



THE WHOLE PACKAGE:

How a Total Solutions Provider Can Solve Your Packaging Challenges



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All too often, companies don't consider packaging decisions early in the product development process or as part of their overall manufacturing activities. The long-standing approach of sourcing packaging materials one by one was further complicated by the unprecedented conditions of the pandemic, as supply chain issues and labor shortages left companies scrambling for any available option. The growth of e-commerce and the explosion of SKUs also means more packaging formats and quantities are now needed, while an increasing emphasis on sustainability is putting packaging and the entire product lifecycle under greater scrutiny.

To overcome the variety of challenges in the market today, industry leaders should look for not just a packaging supplier, but a total solutions provider. Rather than having scattered supply chains or small specialists, industrial organizations should find comprehensive partners who have the qualities needed to keep up with changing conditions.

Industries from raw materials to high-tech instruments can ensure their products and people are protected if they pursue a strategy of systems-based unit load design, which brings together supply chain component designers to streamline processes. This is where a total solutions provider, who evaluates the entire product lifecycle and brings holistic packaging designs, can make a difference.

"Even today, items are designed one component at a time — the pallet, the conveyer, the box, the bottle," says Marshall White, professor emeritus and past director of the William H. Sardo Jr. Pallet & Container Research Laboratory and the Center for Unit Load Design at Virginia Tech. "But if you break out of those siloes, you reduce costs and increase sustainability," he says.

How can a packager be a total solutions provider? The right partner will feature many key capabilities, all of which can meet their customers' changing needs in today's marketplace. And the first of those capabilities is being agile in a shifting industrial landscape.



AGILITY FOR EVOLVING INDUSTRY NEEDS

From inflation to automation, industries across the economy are grappling with constantly changing pressures. A total solutions provider has the expertise and innovation needed to gain efficiencies in today's plants and facilities.

For example, as companies implement automated solutions and robotics, they need to ensure unit loads are appropriate for their equipment. “We need to remember that robotic automated systems have an IQ of zero, compared to forklift drivers who know how to adjust to changes in their environment,” White says. “The stiffness of a unit load, for instance, is critical to the automated system being able to lift and move product without damage, and we can control for that by designing all the components of the unit load with the machinery in mind,” he explains.

Likewise, automated machinery must be able to handle the materials used in packaging — finding out at the end of the planning process that a machine cannot run a certain type of shrink wrap could cost thousands of dollars.

Bringing in a packaging partner early also drives other savings. As Justin Elwell, Vice President of Strategic Growth and Marketing and New Products with UFP Packaging, explains, UFP’s approach identifies mixed material solutions based on a customer’s particular needs. “We have a team of packaging engineers who review our customers’ facilities and entire product flow,” he says. “We work with them and their designers to develop a package that keeps the product safe, provides the lowest cost and is easiest to assemble.”

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JUSTIN ELWELL

VP, Strategic Growth and Marketing
and New Products, UFP Packaging



EFFICIENCY WITH COSTS AND LABOR

Evaluating the entire unit load design is critical to determining what works best for a given product and customer. Only by examining the item and its packaging process can manufacturers find efficiencies that improve costs as well as employee productivity and safety.

“We’re working with a paint manufacturer, for example, that ships gallons of paint on 48” x 40” pallets,” Elwell says. “We looked at the thickness of the pallet itself but also the thickness of the paint cans, and we found that we could trim down the pallet to lower their costs. But, we also determined they could use less material in the cans and keep the thicker pallet, and that saved even more money than the thinner pallet,” he explains.

This level of collaboration and customer-specific design embodies the agility needed to improve production and the bottom line across industries.

Similarly, a total solutions provider is flexible enough to meet workforce needs. As industries [struggle](#) with staffing shortages, a systems-based design can account for fewer workers while also enhancing safety. A packaging partner can develop lighter packages or materials that are easier to assemble. These innovations can even reduce the need for pneumatic fasteners and other tools with potential safety concerns.

