

Inland Packaging and Advancing Sustainability Practices

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Executive Summary

The following information provides a case study analysis designed for Inland Packaging. The case study analysis includes a brief company background, the problem statement, the case analysis, solutions to the problem, and recommendations Inland should employ to accomplish the proposed solutions. Inland needs help in adequately educating clients on sustainable packaging solutions. Research conducted for this case revealed a few possible solutions, including creating a universal portfolio of sustainable labeling options, holding a quarterly seminar, and attending trade shows. These solutions are supported by evidence from the course textbook lectures and outside research. Finally, recommendations for Inland Packaging have been formulated to ensure proper implementation of the proposed solutions.

Company Background

Inland Packaging is a family-owned label converter company that spans across three generations. It was established in 1907 by John Glendenning when it primarily produced printed garage forms for the local Ford automotive dealers, (Hrinya, 2020). Inland Packaging has grown from a local business to a global supplier.

Today, Inland Packaging is the leading label manufacturer in North America, providing a wide range of printing technologies. They have over 400 employees across their six facilities, (Hrinya, 2020). Out of Inland Packaging's six facilities, three are in La Crosse, WI, one in Neenah, WI, one in Downingtown, PA, and the last in Delafield, WI. Their markets include labeling and packaging for beer, with the next largest market being food packaging. However, they also supply packaging for bottled water, household products, and health and beauty, to name a few, (Savastano, 2017). Inland Packaging's current president and CEO, Mark Glendenning, maneuvered the award-winning company through its 75th anniversary. Since then, Mark also formed the Glendenning Family Foundation in 2000 to share the success of the La Crosse, Neenah, and Downingtown communities. Currently, the annual revenue for Inland Packaging is 89.3 million, (Zoominfo).

Inland competes in the packaging and labeling industry and operates in mostly corporate markets serving consumer packaged goods brands. Inland's largest key competitor is Multi-Color Corporation, although competitors Smithe and Gamsey also play an influential role in the competition. Inland's largest customer is Molson Coors. Aside from Molson Coors, Inland Packaging mainly services smaller brands. Some of these brands include Arizona, Heinz, Blue Moon, and Land O'Lakes, (Inland Packaging, 2023).

There are various trends in the packaging and labeling industry currently that have a direct effect on Inland Packaging. The key industry trend that is increasingly prevalent in the industry today is increasing sustainability concerns. Many packaging companies are moving towards more sustainable and environmentally friendly practices in their packaging. Customers are asking that their suppliers do the same. Another key industry trend is the increasing demand for flexible packaging. Inland Packaging, previously known as Inland Labeling, was able to act on this trend and expand its product offerings before it was too late, (Blum, 2023).

A key issue Inland is facing regards their customers' knowledge of sustainability efforts. There is a wide variety of sustainable practices therefore it is not feasible for a business to have multiple sustainability goals. Many of Inland's customers want to invest in sustainable practices but are unsure where to start or what their goal is. Sustainability goals can vary from waste reduction to responsible production and consumption, increased sustainable materials, and more. Inland is struggling to educate consumers on sustainability as there are so many components to it and most customers are extremely undereducated in sustainability. This presents a problem for Inland and slows the production process significantly, (Blum, 2023).

Problem Statement

The key problems Inland Packaging is facing are (1) customers are uneducated on current sustainable practices and (2) educating clients on sustainable practices has posed issues and takes time. For example, Lily Blum mentioned during the interview that they are currently working with a large CPG company that is two years in the making with them as a potential client. This company and Inland are currently working together to make a new label for their plastic bottles. APR, the Association of Plastic Recyclers, which sets the standards for plastic recyclability. The company is working on using paper labels on their plastic bottles, which the APR stated they cannot do anymore, as it does not fit into the guidelines for recyclability. Blum and her team are currently working with the company's packaging engineering team to create a new label to put on their plastic bottles. As Blum said, it can be frustrating with the amount of back and forth going on between the companies and working with the APR to make sure it fits within the regulations, (Blum, 2023).

Educating customers on sustainability is a larger industry-wide issue. According to an article from Harvard Business Review, sustainable efforts fall apart for many companies and are unable to scale. One of the hidden enemies mentioned is the methods and tools designed for sustainability are relatively new and more challenging for companies to adopt. Most employees are unfamiliar with sustainability terminology and frameworks. Another hidden enemy is culture and leadership. A lot of today's firms are not designed for sustainability, and current senior executives still think within the profit-focused paradigm, (Farri et al., 2022).

Case Analysis

Specific frameworks will be used to analyze Inland's performance in improving customers' sustainability education. Frameworks include the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Customer Marketing Framework, and implementing benchmarking solutions using an outside company. Each of the SDGs focuses on a different aspect of sustainability, and they provide specific and measurable targets for each goal to assist businesses in their progress. Customer Marketing Framework would help streamline marketing activities to better educate clients on sustainable packaging solutions. Inland would follow the steps of strategy, planning, development, and execution when incorporating this type of framework. Similar to the SDGs, benchmarking solutions using an outside company would allow Inland to measure their progress regarding increasing education on sustainable packaging. A company such as S&P Global offers businesses various online tools such as benchmarking reports, databases, data analysis tools, and workshops to make sure they are on the right track to reach their sustainability goals.

