

Interest in PhoenixPET[®] goes global



We talk to Russell Westley, who looks after Extrupet's key accounts, about the addition of the new Starlinger line and what this means for food grade recycling

SAPT: How is the recycling business in the middle of the pandemic?

Russ: It certainly has been a time of reflection. For the first two months there was tremendous pressure placed on the collection stream with many waste pickers not working and this had a significant knock-on effect across the chain.

SAPT: With the pandemic at hand have you noticed much change from brand owner's sustainability agendas at all?

Russ: Not at all. The sustainability targets for most international brands are on track and being pushed harder than ever. Many have been asking for additional allocations, which, moving into summer and to hopefully a more stable 2021, will bode well for PhoenixPET[®] allocations. We also noticed a marked increased interest in PhoenixPET[®] from markets outside of Africa, with food grade rPET now being significantly undersupplied in most first world economies.

SAPT: With the kind of quality PhoenixPET[®] is associated with globally, was the lockdown a time for Extrupet to export its resins globally?

Russ: There has always been tremendous global interest in our flagship brand, and during May/June the Euro prices were trading well above that of virgin PET. There is therefore commercial opportunity; however, that would only be relevant when we have been able to supply our local contracted partners with all their resin needs. The business has taken a position to contract with partners that are prepared to keep monthly commitments to the PhoenixPET[®] brand. These 'friends' will

always take preference over either local spot sales or export opportunity. They are the customers that have stuck with us from the very beginning. Those tough times are certainly well remembered, especially with the additional Starlinger capacity that is about to be installed. As we continue to add volume capability it will be a natural progression towards these global customers.

SAPT: We believe your third food grade line is already in South Africa?

Russ: Incredibly so, arriving the week we all went into lockdown. Even more incredible has been the market response with the Starlinger volumes just about all sold out. We have taken the same approach by supporting those that have supported us when we were getting started and allocated volume accordingly, with our contracted partners always getting priority.

SAPT: What have been the main lessons after these few months of lockdown?

Russ: The key to success in a circular environment is one of design and within our business we have full sight of the process. We know which bottles are collected and understand completely which bottles are returned to us, or end up in our oceans. That unique perspective allows us in-depth understanding of which designs are made for a successful recycling system and which are not. We get to see who lives their story so to speak, and it is rather revealing ...

SAPT: Do you mean that some brand owners/convertors, although they claim packages to be recycled, are in fact not even being collected?

Russ: Yes correct! Designing a pack that is 100% recyclable, however, knowing that in a South African context it is not going to be collected, happens on a daily basis. If you are a brand owner and for example, you have a need for a white recycled HDPE, however, 50% of your product range is a colour HDPE that is not collected, then you, as the bottle producer, are ensuring the recycled stream does not work. How can a colour HDPE bottle become a white HDPE recycled polymer? It really is all about design and to that end Extrupet spends a lot of time engaging with industry, sometimes with great success, but unfortunately there are also times when our advice falls on deaf ears.

Our reality is that the producers of the bottle have a direct impact on what will be recycled. Shrink sleeves, non-recyclable labels, metal closures, printed ink on the PET bottle wall - there are a few basic principles that if not adhered to will ensure the package ends its days on a landfill or in our oceans. The design guidelines for PET packs recently released by PETCO, and the work they undertake in this space, has been a crucial facet of addressing this issue to the benefit of everyone in the value chain.

SAPT: But you can't tell a brand owner how to market their own products

Russ: No you can't. However, we also have a responsibility to call it like it is. If a brand owner pursues a green washing agenda and says 'my products are 100% recyclable' when in fact nothing could be further from the truth, I think we have an obligation to speak out.

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