

Can sustainable beauty come to terms with cosmetics and personal care packaging waste?

By Deanna Utroske, 19-Apr-2017

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In the run up to this year's Sustainable Cosmetics Summit in New York City, Cosmetics Design checked in with speaker Scott Cassel of the Product Stewardship Institute to find out what beauty brands can do better when it comes to post-consumer waste.

"Beauty brands that value sustainability in their packaging can gain a competitive marketing advantage over those who do not," Scott Cassel, CEO and founder of the Product Stewardship Institute, tells Cosmetics Design. But it's not a straight and narrow path to success.

For beauty companies operating in the US right now, *"the current free market system actually limits the ability for a company to reduce its societal impacts and puts socially conscious companies at a competitive disadvantage against other companies that have no intention of internalizing their impacts and becoming responsible social partners,"* says Cassel.

"The playing field is uneven. With this in mind, the whole industry – not just a few companies – must work together to create a level playing field for sustainability, which needs to be incorporated into business costs just as labor and capital are now."

Stewardship

The Product Stewardship Institute that Cassel leads develops governmental and business initiatives to hold manufacturers in all industries more responsible for the safe disposal or reuse of products and packaging, post-consumer.

Cassel explains that *"product stewardship is the act of reducing the environmental, health, and economic impacts of consumer products and packaging across their lifecycle."*

The responsibility of product stewardship doesn't fall back entirely on manufacturers: *"Product manufacturers have the greatest ability to minimize adverse impacts,"* says Cassel, *"but other stakeholders, such as state and local governments, recyclers, retailers, and consumers also play a role. Product stewardship can be either voluntary or required by law."*

Stumbling

Cosmetic and personal care product waste affects the natural environment, corporations, and society at large. As Cassel affirms, *"consumer products impact our environment via energy and materials consumption, waste generation, toxic substances, greenhouse gases, and other emissions. On top of this, state and local governments, and therefore taxpayers, pay billions of dollars each year to collect and manage post-consumer waste."*

"Corporate impacts of product waste relate to the loss of material supply, energy, and labor, since waste is really an inefficiency of the manufacturing process," he tells Cosmetics Design, adding that *"any improvements to that process are always important to reduce business costs. However, many costs of product waste are externalized by a company and paid for by taxpayers, either in the form of environmental impacts or by government efforts to clean up waste or to prevent it in the first place."*

In the scheme of things it's post-consumer products and packaging that need attention, according to Cassel. And the problem can be addressed with both better design and better collaboration with recyclers.

"The key for product brands," suggests Cassel *"is to understand the connection between the materials they use and the degree to which that product, at end of life, can be reused or recycled. 'Extended producer responsibility' systems require manufacturers to finance and manage their products at end of life, which provides a direct financial incentive for those manufacturers to pay greater attention to the materials they use in product design and manufacture."*

Starting

A real solution here seems to require a big picture approach: *"The first step in becoming a product steward is to be willing to engage with all stakeholders – state and local governments, suppliers, retailers, recyclers, environmental groups, consumers, and others – to develop joint solutions. We all need to learn from one another because each stakeholder has a unique perspective that is important to finding a sustainable solution,"* Cassel tells Cosmetics Design.

“It’s also important to recognize that the ‘free market’ under which many companies currently operate does not take into account the costs that state and local governments and taxpayers are paying to clean up waste and prevent pollution. The product sale price needs to account for the true cost of managing those products all throughout their lifecycle.”

Learn more about sustainable beauty packaging on Friday May 5th at the [Sustainable Cosmetics Summit](#) in New York City. Scott Cassel of the Product Stewardship Institute will be speaking that day at 1:30pm about the impact of packaging waste.

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