



PORTABRANDS

Richard Dagleish reviews the innovative design capabilities of this UK-based company.

novation is widely accepted to be one of the key factors in developing a business.

Without new ideas, businesses find it difficult to create new outlets for their products and run the risk of getting left behind by other more creative and innovative competitors. However, defining innovation is far from easy. In many cases it could be said that what is described as innovation is in fact renovation, where an existing design or idea is developed further to either better meet market demand or alternatively to meet changing market needs.

True innovation is therefore comparatively rare, and because of that, is all the more exciting. One company that specialises in innovating new products is UK-based PortaBrands. Such is their commitment to

new ideas that their Chief Executive is described on his business card as 'CEO and Inventor'.

Ian Bates, along with Richard Davies, founded PortaBrands in 2004 and between them bring to the business over 40 years of combined experience in a multitude of disciplines. Ian has a background in sales and marketing with such companies as Finnboard, D.S. Smith, Assi Domän Packaging and CRP. Before founding PortaBrands, he ran a successful display packaging design company. Richard also has a wealth of experience in the paper and packaging industries, having worked for companies such as Smurfit, Assi Domän and Caxton Paper.

What brought the two together was a desire to develop new products in the field of



Ian Bates

packaging that were truly innovative and exciting. Added to this, both have a passionate belief that sustainability should be a key factor in developing new products. As such, it is interesting to note that all the products they have developed, and are developing, are manufactured from paper and board. Their philosophy is to invent and develop new products and markets for ethical, renewable and sustainable packaging products which are reusable, biodegradable and, where possible, compostable. All their development work is carried out against this background and all their products are

PortaBrands

checked and monitored against this philosophy to ensure that they fully meet these criteria.

The business started in 2004 when they decided that the bottle carriers being used in Supermarkets at that time could be improved. They regarded them as dull and merely functional and felt that significant improvements could be made that would enhance their usefulness and offer branding opportunities. So, PortaBottle was created and is manufactured under licence using litho printed corrugated material. The design was significantly different from existing carriers. As well as being easier to erect, it also offered a much better opportunity for branding by virtue of the better quality substrate used and its inherent design characteristics. It was also made available in 2, 4 and 6 bottle sizes and was designed in such a way that the bottles were safely carried without touching each other. This design was quickly taken up by a number of different retailers, including Marks & Spencer, Asda and Morrisons. PortaBottle is now seen in a huge range of outlets both in the UK and elsewhere.

As the product became better known and more widely used, an approach to PortaBrands was made by Tesco, the UK's largest wine retailer, to develop a new design to respond to certain unique demands that they had. The result of much thought and development was the introduction of PortaSure — a bottle carrier with a difference. Rather than being manufactured from corrugated material, this carrier was designed using AquaKote carrier board which provided the strength needed, along with an excellent print surface, that could be used to highlight brands and products. It was designed in such a way that different sizes can be easily produced and currently it is available as a 4, 6 or 8 bottle design. This product was launched in Tesco stores in June 2006 and the annual demand is expected to be around 15 million carriers. Initially, most of the carriers used by Tesco carried the Tesco brand image, but PortaBrands is now working with suppliers to Tesco to carry their own brands on the wine carriers which both promotes the brand and reduces the cost to Tesco of providing carriers free to all consumers.



PortaBottle



PortaSure



PortaDrink



PortaTray

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BEVERAGES TOO!

Despite the success of these two products, both Ian and Richard felt it was vital to look for other markets — as they felt it would be unwise to rely on such a comparatively narrow product range. With the knowledge they had built up in developing carriers for drinks, it is perhaps no surprise that they looked in detail at the burgeoning take out coffee market and felt that the carriers that were being used, manufactured from dull, drab grey pressed fibre, could also be improved. They set about looking for a new solution and initially PortaDrink was born. This is an intriguingly simple design using a flat sheet of cartonboard with circular cut outs into which the coffee cups are placed. The handles pull up around the cups and simple gravity ensures that the drinks can be carried safely and securely. Now available in sizes to carry 1, 2, 3 or 4 cups, this has been adopted and rolled out across the country by Costa

PortaBrands

Coffee amongst others. Once again the high quality print surface of the Frovi material that is used enables the carrier to be branded either by the retailer or by some other company. PortaDrink is not only used for coffee but can be used for beer and other drinks and is now widely seen in many venues where take away drinks are served.

With the success of PortaDrink, Ian and Richard felt sure that there was a market for an alternative type of beer or drink carrier — one that could be used more easily at sporting venues and was, in addition, stackable. They therefore designed and developed a new style of tray which they called PortaPint.