“We developed the [Easy-3](#), which is designed to expedite crate assembly,” Elwell says. “It takes one person just 10 minutes to assemble with no nail or staple guns, whereas previous crates took three people an hour to assemble,” he adds. These solutions are particularly beneficial for building materials and manufacturers of glass or heavy equipment. They are also an example of the breadth and depth a total solutions provider can bring to their customers.

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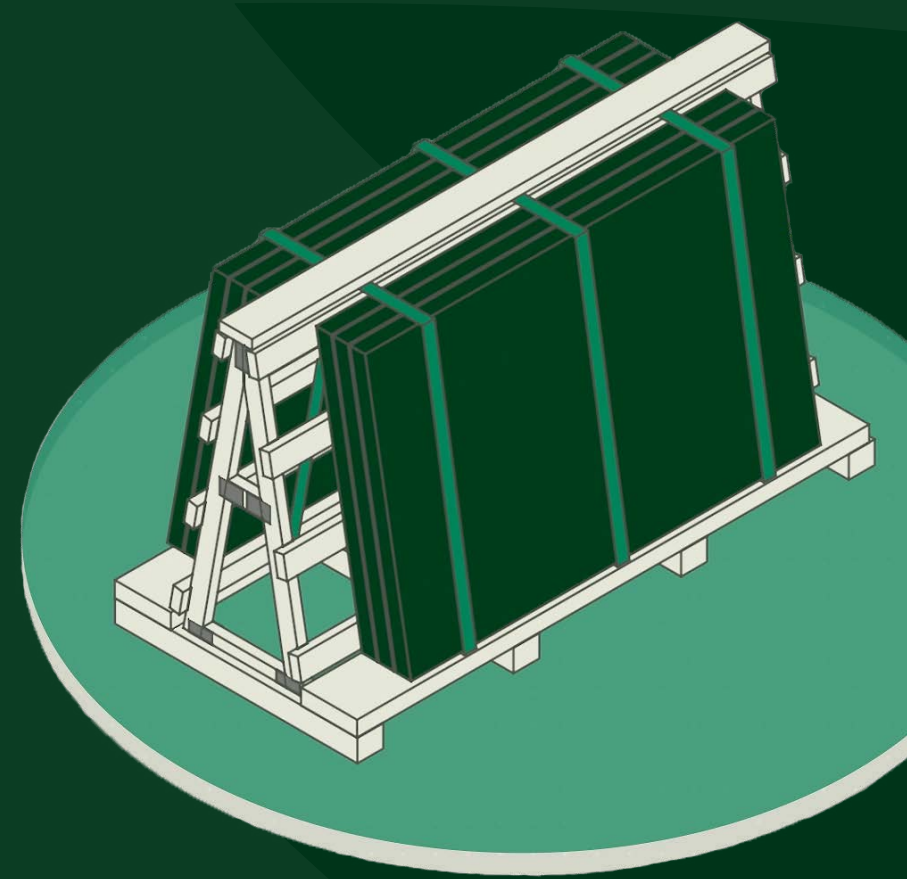
SCALE TO TACKLE MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES

Simply put, sometimes bigger really is better. A total solutions provider can supply the entire suite of packaging components, from corrugated and boxes to film and strapping. This capability saves on costs as opposed to negotiating contracts with separate suppliers for each component.

The geographic footprint of large-scale suppliers is also valuable for customers. Any company with multiple locations can be serviced by their packaging partner's nearest location, which lowers the cost of shipping. UFP Packaging, for example, has locations across the U.S., which drives savings on materials. "We can bring our customers the lowest-cost product based on the available resources at our plants nearest to them," Elwell explains.

Another benefit of collaborating with a large packaging partner is their ability to apply cross-industry knowledge to develop the best solutions for all their customers. The [Easy-A](#) crate from UFP Packaging was developed as an A-frame for shipping glass plates. UFP sales and engineering staff recognized its versatility for marble, tile and quartz plates as well, and now countertop manufacturers are utilizing this packaging.