Each of these frameworks can be used to measure Inland's performance against concrete benchmarks and targets to understand where they are performing well or where they could work on improving. The frameworks are relevant to the case because they will help increase sustainability and better measure goal performance.

Identify Alternatives

Solutions

There are multiple alternative solutions Inland can use to effectively educate consumers on sustainability efforts. The first alternative solution involves offering a universal portfolio with various sustainable label and packaging options. The portfolio would highlight the multiple different sustainability goals businesses can strive to achieve as well as ways in which businesses can accomplish these goals. Amongst the sustainable solutions presented in the portfolio, each goal will include the benefits and positive implications of implementing the specified goal. This portfolio will have significant sustainability information composed into a cohesive document.

Another alternative solution is holding a quarterly seminar. This involves Inland conducting a seminar each quarter to inform customers about sustainability as well as answer any questions they may have. This would aid in decreasing the amount of time Inland has to spend educating each customer. If customers even have a general idea of sustainability, it will cause fewer delays in the production process. Holding this seminar quarterly allows Inland's customers to be regularly informed on changing sustainability practices and regulations. This will ensure all the customers are on the same page before placing their order.

The last alternative solution that Inland can use to educate and inform its customers on sustainability is attending various industry events. These events include trade shows, conferences, expos, etc. Individuals from Inland Packaging would be delegated the responsibility of attending these events and gathering information to bring back to Inland. Along with this, Inland can also showcase its sustainable innovations to bring greater awareness to the brand and, ultimately, sustainability.

Evidence

These solutions are supported by various pieces of evidence, including concepts from the course textbook and lectures. According to the course textbook, creating a more collaborative relationship versus a transactional relationship between Inland and their clients would create more of an open conversation, allowing Inland to better educate clients on their sustainable packaging needs, (Hutt et al., 2023). Inland needs to implement the core differentiators that drive value in collaborative relationships, which include improving service support, supplier know-how, and personal interactions. By implementing these core differentiators, Inland's relationships with its clients would be strengthened.

Outside research was conducted to provide additional evidence for the proposed solutions. According to the Journal of Marketing Research, cooperative norms are when two parties understand the need to work together to be successful, (1999). Educating customers on sustainability needs to be a collaborative effort, and by treating each other's problems with equal and shared responsibility, both parties will reap long-term benefits. A collaborative relationship between Inland and its clients would allow them to function more in a partnership, which would allow both parties to communicate their needs more clearly. One way they could engage clients in an ongoing conversation is by attending trade shows and expos. As stated in the solutions section above, trade shows would allow them to showcase their innovations while still being open to questions and feedback from potential buyers. This face-to-face interaction may be the start of an ongoing collaborative relationship between Inland and those new clients.

On the other hand, a strong relationship may not come so naturally, and adaptations may need to be made. According to the Journal of Marketing Research, relationship-specific adaptations are changes to products or procedures that are specific to the needs and/or

capabilities of someone in a relationship, (1999). Adapting to meet their clients' needs would show Inland's commitment to building quality relationships.

Another piece of outside evidence supporting building quality relationships with clients is holding quarterly business reviews. These would allow Inland to be more in sync with its clients and would keep its clients happy and engaged. This would ensure Inland maintains business with those clients long-term. This ties directly in with the proposed solution of holding a quarterly seminar to ensure accurate and up-to-date information is being distributed to clients, (Gibbons, 2023).

Recommendations

There are recommendations that Inland Packaging should utilize to enable an effective implementation of these solutions. The key proposed solution resulting from the case study analysis is composing a portfolio with information regarding different sustainability goals and practices. Inland should ensure the information included in the portfolio is accurate and up to date. The portfolio should also be written in language that a typical consumer can understand. Inland should avoid using any business-specific language to ensure the information is relayed to the consumer effectively. To successfully implement this portfolio, Inland should allocate a team of multiple individuals each focusing on a different aspect of the portfolio. One individual should be responsible for the research and data collection. One individual should be responsible for the design and creativity of the portfolio. Ensuring that each individual has a specific duty to accomplish regarding the creation of the portfolio will ensure that the portfolio is well-formed.

To ensure that the portfolio is continuously updated with the latest information, Inland should hold a quarterly seminar with employees. The seminar should be held to ensure the portfolio is up to date regarding research and data, as well as facilitating information sharing amongst employees to enable improvements to be made. This ensures that the portfolio is analyzed and updated quarterly.

A portion of the seminar should also be reserved for training and educating employees on sustainable packaging practices. Ensuring that all employees are knowledgeable on sustainability and can be of aid when customers have questions is of great importance. To successfully implement this solution, all employees need to be on the same page. Doing this will also ensure that all customers are receiving the same information.

Using these recommendations will ensure the portfolio is well-versed. This will enable faster information sharing between Inland and their customers, ultimately eliminating production delays. Ensuring that employees are receiving regular education regarding sustainability will ensure that Inland stays up to date with the latest sustainability trends. This portfolio will enable the education on sustainability for employees and Inland customers.

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