

# A WORLD WITHOUT WASTE

**W**hat do George Clooney and Cristiano Ronaldo have in common? Apart from a shared passion for good coffee, they are influencers that the plastics industry could well do with right now in the face of a challenging environment. At least that's the view of Filipe de Botton, the executive chairman of rigid packaging converter Logoplaste. He was talking at the recent Petcore Europe AGM in Belgium, where the 'state of play' was one of the key focal points.

"How do we defend our industry?" he asked the audience. "Shouldn't we go to the battlefield, rather than just being around it? Communicate our content and our position? We also need to survive the next five to ten years by making use of social networks. Today, our politicians live on a short-term basis, living on votes, so it's a Catch 22 because we need a long-term perspective from governments who only react to short-term options."

Communications consultant Sam Rowe from Caro Consulting, which is providing PR for Petcore Europe, admitted that there is "never really one silver bullet with communications" but that a continual effort is required, particularly for members of the European Parliament.

"You need a Kim Kardashian for PET recycling," quipped Rowe. "You need a maven – people who drive other people with them."

While Ronaldo outscores Kardashian and Clooney on the social media follower rankings, the point is moot – it is clear that the plastics industry needs some heavyweight support to help it through its current media malaise. While the aforementioned trio are not likely to hold the appropriate kudos the industry needs right now, someone like Sir David Attenborough – the man behind the hard-hitting documentary series *Blue Planet II* – could play an interesting role, according to Stephen Short.

"Sir David is now talking about PET being good for the planet, with depolymerisation," said Short, who was president of Petcore Europe until this February. "He is on board. I know he's talking about pyrolysis, so we need to educate him."

Petcore Europe's executive director Christian Crépet agreed that depolymerisation is frequently confused with pyrolysis and bemoaned the fact that everything is "put under the banner of chemical recycling". He believes that depolymerisation provides better yield, and the industry needs to work at communicating that better.

The point they are all making is that it's all very well communicating among ourselves in

Stakeholders from across the PET value chain recently converged on Brussels to discuss strategies for the future of the industry. The result was an often frank and sometimes tetchy exchange of views, reports **Steven Pacitti**



*Logoplaste executive chairman Felipe de Botton (left) and former Petcore Europe president Stephen Short had a candid conversation about the future of plastics and packaging*

the industry, but we need to break the circle in order to protect the sector as a whole.

Rowe said that her PR focus for Petcore Europe is on consumers and Brussels. "In the consumer area, we have the TikTok challenge, which is targeting the young. But you have to be careful targeting kids," she admitted. "We need to reach a youth audience with the message of recycling and circularity."

The other focus is Brussels, in what Rowe called a year (actually, probably more like two years) of circularity. "There is the circular economy package, revision of the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive, the European Green Deal, and the Single-Use Plastics Directive. Our messages are based on the policy agenda, milestones and developments. We are working on promotions and sponsorships in the Brussels media and organic social content."

Rowe warned the audience against expensive advertising that could be perceived as "lobbying", suggesting that communications should instead be focused on sitting down with people who have been identified as key

advocates and using them to help drive understanding among the broader audiences.

Alessandro Pironcini, vice-chairman of the Committee of the PET Manufacturers in Europe (CPME) and director of corporate key accounts at Indorama Ventures Europe, said that the CPME is promoting the discussion with EU institutions, policy makers and representatives of organisations, scientists, academics, entrepreneurs and stakeholders – but reminded the audience that using less plastics does not mean more sustainability.

"We know that replacing plastics packaging with alternatives, on average, increases weight 3.6 times, carbon emissions 2.7 times, and energy 2.2 times, but we still see brands switching and saying 'less plastics,'" he said. "The total amount of PET packaging consumed in the EU (27+1) market shows that we're still the preferred option. Virgin PET consumption is slightly reducing, as there is an increased move to flakes, with some imported."

Across all European PET producers, there is about 3.5 million tonnes of virgin PET capacity per year. PET is 10 per cent of total plastics ▶

## Labels: a strong link for PET recycling

Some brands have been criticised in recent times for promoting 100 per cent recycled bottles that exclude the cap and label, but there is plenty of innovation and progress being made when it comes to those two supplemental parts of a package.

How we turn labels truly circular alongside the PET containers they adorn was a question discussed by Sofiane Mameri, sustainable development manager for Sleever International. He was presenting the work of the Petcore Europe Labels Working Group, which was launched in 2020. This, he said, was the first time Petcore has formed a working group outside primary packaging.

“Five task forces have been set up to enhance label performance by eco-designing and advancing solutions,” he said.

The first task force is PET liner recycling, led by Celab-Europe project manager Ophelie Gourdou. The focus is on identifying ways to recycle label liners and waste, and developing a circular economy model covering 75 per cent of this waste by 2025. There are four development axes: data mining; recycling solutions (to reduce label footprint and costs associated); logistics (on-site specific solutions for collecting used liners); and legal framework (to provide answers to present and prospective legal and market requirements with the management of secondary release liner materials).

