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Because they are designed to fit the product, SIOC packages use less raw materials.

Specially designed compartments within the package keep a product protected on its way to your doorstep.

The paper liners inside your package are lightweight (and getting lighter).

Sturdy and stackable, the humble box cushions, protects and stabilizes.

Custom-fitted packaging means the end of inefficient void fill like air pillows.

Boxes are the Star of the E-commerce Boom

E-commerce has exploded over the past decade as consumers increasingly rely on their ability to order nearly anything online and have it promptly delivered to their doorstep. Nearly eight in 10 consumers say they're ordering more merchandise online than they were a year ago, and e-commerce sales in 2019 reached more than \$600 billion.

Our growing reliance on e-commerce became much more pronounced in recent months as hundreds of millions of Americans sheltered in place at home to slow the spread of the coronavirus. To sustain their families, households ordered record-breaking amounts of everything from toilet paper and protective face masks to groceries for home delivery.

Manufacturers have been adjusting quickly to this dramatic shift in demand, says Tim Wilson, President of Ernest Packaging Solutions, which uses a design-driven approach to engineer packaging and shipping solutions for its customers. "[The shift in buying behavior to online platforms] is just exacerbating the pressure on our customers to transition more of their lines to e-commerce," he notes.

As some manufacturers make more goods (or more supply) available online, they're finding innovative and technologically advanced packaging solutions that protect their products

and ship direct to consumers. To meet the demand for sustainable products and simultaneously create economic efficiency for clients, today's packaging producers are creating custom-fitted recyclable boxes that often reduce the need for secondary packaging, as well as extra packaging materials like air pillows and packing peanuts.

Packaging Performs Double Duty

The increased need to combine sustainability with marketability has resulted in SIOC (Ships In Own Container) packaging that is strong enough to protect the product in transit, promotes the brand message and is easy enough to open that it still delights the customer when they receive it.

"It's been a huge revolution," says Wilson, whose company has advised its partners on how to navigate new policies by some of the country's largest retailers and shippers that apply surcharges for non-SIOC packages of a certain size. "Right now, boxes, the liners and the paper are all lightweight, and they're all getting lighter at the same time. They're also all recycled.

"Corrugated is an amazing product," Wilson adds. "It's been around for hundreds of years, but structurally it's one of the strongest products, and it is also a very low-cost product."

Beyond being ideal material for shipping, paper-based packaging also helps brands reinforce their relationship with consumers. According to a 2018 study by Ipsos, two-thirds of consumers agree that paper and cardboard packaging make a product more attractive than other packaging materials, and research by the Paper and Packaging Board shows that more than three-quarters of consumers surveyed say

they rely on corrugated cardboard to ship merchandise safely. Corrugated cardboard also provides a cost-efficient solution to safely transport packaged goods and food to warehouse and retail locations.

Paper is also highly customizable to fit the needs of specific products. High-end shoes or jewelry, for example, require a packaging solution with the level of design, quality and craftsmanship that is on par with the product itself while matching, or even exceeding, the consumer's expectations. Rigid boxes deliver that premium experience. Made from flexible, durable paperboard, they both protect and showcase all-important brand cues. Meanwhile, corrugated cardboard provides a natural, cost-efficient solution to safely transport food and packaged goods to warehouse and retail locations.

Another benefit of paper is its recyclability, a key characteristic for today's sustainably minded companies and consumers. From the same Ipsos study, seven in 10 consumers say they are more likely to buy brands that package their products in paper or cardboard than other materials.

"It's all about innovation in packaging now," Wilson says, and paper-based packaging, from boxes to paperboard to sacks, remains at the forefront.

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