

Cutting the Cost Out of Packaging

Today, companies near and far are being challenged to save, save, save. As a result, the cost of packaging is constantly being scrutinized. When evaluating a package, there are three common ways to decrease cost: reduce the packaging footprint, downgauge/change your material, or choose an alternative packaging solution. While keeping this in mind, the package must also maintain sterility, allow for aseptic opening, and comply with applicable regulatory requirements.

Overwhelmed yet? In this short article, Kevin Zacharias, Technical Director at Oliver Healthcare Packaging, weighs in.

What is the first thing you look at when customers want to decrease the cost of their package?

When we are asked to evaluate a package, we always look at the package footprint first to see if there is a way we can reduce it. Sometimes we see people trying to reduce their footprint by shortening the peel tab, which is something I don't often advise since it makes aseptic opening and presentation more difficult. We actually saw this demonstrated during the Nursing Panel at HealthPack this spring. When the nurses were given a shorter peel tab, they became frustrated by the lack of material available to easily open the package. They also commented that, when in the field, where they wear gloves and are often under significant pressure, a shorter peel tab is the last thing they want to deal with.

Is there a best practice when it comes to peel tab dimensions?

Oliver uses a standard of .75 inches for a chevron pouch. This works well for most products and in most instances provides an appropriate amount of material above the seal for good aseptic opening.

How do you advise people who are looking to downgauge their packaging materials as a way to cut costs?

It really depends on the project. Sometimes it makes sense to downgauge. However, by downgauging your materials, you can see a decrease in performance, incurring higher risk of things like punctures. Most importantly, the package must still survive sterilization and transit testing, so it's a decision that should be well thought out.

What other advice do you have for individuals looking to reduce the cost of their packaging?

I say, look at the full chain of packaging to see if and where there are other areas to save. For example, is there a secondary or tertiary package that can be modified or eliminated to reduce cost? Have you considered other packaging designs such as converting from a pouch to a thermoform-fill-seal configuration? Can you utilize a vendor managed inventory program for savings over time? What can you learn from others in the industry who are facing the same challenges? Ask yourself these questions first, and then: test, test, and test again.