



WHAT ABOUT THE CLOSURE?

Supply chain | After the lockdown in many countries in the first half of the year and the gradual return to normal, one could assume that production chains are also back in “normal mode”. However, due to the high demand for disinfectants and their dispensers, there are occasional delivery bottlenecks, especially for closures.

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► **Malgorzata Chomiuk**, marketing specialist, Polpak Packaging, Warszawa, Poland, www.packaging.polpak.pl

Disinfectants have recently become one of the most frequently used cosmetic and chemical products. We use hectolitres of the alcohol solution – whether at homes, stores or other locations, to protect ourselves against bacteria and viruses, including Covid-19.

Representatives of Biedronka, one of the most popular retail chains in Poland, have said that over 300,000 li-

tres of disinfectant liquids and gels have been used in their stores and distribution centres, all in the period from March to July. And demand is still growing.

Simplified registration procedures for disinfectant manufacturers have facilitated faster production and distribution. Now, the easier procedures have remained in effect and production will not fall under strict duties and taxes policies, as was the case

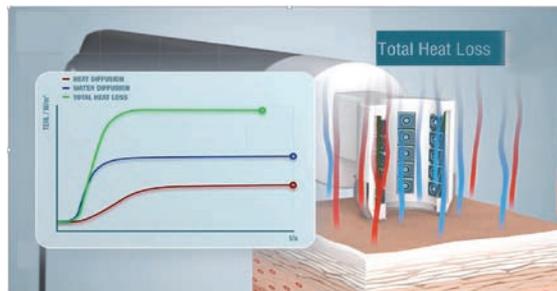
before the pandemic. The manufacturers are being careful to stockpile imported isopropanol, one of the main chemical compounds used in the production of disinfectants. Taking the above into consideration, one would assume everything is under control. Manufacturers would not allow shortages in the supply of “alcohol in spray bottles”.

Lack of spray bottles

The disinfectant manufacturers have secured production materials and suitable points of sale for their products, but only a few of them have stockpiled packaging, let alone closures. Average consumers might assume the situation on the packaging market remains stable. The supply chains have been rebuilt and there are no visible shortages in stores, which means everything works as before. Unfortunately, the situation in the packaging and closure industry ►

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is nothing like last years. **European stocks are virtually empty**; orders made in September will be fulfilled no sooner than next year.

Managing Director of Polpak Packaging, Katarzyna Piątek is warning customers that it still takes a long time to process orders for packaging closures, which means that there won't be enough packaging for the liquids and gels which are being produced. In the last months, when delivery times were extended, our customers have seemingly accepted the situation. But not everyone can come to terms with the fact that the problem still exists. As other industry branches have returned to business as usual, we are faced with the new "normality". We are trying to adopt and accustom our clients to these new constraints.

"Off-the-shelf" no longer available

Most customers of packaging companies have grown accustomed to standard offer orders being completed within two to three days. Today, unfortunately the opposite is seen at many companies. Most have to calculate exactly what they will need until next year and want their customers to adopt the same approach. For the common good, they need to broaden the time horizon.

It is important to be loyal to current and prospective customers for these changes and ask them to plan months in advance. Often, regular customers have already accepted this due to the long-term business relationship, while companies that contact a supplier for the first time are surprised by the new conditions.

Nobody could have expected what 2020 had in store. **All industry and business branches have been put to test.** Due to lockdowns, retail businesses went online, the food service and catering industries nearly went bankrupt, whereas manufacturers strongly dependant on international supply chains experienced a brutal reality check. Now they understand that turmoil and downtimes in only one of the chain links are enough to destroy the whole process.

Chinese New Year

Now we would like all companies cooperating with China to pay attention to the country's current situation. Although this event is included in the calendar every year, it may disrupt functioning of many European companies. During Chinese New Year all factories in PRC shut



If just one single element is missing from the supply chain, such as the spray cap, a product cannot be delivered.

down for at least three weeks. Its peak falls on 12 February and will result in longer lead times, adds Katarzyna Piątek.

We have been cooperating with China for many years now and our best advice is to plan. One should also note that the order completion times in European factories have been extended, which means there are no other alternatives.

However, it should not dishearten us or cause us to panic. We encourage

customers **to plan their production, including the packaging and closure demand**, well in advance.

Even if the order is completed earlier than needed, extra packaging or closures storage costs will be substantially lower than the long-term price of disappearing from the market – even temporarily.

The more and the simpler, the faster

Right now, the most popular closures are those dedicated for disinfecting liquids and gels – pumps and sprayers. What orders have the highest chance of completion and the shortest lead times? The simplest and the most popular closure models.

Various upgrades such as atypical accessoires, aluminium or fancy colourings are not 'fancied' by the factories, and the order is disqualified from the production 'queue'. Unified closures may be used in different product lines.

End customers will prefer having an emergency re-design of the packaging to not finding their favourite product on the shelves. Bearing that in mind, we should literally think out of the box and deviate from conventional solutions in order to maintain a good position in the production queue. If we plan to use disc-tops or airless packaging, we can choose different shapes, colourings and capacities. Products in such packaging will not only stay functional but will also catch the customer's eye. It is also worth mentioning that the market of packaging not necessarily dedicated for anti-septics, such as jars, droppers or glass bottles, is also open for timely deliveries, including different finishing and customised solutions.

We are happy to share our knowledge and have informed our partners and other Polish companies about the potential obstacles to their supply chain. We feel obligated to pass on the advice because we cherish responsible approach to business and believe we are all parts of one organism. In conclusion, even if only one component is imported from China, now is the time to stockpile it. □