

How Covid-19 is affecting the labelling industry

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A whitepaper written by Rachel Littleboy from Fix-a-Form International considers opportunities as well as problems that have arisen in the labelling industry during the Covid-19 pandemic.



In a report about the global print industry during the pandemic, Heidelberg notes that the packaging and label segments have been stable, mainly because of the increasing demand for food and pharmaceutical packaging.

However, the report also reveals that during the peak infection rate in China, print production fell by up to 80% compared to normal volumes. Once the infection rate dropped, production recovered and is now back to levels seen last year in both the commercial and the packaging/labels segments.

But this, the report says, is not the case universally. While print production in other countries was stable until mid-March 2020 and was above the same recorded level in previous years, the

coronavirus pandemic and lockdown led to a significant reduction in print volumes worldwide, especially in the commercial market.

Because labels are so integral to keeping the supply chain going, manufacturers were classed as essential workers during the lockdown. However, what is interesting to note is the market sectors that have seen an increase and those that have seen manufacturing decline.

The pharmaceutical sector

As could be expected, the pharmaceutical sector has been thriving with many more drugs being tested, medication, and medical equipment needed.

But in this time-pressured environment, clinical trial companies need to get clinical labels designed and approved quickly and the lengthy process and regulations involved in clinical label design causes an issue. In this case, informational booklet labels provide the space for detailed multi-language patient instructions.

Another area of the pharma market that's thriving is over-the-counter medications that mitigate flu-like symptoms. A number of these products require informational booklet labels because of the small package sizes and extensive regulatory information needing to be displayed.

The demand for agrochemicals

The response of the agrochemical sector will be critical in coming months to keep the global food supply chain alive and avoid a food crisis. The issues to be overcome vary vastly across the globe.

This then brings us to another sector of the labelling market that's been keeping the world moving.

Food retail

In March and April 2020, UK supermarket consumers spent £2 billion more than they did in March/April 2019. Supermarkets initially struggled to keep up with the demand and rationed key products while, in many countries, farmers were ploughing vegetables back into the ground or dumping millions of litres of milk because restaurants were closed, and schools and public events were cancelled, curbing demand and causing prices to plummet.

The way forward

Many businesses have seen a downturn in production and some will not recover. However, it seems that despite trading issues, including production times and the ability to obtain materials, the label industry has pulled out all the stops and played its part in keeping the global economy going.

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