

# Top take-outs from Tokyo

Packaging for the Japanese market has to be as good as it gets to meet cultural expectations of quality, and final products must demand attention to achieve brand impact and shelf stand-out. On assignment for PKN, packaging journalist Joanne Hunter prowled the aisles of Japan's leading packaging trade show and chose her top trends and innovations.



Developed in Sweden using 40 per cent calcium carbonate, the designer-friendly **Ecolean** pack is exactly what a start-up needed to pack a punch. A French co-operative of dairy farmers chose a one-litre pouch for UHT milk to launch the new **En Direct des Eleveurs** brand. The grassroots initiative was set up to help small businesses take a stand against bigger competitors.



**Crown Packaging**, of Japan, produces paper and board by blending recycled paper pulp with safflower petals discarded by red food dye manufacturers or green-tea processing waste, cacao bean husks, palm husks or bamboo. A material called **Berry Mix** being trialled uses blueberry skins from the production of blueberry juices. The subtle tints of purple, green and pink and neutral shades, and flecking, give away the recycled origins of the

Smartpapier range. Crown is Forest Stewardship Council-certified across the company and campaigning for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics to promote FSC standards, starting with the paper specified for tickets. In a "socially contributing" scheme, Crown packaging recycles the ten million origami paper cranes, or Irizuru, sent annually to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park.



## POUCHES TAKE PRIDE OF PLACE

**RETORT** pouches recorded all-time top sales this year in Japan and the sector had its strongest-ever showing at Tokyo Pack 2016, a top Asia region exhibition that saw Swedish pouch manufacturer **Ecolean** competing with domestic suppliers for new business in arguably the most testing global market, while Japanese-owned **Kururay Plantic** hinted at a future move into pouches.

A big advantage for the European alternative microwavable pouch, which is made from 40 per cent calcium-carbonate and easily stands out from the crowd, is that in design terms it appears tailored to a retail industry that looks for positives for the environment and users.

It is typical in Japanese retailing to flag up novel design elements to entice shoppers into trying what is new and different. An air-filled handle for comfort while pouring, a re-closing feature to help prolong product freshness and the option of transparency, appeal to local tastes.

Continuing its penetration into Southeast Asia by opening a Japanese office a year ago in a fashionable quarter of Tokyo, **Ecolean** unveiled the latest, smaller volume **Air Aseptic** 125ml pouch at one of the most important shop windows for the Asia region, Tokyo Pack. This followed its recent commercial launch in Pakistan by a local producer of a dairy-based 'convenience'



product targeting the hot tea market.

Pakistan is one of **Ecolean's** biggest aseptic markets and half a billion packs have been supplied to two customers there this year, company spokesperson **Hanna Jeppsson** told PKN.

Further, she revealed that the US market office had signed its first North American customer contract in September, already doing business with South America in Colombia and Argentina. Elsewhere, Chinese dairies **Mengu** and **Bright Foods** are big customers for pouches in sizes 200ml and less; and in Russia more than 30 machines are producing family-sized packs of UHT milk

and other dairy-based liquid foods.

Also in the flexibles space, **Kururay-owned Plantic**, producer of biodegradable material 85 per cent made from renewables, is working on a thinner food-tray lidding film of 50 micron or less, expected to bring results in "one or two years". PKN asked **Plantic** researcher **Yuki Morino** (pictured) what is planned after that and she responded: "The future is in pouches."

Tokyo Pack highlighted the country's continuing love affair with pouches, and emerging systems that can reduce their environmental impact still further will keep the format a top-seller in Japan.



A cat-food brand by **Hagaromo Foods**, a stock market listed Japanese company, has become the first commercial user of a combination inkjet and water-based white colour gravure printing system suitable for retort pouches, developed by **Fuji Tokushu Shigyo**. Winner of a Japan Good Packaging Design Award, it marks a "first in a digitally printed package", says **Hiroshi Umemoto**, head of the sales division for **Fuji M.O.**

Health and wellness is a huge category in this market. The "Be Active" theme of **Toyo Seikan's** stand suggested sports mania has arrived early for the host nation of the 2019 Rugby World and 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. The sporty design brief produced some novel results.





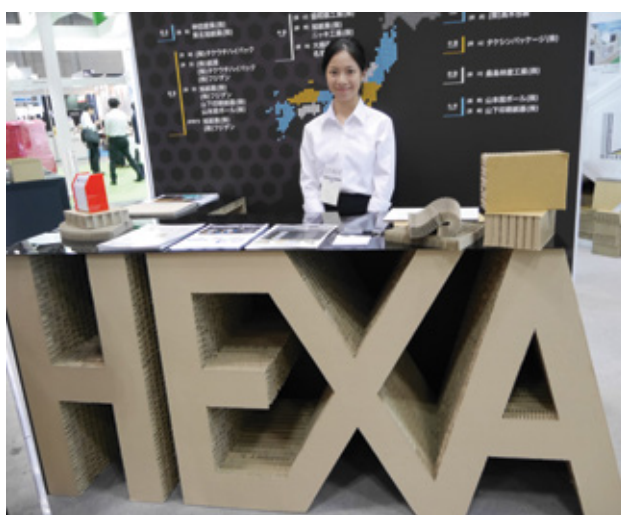
A new design of a hinged ring-pull bottle cap by Toyo Seikan group member **Nippon Closures** has a depression that allows the finger to access the ring and pull, making it easier to open. It is expected on-shelf in 2017, available in standard red, green and gold and custom colours, sizes 26mm and 32mm. A version for granular foods without a ring-pull tab won a 2016 Good Packaging Award. In development is the Ben Lid for the drinks-to-go market, designed to reopen and is also lockable for improved safety.