This level of innovation can only be found in a large organization with deep industry expertise and collaborative, systems-based approaches applied across its customer base. Such innovation is also vital to achieve sustainability goals, which call for new ways of approaching the packaging lifecycle.



*Easy-A crate from
UFP Packaging*



INNOVATION TO MEET SUSTAINABILITY IMPERATIVES

In a recent [survey](#), the Association of Packaging and Processing Technologies (PMMI) found that OEMs and manufacturers recognize the importance of environmental, social and governance (ESG) strategies. Yet, many are just now beginning to implement these approaches. With emissions reduction targets becoming necessary across industries, it's more important than ever for manufacturers to improve the sustainability of their packaging, whether it's via different materials, lighter weight, reuse and recycling, waste reduction or all of the above.

This is where a total solutions provider can help. By examining the entire unit load design, a solutions provider can identify more sustainable options throughout the process. That could mean using sustainably harvested wood and recyclable corrugated. Or it could mean using wood pallets, which have a lifespan of over five years and can be recycled when they reach the end of their useful life. A systems-based approach can evaluate a producer's supply chain and find additional efficiencies as well.

"The three pillars of sustainability are economic prosperity, environmental impact, and human health and welfare — and all of these pillars connect to the supply chain," White explains. "To determine decarbonization levels, look at the mass of the pallet you're using. Reducing packaging mass per use, reduces the global warming potential of the unit load design."

Wood pallets, as an example, require very few chemicals to process and little energy to assemble. Measuring these factors along with wood's sustainability and ability to be recycled means improved sustainability scores on ESG reports.

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MARSHALL WHITE

Professor Emeritus, Packaging

Systems and Design, Virginia Tech



Strip Pak™ Crating is a lower-cost, mixed material alternative to all-wood. It combines a lighter-weighting corrugated material with wood framing components or “cleats” to create a strong, stackable container. Cleated boxes completely enclose products for protection and are easy to assemble and knock down.

Finding holistic improvements for packaging will only grow in importance as more states pass [Extended Producer Responsibility \(EPR\) legislation](#). These laws, on the books in four states with more under consideration, require companies to take financial and/or operational responsibility for their products’ end of life. Global companies must also be cognizant of European regulations if they’re shipping to the EU or acting as a supplier for an EU-based organization. “European companies require a decarbonization program from their suppliers because they have to show it to their customers,” says White.

And, ultimately, more sustainable processes save money. As respondents to the PMMI survey [noted](#), sustainability initiatives improved companies’ bottom lines “through increased efficiency savings and productivity, including reduced energy bills or higher throughput as a result of upgrading to more efficient machines.” By viewing the product lifecycle and unit load holistically, industries can improve the sustainability of their entire supply chain, thereby saving resources and money.



PACKAGING CALLS FOR A PARTNERSHIP

With manufacturers facing numerous challenges, it's crucial to build partnerships that can reduce costs, share knowledge and strengthen business operations. A packaging partner who can provide a total packaging solution is invaluable to meet industries' goals and evolving needs in today's volatile marketplace.

By supporting automation efforts and finding the best solution for a particular product, a total solutions provider is a true partner, rather than simply a packaging vendor. As a partner, they share innovations across industries to protect employees and expedite material handling. A total solutions provider also has the breadth and depth of expertise to supply all packaging materials in an efficient way, while also bringing the latest in sustainability solutions to their customers.

All of these characteristics are important for lasting growth in product development and shipping. By seeking out a total solutions provider, manufacturers and businesses set themselves up for success not just now, but into the future as well.

[Contact UFP Packaging](#) to set up a consultation on meeting your unique packaging needs.

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UFP PACKAGING

A UFP INDUSTRIES COMPANY

UFP Packaging is an affiliate of UFP Industries, Inc., a holding company whose subsidiaries supply wood, wood composite and other products to three robust markets: retail, construction and packaging. Founded in 1955, the company is headquartered in Grand Rapids, Mich., with affiliates throughout North America. For more about UFP Industries, go to www.ufpi.com.

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