Used in nearly every industrial and consumer market, adhesives are the glue that holds together products that we see, use and interact with every day. But what many consumers don’t realize is that it’s also the adhesive that determines the look, design and performance of a product label.

By combining adhesives, facestocks and liners in various ways, label developers are able to create specially designed, or “purpose built” labels for different consumer packaging segments. Here are some examples of how adhesives must perform in today’s diverse, consumer applications:

**Home & Personal Care (HPC) Labels**

Comprised of universal applications such as shampoo, body wash, lotions and detergents, the HPC segment includes big players such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble and L’Oreal. These large brand owners also have high volume products and expensive equipment, so their goal is to reduce downtime through continuous improvement in packaging sustainability and operational efficiency.

With customers all over the world, many HPC companies also design and qualify labels that are used in different locations, climates and cultures. So in addition to having performance attributes such as conformability, clarity and soapy squeeze — for a shampoo or soap bottle — packaging needs to be able to attract attention from consumers in dynamic global markets.

**Adhesive requirements:**

Due to competitive nature of the HPC category, brand owners seek adhesives with performance properties that enhance shelf appeal and improve sustainability. Thinner adhesives, for instance can be used to give packages a no label look. And adhesives with good “wet out” capabilities will help eliminate air bubbles and label haze and give labels a tight and smooth fitting look.
Wash-off, biodegradable and no-ooze adhesives are also in high demand, as they allow brand owners to process labels efficiently at high speeds and are more recycle-friendly. And because packaging is often manufactured in different global locations, HPC brand owners may choose adhesives that can be applied to containers in hot and cold climates.

**Food Labels**

Food is one of the most diverse and fast-changing packaging segments, and as such, includes brands with a wide range of design and performance requirements. Food packagers and brand owners recognize the need to keep pace with novel packaging design criteria. So there is a lot of innovation occurring around food packaging in terms of cost, shelf appeal and functionality.

One unique challenge to food packaging is food contact requirements. Food brand owners must ensure that any food packaging they use is in compliance with the latest FDA regulation or other groups setting guidelines for dry, wet and moist foodstuffs. Like HPC brands, food companies also have scorecard goals for their operations and are seeking sustainable packaging solutions for their products.

**Adhesive requirements:**

Food labels, and their adhesives must not only attract consumer attention, adhere to a variety of surfaces and solve a variety of problems, but they need to stand up to significant regulatory oversight. What amount of durability, water-resistance, temperature resistance, open time and other performance traits a label needs will determine what type of adhesive a brand chooses. But adhesives must be able to stand up to a constant regeneration of new packaging design. For example, a growing trend in food packaging is using complex-shaped containers. The development of higher performing, thinner label adhesives is helping food packagers achieve greater conformability to unique containers while providing productivity and sustainability benefits.

**Pharmaceutical Labels**

The biggest challenges in pharmaceutical packaging are directly related to labeling. Pharmaceutical containers use labels to convey highly personal, sensitive medical information, whether prescription information, dosages, medical history or so forth. So labels must be tamper proof or include security features. Label materials also cannot contain components that would migrate through the bottle and contaminate its contents. Also, pharmaceutical labels must adhere tightly around small curved containers, such as pill bottles.

**Adhesive requirements:**

Like food stuffs, pharmaceutical brand owners must be extra careful about what kind of label materials are used on their containers. This makes the adhesive a critical component. Adhesives used on pill containers must be anti-migrating for the life of the bottle. So many label developers have long-term, no-change policies on adhesives to ensure the adhesive is approved by government bodies for at least five years of use and will withstand general use conditions in that time.

To avoid counterfeiting or other liability issues, strong adhesion and conformability to a bottle is also needed. Durable adhesives can help brand owners ensure labels are destroyed if they are removed from a bottle, which protects sensitive information and deters tampering.

**Keeping up with packaging trends**

Despite advances in packaging and adhesive technology, there is still no one-size-fits-all label. Packaging requirements of consumer brands are changing every day, and label developers have continued to adapt by introducing adhesive solutions that are affordable, functional and responsive to new decorating techniques.

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**Thinners deliver benefits to beer brands**

A number of years ago, Anheuser-Busch InBev was struggling to improve productivity in its packaging and dispensing lines. It decided to switch from paper labels to pressure sensitive (PS), clear film labels for Bud Light. The clear films with thinner adhesives and facestocks gave bottles more options for package decoration and a no-label appearance for enhanced shelf appeal. They also had good cold temperature and water resistance.

Using thinner PS label materials allowed the company to increase labeling and bottling speeds to up to 800 bottles per minute, improved productivity in its bottling lines by 20 percent and reduced operational costs.

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