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Technology for Today's Food Production & Packaging Market

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SALT of the EARTH

Jacobsen Salt Co. proudly harvests flake and kosher sea salts from the cold, pristine waters of the Oregon coast.

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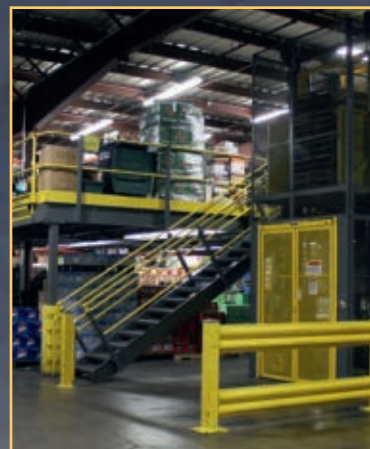
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Reclose/Reseal a Growing Trend for Plastic Packaging in Food Applications

By Anh Marella, Senior Product Manager, Select Solutions Collection, Avery Dennison Label and Packaging Materials, and Scott Hetherington, General Manager, HFM Packaging

It's probably happened to you. You buy a package of deli meat at the supermarket. You open the package the next day to pack a lunch and press together the open film ends to reseal the package. It looks like it can reseal itself, but it just won't. You might have had the same experience in trying to reclose the lid of a clear PET container of lettuce. It looks like you can close it, but there's no adhesive to create a seal, and reclosure just doesn't happen. After several attempts, you end up taking the remaining contents and toss them into a reusable, re-sealable plastic storage bag. The original packaging goes into the trash.

That's a real waste — in more ways than one. It's a missed opportunity for the manufacturer, whose packaging — which had the potential to build brand awareness every time it was taken out of the fridge — had little to no positive impact on the consumer beyond the purchase. In fact, it may have had a negative impact due to the annoyance factor involved. Plus it adds a second package — the storage bag — into the waste stream once the product is used up. That's another cost to not only the consumer, but also the environment.

Flexible Packaging — Still Evolving

Plastic and flexible packaging has come a long way in the food arena. It's the packaging of choice. It offers

major advantages over traditional, rigid packaging, using less material (which translates into less solid waste), weight savings, reduced shipping costs and reduced shelf space requirements.

Reclose/reseal solutions are used with packaging on products such as deli meats, cheese, snacks and cereals. But the reclose/reseal function hasn't always been so simple. Zippers, sliders and pressure-sensitive seals have their fans — and their detractors — among manufacturers and consumers.

Recently, a reclose/reseal solution that had its origin in the wet wipes arena nearly a quarter century ago is making headway into the food packaging space. The packaging employs a pressure-sensitive adhesive label that combines with an easy-open lift tab. The tab is used to open the package. The label, which contains the resealing adhesive, is used to reclose the package to the die cut film with a dependable, hermetic seal. It can be used again and again, delivering reliable closure for freshness and convenience to the consumer and repeated brand messaging for the manufacturer.

Because it is somewhat early in the game for this food packaging technique, brands that adopt early can leave a lasting impression. Consumers may think of the brand that kept their cheese slices from becoming dried out as one of the good guys — an innovator that saved them from using yet another storage bag on top of the original packaging. There are added benefits. A second tab



can be built into the first that provides evidence of tampering, allowing the consumer to pass on the purchase of a package that looks like someone has tried to open it.

And for the manufacturer, the label and packaging combination is robust. It provides barrier properties that offer shelf stability through resistance to moisture, oxygen and CO2 transmission. It's compliant to FDA 175.105 for food adhesives.

Building the Label Directly Into the Packaging

The resealable label option may actually save a manufacturer time in terms of package filling; there's no need to add the primary label to the front of the packaging. The label can incorporate different shapes and sizes. It includes primary graphics and is affixed to the film during the converting process. The packer receives pre-labeled film into its facility, making the resealable film a drop-in process.

Formats include hang-hole or shelved packaging. The preprinted resealable label may also be used for produce packaging on PET thermal form lids. In this instance, the label is pre-applied to the film, easing application in the packing process.

No heat, water or other substance is required to seal the adhesive; simple pressure is all it takes.

The resealable market in flexible packaging is growing rapidly among food





manufacturers for several reasons:

- Extremely user-friendly
- Provides a branding opportunity
- Offers ease of use for the customer and consumer
- Reduces overall packaging; there's no overwrap or secondary packaging required

Some manufacturers have also switched to the new film for food safety reasons, as the reclose/reseal process provides a more reliable package. But, in the process, some manufacturers started to realize they were getting a more consistent, reliable product that actually reduced total cost of ownership. The pre-applied label method significantly decreases defects in the film or labels such as delamination, buckles or bubbles. In essence, this process adds a quality control function for manufacturers, significantly enhancing the quality of finished roll material.

It can also eliminate the use of die cutting equipment and label applicators in the packaging process. One manufacturer — as soon as they put the first roll on the packaging machine — realized “they were

never going back; it was the first time the machine ran at the rate at which it was supposed to run.” They decommissioned the label applicators and die cutting equipment from the machines. Their new “super plant” doesn't even have die cut and label capability.

Sealing the Deal

There are several variables to consider when thinking about pressure-sensitive reclosure packaging. These include:

- **Peel Feel:** Ensuring label, film and tray compatibility for the proper bond strength and transmission rates can play a role in providing the right “feel” or peel force for opening the package. Different “peel feels” or levels of resistance can be achieved. Some manufacturers opt for a more secure seal to make tampering difficult; others want a smooth, easy peel.
- **Film Sourcing:** Similarly, the right film has to be sourced for the proper oxygen and CO₂ transmission rates, depending on the product being packaged.

- **Creativity:** How creative do you want to be? Building the label into the packaging gives the manufacturer an opportunity to brand the product in a unique way. It's not just about clear trays and lidstock anymore. Dark trays, printed films and matte finishes have all been used recently to help brands stand out from the pack. Label shapes and colors can also mean the difference between just another package and one that sticks in a consumer's mind as it is used time after time.

The good news is manufacturers need not go it alone. Consulting with flexible packaging and labeling experts should be the first step in terms of partnering for success.

Who's Using It and What's Really In It For Me?

Pressure-sensitive reclosure packaging is being employed for products such as processed meats, bacon, snack food, pasta, cheese, produce and cereal — but the sky is the limit.

From a cost standpoint, the label/film converting process costs no more to produce. But depending on the application, a cost savings may be achieved in the actual packaging/filling process.

In terms of product differentiation, the only real limit is your creativity. Pressure-sensitive reclosure packaging is an opportunity to brand a package that will be used and reused throughout a product's life cycle. Certainly, the opportunity exists to promote to consumers you've added a packaging feature that will allow them to receive the full value for the price paid and keep the packaged contents fresh for their enjoyment, plus let them know your brand is committed to sustainability goals through this innovative step (and most of that should fit on the label!).

Finally, consumers may also consider purchasing a product in larger sizes with assurances that pressure-sensitive labels will maintain the product's quality and freshness.

Customer convenience. Foods that remain fresher for a longer period of time. Pressure-sensitive reclosure options can differentiate a brand and build customer loyalty while adding to the bottom line. And isn't that the ultimate seal of approval?