In line with the trending rise of co-bots, **Fanuc** introduced a robotic workmate for packaging-line operatives. The CR-7iA/L, with a payload of 7kg, can be allowed to roam freely around the factory-floor thanks to being equipped with intelligent safety functions. Surprisingly soft and responsive to touch, depending on the level of force it will pause then continue, or else come to a full stop and require a manual restart. Future users are considering how to apply the robot and it will be developed accordingly, says Fanuc's manager for sales in India, Hiroshi Ota. Last year, Japan Pack (a biennial packaging machinery show that alternates with Tokyo Pack) introduced its big brother, the CR-35iA with a payload of 18kg, which has been in the automotive industry since mid-2015 but is still waiting for its big break into packaging.



A near-invisible barcode known as digital watermarking was shown by **DNP**, licence holder for the Asia region for a "unique" technology by Digimarc. Datalogic Magellan 9800i scanning machinery developed for the Japanese market will be launched in summer 2017, giving retailers the chance to offer a speedier checkout service. Shoppers can scan the code with a smartphone for allergy information and to obtain vouchers.



Paper is still king and the number one packaging material in Japan. **Hexa Japan** offers a light, durable and eco-friendly paper honeycomb for use in the production of suitable alternatives to wood and plastic in pallets, claimed to be strong enough for making furniture or, as pictured, in the building of exhibition stands.

9 Refillable concepts are key to Japan's circular economy ambitions and designs are under continual review, refreshment and development. Three stand out examples includes a design from **PacPlus** of a "clean, easy and stress-free" pouch-exchange type refill system that skips the capping process after filling, designed to keep the contents fresh until the last drop is pumped out. An easily detachable refill container by **U Co** aims to avoid oxygen ingress to keep contents fresh. And a pouch-refill system by **Kao** makes it easy to dispense a high viscosity shampoo by adding top and bottom gussets to help give a steady flow; it was recognised for Technical Achievement.



10 Accessibility is high on the agenda for Japanese packaging designers. **DNP** was promoting prototypes of two user-friendly designs: a concept for one-handed opening that uses two materials easily separated for disposal; and a tearable film for making a pouch simpler to pull open.

Just add water to turn a flat plastic sheet into a watering can or flower vase. This example of typical Japanese ingenuity is by design company **D-bros**, seen in a store at Shinagawa subway station.



## AUSSIE VISITORS' VIEWPOINT

**JAPAN** is renowned for having the highest quality and most sophisticated packaging in the world, with the latest innovations on show every two years at Tokyo Pack.

Phillip Rolls, MD of Australian flexible converting and printing specialist RollsPack, is a regular visitor to Tokyo Pack. This year he took along team members Anna Angelovski (national sales manager), James Luttick (operations manager) and Sophie Fu (manager promotions division) to review this packaging showcase from an Aussie perspective, keeping an eye out for innovation and cost savings. PKN invited him to share the experience.

"At Tokyo Pack this year, as in years past, the focus was still on easy open, single-serve products, but the show also exhibited a high level of Japan's current packaging technology and packaging techniques," Rolls says.

The scope of concepts on show at Tokyo Pack ranged from microwavable and retort single-serve packaging, outer packaging, consumer packaging and transport packaging with clever design and innovative carton creations, moulding the product being transported.

"Flexible packaging products have become more sophisticated in design and obviously difficult to replicate with 'off the shelf' equipment available today," he notes.

"On the printing and converting side, digital and ink jet systems showed strong growth over previous years," he says. "Of particular interest was new technology for digital gravure printing for flexible packaging.

"It comprises an ink jet printing unit and water-based white colour gravure printing unit, which allows printing small-lot multi-product efficiently by applying digital technology. It features the same quality of white colour and image reproducibility as gravure printing, applicable for boil and retort processing with the added benefit of a reduced amount of organic solvent," Rolls says. "It is an innovative printing technology to create a new world of packaging."

Rolls says he was impressed by the quality and vibrancy of the water-based inks, as Japan switches to more eco-friendly ethyl acetate-based formulas and alcohol, away from the Asian norm of toluene and MEK.

An Australian-owned and operated SME with business ties in Europe and Asia, RollsPack sees Tokyo Pack as a window on a world of innovation and best practice that it can apply in its home market. For instance, RollsPack has already been inserting an invisible/transparent anti-counterfeiting mark in some of its products this year. Also, Rolls says it was the first company in Australia with a box-bottom and a triangle flat bottom pouch machine. And in gravure printing, it bats with the biggest like Amcor, offering 9-colour gravure printing and 8-colour flexo printing.

"Tokyo Pack is always interesting for identifying the trends of tomorrow, and it will remain a key source of inspiration for our team," Rolls says.



Phillip Rolls, James Luttick and Anna Angelovski in the colourful aisles at Tokyo Pack.