

Shaving Speed *to Market*

In the highly competitive personal razor segment of personal care packaging, new products and packages are expected to be on the shelves yesterday.



With a career spanning 35 years and all forms of home care, personal care and medical device packaging, Bob Collins now helms the always evolving razor segment for Proctor & Gamble Gillette, as director of global package development for blades and razors in Boston, Mass. After merging in 2005, P&G and Gillette are currently pooling and restructuring their respective teams to streamline the critical functions behind new product and package development to more quickly and efficiently bring products to the global market. The sum of the integration, according to Collins, is positioned to be a “geometric improvement” for both companies.

By Joanna Cosgrove



As P&G Gillette's director of global package development for blades and razors, Bob Collins manages between 650 and 700 packaging programs a year in more than 200 countries.



PMT: What is your packaging background?

Collins: I graduated from University of Wisconsin - Stout, with a BS degree in Industrial Technology and a concentration in Packaging. I continued with graduate studies at Central Michigan University. I'm a Certified Professional in packaging and materials handling through the Institute of Packaging Professionals (IoPP) and have been since 1976. I have held various positions through the IoPP and taught the certification preparation class. I'm a member and past chairman of PMM's Packaging Management Council.

I started in the design side for material supplier Packaging Corp. of America, before moving to Biomedical Engineering at Baxter-Travenol Laboratories. I've spent the last 29 years in consumer products with Amway, Drackett (a division of Bristol-Myers Squibb), The Dial Corp., Gillette and now P&G, which is presently referred to as P&G Gillette.

PMT: What are some of your packaging responsibilities at P&G Gillette?

Collins: I'm responsible for all blade and razor structural package innovation and R&D worldwide, which is everything from ideation to disposal of waste packaging! Our team becomes immediately involved in a project as soon as it is

released from our Advance Technology Centers, where new ideas are developed. Once it transfers into Research and Development, the concept is commercialized by way of industrial design, blade development and equipment development.

Concurrently we work on packaging ideation, and if it requires a new type of packaging, we do all the proof of principles and material research. As soon as a 3D database is established for the product we build and finalize the package around it. A completely new product launch can take several years to complete. There is a lot of equipment that needs to be set up to design and manufacture the razors, and it affords us more time to do the packaging work. But, when necessary, we've done new thermoformed packaging and gotten it to the marketplace in about six months.

My team—which spans the Package Engineering group, Package Development Planning group, 3-D CAD group, 2-D CAD group, testing group and the Standards Office (the documentation group)—amounts to about 40 people.

PMT: On average, how many new packages do you work on in a given year?

Collins: If we're talking new package designs, the number ranges from 50 to over 200 a year. Overall, we probably deal with between 650 and 700 programs a year. For instance, new

launches like the new Fusion and Fusion Power launch can have anywhere from five to ten new designs between retail and club stores. When you deal in over 200 countries and try to take care of all of the local promotional needs, it can get pretty involved.

PMT: What is your team's packaging philosophy?

Collins: Our philosophy within P&G Gillette is that we do what we have to do in order to deliver the products as soon as possible. If it takes a full court press to get something designed, that's exactly what we do.

Wherever and whenever we can, we provide packaging worldwide for any given product with the same structure and the same basic graphics other than the country-specific graphics. It really gives a true brand image and significantly reduces the package engineering and artwork development effort

PMT: How important is packaging to P&G Gillette? How heavy is the focus on creating packaging that appeals to consumers?

Collins: Packaging is integral, given the fact that we're the market leader. Gillette's banner is "The Best a Man Can Get,"

with the female banner for the Venus line "Bring out the Goddess in you." Packaging and pricing have to deliver a premium image. At P&G Gillette retail presentation is called The First Moment of Truth (FMOT). Our whole objective is to have the consumer see our packaging jump off the shelf.

PMT: Which packaging technologies have most influenced you over the course of your career?

