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SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING IN ECOMMERCE:

A Few Solutions to Protect the Planet



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How does your parcel look like when it arrived at your door? How is it wrapped and is your purchased item safely secured and in top condition? Did the seller use sustainable packaging? Normally, the first two questions are our primary concern, but not the latter, unless you are an eco-concern buyer! Buying online through eCommerce requires seller to pack and deliver the purchased items to customers. As Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) have become the global agenda for a better planet for people and prosperity, eCommerce must also embrace sustainability in its daily operations. By definition, sustainable e-Commerce means conducting online commerce in a manner aimed at meeting the needs of today's generation without depleting natural resources or compromising future needs. This includes eco-friendly manufacturing, eco-friendly shipping, sustainable retail management and sustainable consumption on the part of the buyer (Virstiuk, 2022).

One of the sustainable practises that eCommerce can use is sustainable packaging. According to Nicasio (n.d) sustainable packaging refers to the sourcing, development, and use of packaging solutions that have minimal environmental impact and footprint. With online shopping booming due to Covid 19, waste from the packaging will increase tremendously. Thus, eCommerce sellers must not just think about packaging costs but also environmental impact on the planet.

Sustainable packaging in eCommerce can help reduce the environmental impact by offering different methods and materials for product packaging. Let's look at a few best practices of sustainable packaging in eCommerce:

1. Make use of recyclable cardboards. Courtnell (2022) recommended that

eCommerce use post-consumer or post-industrial recycled paper and cardboard, as well as FSC-certified materials to ensure that you are supporting sustainably managed forests.

2. Biodegradable packing peanuts. It is a great alternative for Styrofoam because it is made primarily from natural materials like wheat and corn starch, and it begins to decompose once discarded.
3. Inflatable air pillows. They are small bags that can be inflated, so they are mostly made of air. When compared to other cushioning materials, this reduces the amount of plastic used in their production and transportation. This is also another great substitute of Styrofoam, comes in different sizes and ideal for filling voids in boxes or providing cushioning around packed items. It can be reused, recycled, and are even biodegradable. However, it is critical to use air pillows made of 100% recycled materials that are biodegradable.
4. Corrugated bubble wrap which is made from 100% recycle cardboard and it has small cuts that are made to create a concertina-like effect that protects against shocks in the same way that bubble wrap does.
5. Corn-starch packaging is made from corn or maize plant, biodegradable and it has a plastic-like properties, an alternative for polystyrene.
6. Mushroom packaging is made entirely of biodegradable and renewable materials that can be recycled in and by nature. Mushroom packaging is made by cleaning and grinding agricultural waste, which is then joined together by a matrix of mushroom roots, also known as mycelium. This raw material can be shaped into whatever shape is desired. After that, it is dried and used as packaging.
7. Seaweed packaging is a green

packaging solution made from the gelatinous substance agar, which is found in a variety of seaweeds and algae. Agar will be dehydrated to create a material suitable for packaging. Seaweed packaging, which is made from a plentiful and sustainable raw material, could be the next big thing in eco-friendly, biodegradable packaging alternatives.

8. Bioplastics can be used instead of plastic packaging materials. Because these products are made from plant-based materials such as wheat straw, they degrade much faster than traditional plastics. They also produce fewer greenhouse emissions in landfills, making them compostable.
9. Compostable mailers are a more environmentally friendly alternative to traditional poly mailers. Because these mailers are made of recycled or regenerative materials, they can be eaten by worms when placed in a compost heap. The bag must decompose within 180 days of the customer receiving it to be certified compostable.
10. Water-activated tape is paper-based packaging tape with a water-activated adhesive. It bonds to the packaging material with gum rather than toxic chemicals. Water-activated tape outperforms plastic packaging tape in terms of strength. Furthermore, it will not leave any sticky residue on the packaging materials, making it better for the environment and customers.
11. Fibre packaging is made from renewable or biodegradable materials. For example, it can be made from reused newspaper, cardboard, or natural fibres. In addition, fibre wrap can withstand high temperatures and has excellent water and oil resistance, making it suitable for food packaging.
12. Compostable shipping labels are made from 100% FSC-certified recycled thermal paper so they're nontoxic and compostable. These labels are applied to customers' packages and degrade in a home composting environment in 180 days.
13. Organic ecological textiles are multi-use and durable material composition. These packaging will add value to customers while also reducing business waste across the supply chain. Reusable bags, for example, can be designed to replace plastic bags, or textile wraps that can be reused as furniture surface protectors. Organic fabrics on the market include hemp, organic or recycled cotton, tapioca, and palm leaves (plus more). All of these materials are biodegradable, which means they decompose naturally in a short period of time.
14. Edible films are a sustainable packaging option for wrapping food. This packaging has the potential to simplify food storage, preparation, and transportation. Edible films have the potential to reduce food and packaging waste, as well as chemical leaching from plastic coats.

Sustainable packaging in eCommerce is a commitment to sustainability as it becomes a pressing issue for consumers, governments, and communities. With generation Z and millennials being the largest eCommerce consumers, sustainability packaging is the way to go because these groups want to be more environmentally responsible. With many alternatives of sustainable packaging and constant innovation in the field, eCommerce players have more options to choose which sustainable packaging they desired most, considering cost, usage, safety, and functionality.

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