag goes from bag to bowl with a simple pull of the string."

Consumers can enjoy the *Homemade* variety of *Jolly Time* without getting butter on their knuckles or having to wash a bowl. Likewise, American Pop Corn Co. uses its *Jolly Time* packaging to evoke a feeling of nostalgia.

"The retro image prominently displayed on the front of the *Homemade* package accurately conveys the flavor profile," says Garrett. "The image is of a 1950s era,

Continued on page 36



Continued from page 34

apron-wearing mom holding a big bowl of popcorn and lovingly giving her daughter a smaller bowl.”

Garrett also asserts that the photo on the 3- and 6-pack cartons is square with a white border, which is similar to photos of that generation.

For other companies such as Rudolph Foods, the resurgence of nostalgic packaging is not lost either.

“For decades, not only pork rinds but potato chips and other snack foods, including popcorn, were sold in gift tins or home-delivered tins,” states Mark Singleton, vice president of sales and marketing for the Lima, Ohio-based company. “That went away with the advent of [flexible] film, but over the last several years, we have [seen] a real resurgence in our big pork rind barrels.”

The company is also finding that not only does the new packaging look great; it also holds a dual purpose.

“Consumers react well to the fact that it is reusable. Consumers can reuse it for something else in their everyday lives,” Singleton says. “They can eat the great-tasting pork rinds at a great value and then use the barrel for sprinkler parts [or] dog biscuits. That really appeals to a lot of people.”

The company is not ignoring its other packaging for pork rinds. For example, Rudolph Foods’ smaller-portioned bags are always made with clear film, which is a critical component to the company’s packaging design.

“[Our consumers] know what they



are looking for, they are very loyal to our product and they know what it looks like, so that’s the reason we want to show consumers what they are buying in the bag,” asserts Singleton.

Rudolph Foods also uses packaging to convey the health benefits and unique attributes of its snack product.

“Since we do have a surprising health story to tell, we focus on making sure to communicate to our consumers that there are zero carbs in our products,” Singleton says. “Also, you have to communicate the flavor and flavor impact, like we did for our Southern Recipe line. We enhanced the bags and brought them in[to] the 21st century, but still remains true to the Southern heritage and its roots.”

Rudolph Foods also calls out to its target market in the design and labeling of its packaging.

“Our *Pepe’s* bag is a great example of that,” says Singleton. “We’ve got Hispanic ingredient statements, we’ve got a Hispanic/Spanish/English back story, and we always make sure and mention *chicharrones*, which is the Spanish word for pork rinds.”

On the other hand, sometimes the introduction of a new product will prompt a manufacturer to redesign its packaging. This holds true for Hostess-owned Merita of Irving, Texas.

“In November [2010], Merita made its first major packaging update in more

than three decades when the brand added two more nutritious bread choices to the *Merita* family of breads,” says Ann Oades, director of premium bread marketing for Hostess Brands. The new *Merita* Smartwhite and *Merita* Made With Whole Grain White varieties inspired the company to make such changes.

“Our first goal was to create a consistent brand architecture that would allow consumers to more easily see the breadth of product offerings the *Merita* brand brings to Southern families,” states Oades. “This new brand architecture features a new logo, richer colors and design of the *Merita* ‘Quality Guarantee.’”

As part of the “Quality Guarantee,” Merita included taglines on the front of its packaging to call out the benefits provided by its line of breads. Oades adds that the *Merita* Smartwhite package totes the tagline, “The Fiber of 100% Whole Wheat,” while the *Merita* Made With Whole Grain White’s packaging boasts that it contains 8 g. of whole grains per serving. Oades says that this reminds consumers of the added nutrients at-a-glance.

Of course, Merita had to keep in mind that many of its loyal consumers might be apprehensive about the changes made to the packaging of their favorite bread. Oades states that in the case of the *Merita* Old Fashioned and *Merita* Autumn Grain lines, modifications had to be made with care. As a result, design changes were more tempered.

While some companies initiate packaging changes to display health benefits, other companies such as Mars Chocolate North America focus solely on altering packaging to garner more impact on supermarket shelves.

“There’s been a trend toward cleaning up packaging graphics and focusing on singular communication,” says Steve Ginsburg, director of strategic brand design for the Hackettstown, N.J.-based company.