Collins: Looking back, there have been a lot of them. But the availability of different materials now versus 35 years ago have offered huge advances which have had a tremendous impact on today's significant level of focus—sustainability, on material reduction, lightweighting and reduced cost for shipping materials around the world.

From a machinery viewpoint, the advancements have been in the control systems of machines and conversion to servo motors, which has allowed higher and more reliable production speeds.

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PMT: Given the breadth of your career and

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all of the packaging balls you currently juggle, there is no doubt you have overcome a variety of challenges.

Collins: When it comes to challenges, my opinion is that if you're really stretching to advance the whole

"making packaging better" idea, you get stumped often. In my career—both technically and organizationally—challenges happen on a regular basis. The key is to understand the science and organizational issues behind the problem at hand, because it allows you to make rational decisions and

understand the level of risk behind the action you choose. Resist the urge to get into the "ready, fire, aim" mode and always aim before you fire. Every challenge offers the possibility to learn something new.

The other element behind getting stumped and resolving a problem is the issue of speed to market. Thirty years ago you might have had enough time to do everything because the rate of new product introductions wasn't as great and the competition, although it was there, simply wasn't as intense as it is today.

PMT: What is your greatest professional achievement?

Collins: In the grand scheme of things, it's been what I've done since coming to Gillette: building a seamless world-wide organization. We think and act globally and we're able to consistently meet organizational requirements. When we start a program, a launch date is picked and our culture is that we launch on that date. In the nearly ten years I've been here, we just don't miss dates. We figure out a way to get it done. It's critical because if your sales organization has done all the pre-work to launch a new product, they wouldn't be very happy if they heard they weren't going to get it. It's really that seamless effort worldwide.

PMT: How have packaging operations at P&G Gillette changed since you've been with the company?

Collins: We produce razors and cartridges in massive quantities. For other companies with the same issues, the tendency is to find extremely high speed equipment that's dedicated to the operation, cranking out product 24/7. Most companies now are trying to reduce their supply chain inventory and we are too, which makes that window for distribution much smaller. We still need

to maintain the speed of the systems so we have to build in flexibility. Nine years ago we were using huge dedicated systems, now our systems are more flexible to accommodate quick changeovers.

I was on a PMMI panel a couple of months ago and we discussed why European companies are selling so much equipment. In the U.S. the tendency is to buy five machines, bolt them together and hope everything runs well. In Europe, the tendency is to buy an integrated system that is all run off of one control system. The key is to build-in flexibility so if you have to change from one package to another, it's a fairly quick changeover to limit the downtime.

PMT: How do you see the current rush to market and ratcheted competition levels of the personal care segment changing over the next decade?

Collins: It's absolutely going to continue. Consumers thrive on options. Just look at how grocery stores have evolved over the years. Years ago, if you wanted cereal, you'd choose between Cheerios and Wheaties. Now there is a whole aisle of choices. When you get into consumer products packaging will always continue to provide the first impression of a product to the consumer. The package not only has to protect the product, it's the initial selling tool and has to address consumer demographics. Products no longer simply address specific applications; rather they address different age groups, ethnic groups, etc. There's a new realm of diversity to deal with.

Rising prices of products will continue to escalate the necessity to protect from theft at retail, which is always a huge challenge. When you protect a product from theft at retail by making it hard to open up and steal, you're also making it hard to open and use at home (which P&G calls The Second Moment of Truth). In some cases what our trade partners are requesting is diametrically opposed to what our customers want—there's a term that describes this phenomenon of being difficult to open as "Wrap Rage." In an ever increasing number of product categories, products are packaged in clamshells, EAS protected sealed plastic blisters. We put our razors in them, but with an opening feature to assist removal of the product.

We're also going to have to do a much better job of developing and implementing more sustainable packaging. We've got to do a better job of conserving our natural resources and protecting the environment. As more packaging is required just to sell products, we've got to be smarter about the materials we choose to do that. **PMT**

Joanna Cosgrove, a Media, Pa.-based writer, has been covering the packaging industry for more than 10 years.



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