PortaPint

Designed initially to hold 4 pint glasses, this is now widely used in many sporting venues and has the added advantages of being strong, light and again, easy to brand. The tray is delivered flat so it takes up little space during transport and can be erected in a second to provide a strong tray that is easy to use, convenient to carry and fully recyclable.

Having developed PortaPint, it was only a small step to move toward chilling the contents — and PortaChilla was born. Made entirely from water resistant cartonboard, this product can hold 2, 4, 6 or 8 bottles along with glasses, and is ideal for picnics and other outdoor events. The picnic theme is now being extended with the introduction of PortaSnack which is intended as a “meal on the go” carrier that can hold a sandwich, bottled or canned drink, fruit and other snacks. It is secure and safe and in addition



PortaChilla



PortaSnack

to being used for a simple lunch, it can also be used while travelling. It can be manufactured either with or without a shoulder strap. Additionally, work is currently underway in developing a new product that will be called PortaPicnic. This will be launched later in 2007.

NEW THIS YEAR

But an entirely new development is currently underway and will be launched in 2007. With the fervent belief that the PortaBrands team have in sustainability, they are well advanced in developing PortaBio. This will be the new brand name for a range of cellulose based laminates which are environmentally renewable, biodegradable and compostable. It will offer a natural replacement for oil based metalised polyester paperboard laminates

used to manufacture a wide range of products including toothpaste, perfumery and many varieties of luxury gift packaging. It is protected, as indeed are all PortaBrand products, by patent and it will be marketed globally by PortaBrands Ltd.

The product is manufactured by laminating cellulose film onto the cartonboard substrate. The film can either be metalised, or non metalised, depending on the finish required. The metallisation process will offer a high gloss, shiny finish that is much in demand and as the laminate is 100 per cent cellulose based it will be simple to recover and recycle. The target markets for this new product are almost endless and include such areas as drinks, health and beauty, tobacco, gift packaging and many more. The PLA film is widely available and PortaBrands have signed a license agreement with API to ensure that this product is widely and easily available. Trials are well advanced and it is anticipated that the product will be launched, initially in the UK, at Marks and Spencer in late spring this year.



PortaBio

DESIGN ONLY

PortaBrands do not actually manufacture any products themselves. They expend all their considerable energy in developing new ideas and introducing them to the markets they seek. They have built up, over the last few years, excellent contacts with major retailers and brand owners and then offer the manufacturing rights to companies who make and deliver the products. The major suppliers of Porta products are MSO, Smurfit Kappa Zedek and Graphic Packaging International. Other manufacturers are also being brought in as the business and demand expands. Sales in 2006 were worth about £4 million and it is anticipated that by the end of 2007 this will have grown to over £6 million. This will be the equivalent of somewhere around 50 million units of packaging.

It would seem at first glance that the use of the word "Porta" indicates the portability of their inventive products. However, their commitment to sustainability and their desire to ensure that all their products are as environmentally friendly as possible means that it has another meaning that reflects the overall ethos of the company.

P = Portable with ease and comfort

O = Original designs

R = Recyclable and sustainable

T = Transient and disposable

A = Attractive, eye catching and with added value

GOING GLOBAL

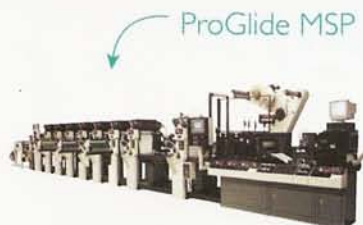
PortaBrands target markets include all developed countries globally. Initially the focus has been in the UK to gain credibility with leading supermarket chains, brands and key distributors. The plan in the future is to extend into markets overseas via strategic alliances with companies such as Graphic Packaging International, the worlds leading supplier of beverage packaging and packaging systems.

PortaBrands have a long term agreement with GPI to represent their business interests directly with UK retailers, catering distributors and promotional agencies. The close links they have with Smurfit Kappa regarding the manufacturing and distribution of PortaBottle has provided them with

access to Europea markets and already new business is starting to develop.

PortaBrands small team, which as well and Ian and Richard, includes Hazel Butler who looks after all the administration, is wholly dedicated to the development of new innovative and sustainable products. They only work with fibre based materials as they passionately believe that this must be the way

to develop new packaging while minimising any impact on the environment. In just a few years they have come a long way and introduced many new ideas and products to various markets. They have a keen ambition to continue this development and with the introduction of PortaBio, there is little doubt that we will be seeing many more Porta products in the market – not only in the UK but increasingly overseas.



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