Ginsburg attributes the less-is-more design trend to the influx of media images presented to the average person on a daily basis, adding to what he calls the “visual noise” consumers are exposed to. Mars

Continued on page 38



Continued from page 36

redesigned the packaging thusly, so that its *Combos* snack can compete on store shelves.

"The new packaging features brighter colors and a black arch design at the top, which helps the product stand out on the

shelf," says Ginsburg. "The description 'Baked Snacks' appears just below the *Combos* brand logo, so consumers will immediately know the origins of the hearty snacks."

The *Combos* bags also feature large



photos of the food representing the snack variety contained within, such as a large pizza slice for the Pizzeria Pretzel selection or a Cheddar cheese wedge for the Cheddar Cheese Cracker variety.

Keeping in mind the consumer demand for on-the-go packaging, Mars will also be producing the Cheddar Cheese Pretzel, Cheddar Cheese Cracker, Pizzeria Pretzel and variety mix selections in 0.93-oz. snack-size portions starting in May.

In addition to its *Combos* redesign, Mars enhanced the packaging for its *Marathon* energy and protein bars.

"The new packaging clearly identifies nutritional benefits, including callouts for protein, vitamins and minerals, as well as appetizing product photos," states Ginsburg. He adds that due to the impulsive nature of snack purchases, the package must be seen and understood within seconds in order to be considered for purchase.

"The brand's promise should be instantly recognizable and resonate emotionally without consumers having to read the pack," Ginsburg says. "This is true whether it's premium, taste, fun, efficacy or any other value."

Furthermore, Jack Link's Beef Jerky of Minong, Wis., recognizes the importance of package design for its snack products.

"We call out the protein, fat and carbohydrate information on the front of the package, allowing consumers to see product benefit[s] at a glance," says Jeff LeFever, marketing director. "We recently

Continued on page 40

Continued from page 38

updated our back panel to highlight three of the most important pillars of our products: Taste; quality; and nutrition.”

These pillars are not the only things consumers want to see when looking at the Jack Link's snacks; they have also demanded a peek inside the bag. That's why Jack Link's added a window to the back of its Nuggets variety foil bags so consumers

can view the product they are purchasing, as well as an easy-peel film, making the package easier to open.

“We've innovated a way to maintain the barrier properties, yet now consumers can actually see the

premium quality of the Nugget product inside the package,” says LeFever. “A window on our Nugget package was one of our number-one consumer requests, and we were able to make that happen.”

The jerky and meat snack producer is also going “green,” by reducing the size and amount of film for its main jerky bags by 25%, LeFever says.

“Sustainability emerged several years ago, but continues to be on the top of the minds of customers and consumers,” he adds. “We are constantly searching for ways to reduce our overall packaging material and carbon footprint.”

Meanwhile, Inventure Foods of Phoenix, Ariz., is following the sustainability path, evidenced in its new line of packaging for the *Boulder Canyon* Kettle Chips.

“We introduced the first-ever compostable package for the natural food channel last spring when we unveiled a bag made from forestry-certified wood pulp,” states



Steven Sklar, senior vice president of marketing. “The benefit is the obvious direct impact on lightening the amount of trash in landfills throughout the U.S.”

Not only will the bag compost quickly, it also alleviates the risk of jeopardizing existing food supplies, unlike bags made from corn- and starch-based contents. This “natural” bag further promotes the ideals of Inventure Foods and the *Boulder Canyon* line.

“As it relates to *Boulder Canyon* snacks, we feel our packaging fits the brand. It speaks to our customers—consumers who value healthier foods and better-for-you food and lifestyle choices,” says Sklar.

Additionally, Pepsico-owned Walkers Potato Crisps of Leicester, England, is making strides in sustainable bag trends. The company uses potato skins, which they already have on hand, and extracts the starch to create its packaging. Walkers plans to launch the bags within the next 18 months and says the new packaging will not rustle quite as much as other biodegradable bags have in the past.

From redesign to redevelopment, snacks' and baked goods' packaging has experienced an overhaul. Whether it evokes a feeling of nostalgia, boasts healthful benefits or touts sustainability, manufacturers will continue to find innovative ways to sell their products with packaging. **SF&WB**