

Brands get responsible on recycling and reusing

A host of FMCG firms are stepping on the gas when it comes to initiatives that reduce packaging waste

MEENAKSHI VERMA AMBWANI

In a move that will eliminate 30 million plastic straws annually, Nestlé India has decided to switch to paper straws for Milo and Nescafé cold coffee beverage portfolio. In fact, the company will be leveraging its association with Royal Challengers Bangalore to focus on the sustainability theme during the upcoming IPL matches.

Mehernosh Malia, Director – Dairy, Nestlé India, said, “This Indian Premier League season, Nestlé Milo and Royal Challengers Bengaluru are joining hands to bat for our planet, with the launch of paper straws for the Milo beverage packs. These paper straws are responsibly sourced from renewable sources and certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). We have also made this transition for the packs of our Nescafé range of cold coffees.”

The FMCG major will next look at ways to replace the plastic sleeve with a paper sleeve for the straws on the packs.

Nestlé India is not alone. Major consumer goods companies are stepping on the gas to make tangible shifts in implementing their sustainability goals amidst growing clamour by stakeholders to do more to preserve the planet.

Last month, Colgate became the first mass-market brand to launch recyclable toothpaste tubes in India. In partnership with EPL Ltd (formerly Essel Pro-pack Ltd), Colgate-Palmolive (India) Ltd, has started manufacturing recyclable tubes for Colgate

Vedshakti toothpaste and Colgate Active Salt portfolio.

“The shift to recycling process across all our product portfolio will take the necessary time to fulfill the brand, vendor partners, regulator, and consumer’s needs and hence will be completed by 2025. Sub-brands are in-line towards taking necessary steps to become sustainable in the coming years and eventually we aim to have the entire portfolio be sustainable,” the company told *BusinessLine*.

Unilever too has identified India and France as among the two countries where it will be launching recyclable toothpaste tubes and has announced its commitment to convert its entire global toothpaste portfolio to recyclable tubes by 2025.

Bring your own bottles

In India, Hindustan Unilever has already begun a far-reaching initiative that aims to eliminate packaging altogether – a couple of months ago, it piloted vending machines for its home care products enabling customers to refill bottles of Surf Excel, Comfort and Vim.

The creative solution created in partnership with agency VMLY&R will be expanded across prominent retailers and modern trade outlets. As an incentive, consumers also get a discount on regular retail price if they bring their own bottles.

The move has been inspired by consumers according to Prabha Narasimhan, executive director,

home care, at HUL, who describes how a survey they did showed that in India, a good 20 per cent of its consumers were eco-warriors who look to make a difference.

Narasimhan points to how HUL is doing a year-long programme with Xynteo in Maharashtra schools called “Waste No More”. “No doubt this 20 per cent eco-warriors figure will soon increase – but even 20 per cent is a significant



Smart call Hindustan Unilever’s pilot vending machine enables consumers to refill bottles of detergent

number and if we can meet them halfway with an initiative, they are happy to participate,” she says.

Narasimhan says that the pandemic has made people realise the delicate balance between the world and us and added fuel to

such measures.

Going carton free

Mohit Malhotra, Chief Executive Officer, Dabur India, said despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, the company has been moving forward in implementing a series of measures in implementing its ESG commitments. “We are progressing smoothly to achieve our target of becoming a Plastic Waste Neutral enterprise in the current fiscal by collecting, processing and recycling 22,000 MT of post-consumer plastic waste from across the country,” he said. The company has also taken steps to reduce the usage of paper for printing invoices for goods and in its packaging materials.

“We have begun with removing outer paper cartons from the packaging of Dabur Red Paste as a pilot project. The innovative carton free packaging has been rolled out in key modern trade outlets. A similar initiative is being launched in rural markets to remove outer paper cartons from low unit price packs of Dabur Red Paste. The paper saved from the outer cartons is being used to create notebooks for 1,20,000 underserved children in collaboration with CRY,” Malhotra said.

What’s driving the urgency towards sustainable measures, experts say, is the fact that consumers are increasingly looking to buy brands that have social and environmental purposes. According to Kantar’s Asia Sustainability Foundational Study, around 48

per cent of consumers in India are active and engaged on sustainability issues and are conscious of the impact of their choices

But Jeevaraj Pillai, Joint President – Flexible Packaging Business & New Product Development, UFLEX believes a lot more needs to be done. “Given the scale and size of the packaging industry in India, currently there is negligible visible change in the packaging landscape with respect to sustainable packaging as a limited number of brands have taken the initiative to move towards sustainable packaging,” he points out.

On its part, UFLEX offers a slew of sustainable packaging solutions to brands. For instance: It offers eco-friendly paper-based tubes that reduces the plastic component in the tube body by almost 45 per cent of weight.

Pillai pointed out that a comprehensive sustainable solution lies in combining strategies of “recycling the collected plastic packaging waste” and “using an enzymatic biodegradable packaging material” so that the uncollected waste would biodegrade.

But there are also a host of other challenges. The Kantar report outlined factors of cost, comfort and convenience that are persistently undermining sustainable consumer behaviour. So while a growing number of consumers are prepared to put their money on brands that try to do good, the intent does not always translate into action as many still prioritise saving money over saving the planet.

(With inputs from Chitra Narayanan)