The second task force is about pressure-sensitive labels (PSL), led by Flor Peña Herron, senior sustainability and circular economy manager for Avery Dennison Label and Packaging Materials EMEA. The focus here is on starting to review design guidelines for adhesives, the behaviour and fate of the glues instead of the types of glue or the way they are applied (PSL or wraparound), and evaluation-protocol testing in order to make it applicable to all adhesives.

The third task force is plastics labels recycling – roll on shrink on, cut and stack, and wraparound, led by Stijn Billiet, global director for sustainability at Multi Color Corporation. Here, the focus is on furthering existing guidelines, and proposing technical explanations and advice when dealing with PET mechanical recycling.



The fourth is floatable full body shrink sleeves, led by Sleever Technologies R&D manager Pierre-Yves Linot. This focuses on testing campaigns based on existing industry sorting evaluation protocol, sleeve thickness, the percentage of translucent area within the full body sleeve, and the percentage transmission of the translucent area or ink opacity.

The final task force is crystallised PET shrink sleeves (crystallisable PET/CPET and washable inks), led by Klöckner Pentaplast brand owner manager Laurent Foldes. The focus is on CPET printed with specially developed washable inks and primer solutions to be recyclable with PET bottle flakes, and large industrial-scale testing with a PET recycler.

“Our 2022/23 targets include the sharing of technical advances between labelling firms and recyclers to reduce yield loss,” said Mameri. “We also aim to explain existing European PET Bottle Platform [EPBP] recycling guidelines to make them easier to understand, and to ensure industry alignment and compatibility of the task force advances with EPBP guidelines about collection and sorting systems and infrastructure. We have much to offer to make labels a strong link for PET recycling.”

# Plastics in Packaging

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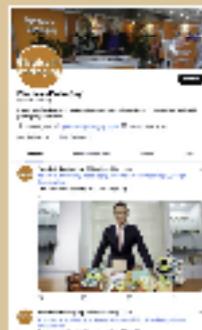
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production and the hope in Europe is to achieve 90 per cent collection of PET packaging.

“The focus is on consumer waste, not just 1 per cent of plastics packaging waste,” he added.

Indeed, there is currently 2.8m/t of installed PET recycling capacity, according to Casper van den Dungen, group business development recycling director at Resilux, and still several deposit return scheme countries due to come on-stream.

He commented that bottle-to-bottle recycling is growing, as is tray-to-tray, although the latter is not the case in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. While explaining that another 30 per cent of recycling capacity for PET is needed by 2030, he thought that, in reality, it should be more than that.

### Sustainable living

The president of Petcore Europe, Antonello Ciotti, was candid in his review of the recycling industry, admitting that he has concerns over 100 per cent recycled content due to the economics involved.

“The price of recycled PET is 40-50 per cent higher than virgin now, so are you using your profit or charging extra to the consumer?” he asked the audience.

Bernhard Heisel, senior expert for plastics and recycling at Schwarz Group, said that recycled content is the same price as virgin for his company on account of the closed loop it has created through its PET conversion and recycling activities.

“The material stream can be closed on one side – bottle-to-bottle – and not flow away from that. For us it’s a good example, good practice, and economical, too,” he said.

For Stefan Kunerth, technical operations director for western Europe at The Coca-Cola Company, it’s a question of what you want to achieve. “We want to avoid fossil oil completely and invest into this, so you can’t always pass the cost on to the consumer,” he admitted. “If you are convinced about it long-term, then it’s an investment. And it creates demand, so you can invest more in recycling.”

Kunerth was keen to explain that we should avoid punishing one specific type of packaging and that, as a producer, Coca-Cola has a range of packaging in different materials that it constantly reviews and improves for sustainability.

“Reducing virgin plastics is important to reduce carbon,” he said. “Our PET bottle-of-the-future concept is 70-80 per cent rPET from mechanical polymer recycling, and 20-30 per cent from depolymerisation recycling or renewable sources. This will give us a 100 per cent recycled or renewable bottle.”

### Is ‘keep it simple’ the policy now?

All companies address sustainability in their own way, so there are lots of definitions for what it means.



*Petcore Europe president Antonello Ciotti claims that only packaging can help with the goal of zero food waste*



*Schwarz Group's Bernhard Heisel says his company's closed loop system keeps it shielded from price volatility*

For Filipe de Botton of Logoplaste, the nature of the conversion business is changing. “Our customer is the consumer, not only the fast-moving consumer goods company now,” he explained. “It’s the e-commerce or supermarket firm that defines the future. We audit our packaging and can adapt it to the likes of Amazon, but how many converters are already doing that? We need to adapt to the future and it’s no longer in our hands. We need to react with the real customer, which is no longer our previous customer.”

He asked why the plastics industry does not react when a ‘paper’ bottle is marketed as being more sustainable on account of it having less plastics. “We don’t exist if we don’t react. The conversion industry has to be an influencer. Carbon emissions are a key performance indicator that everyone understands.”

Logoplaste is continuing to reduce weight and thin-wall, explained de Botton, but he pondered whether converters like his company will be in the same business in a decade from now.

“Packaging as we see it today will not be there in the future,” he said. “Packaging will be totally different and we need the capacity to rethink.”

The more immediate need, according to Petcore Europe president Antonello Ciotti, is to focus on food waste: “A UN target is zero food waste, but you need packaging to achieve this. We need to be clear on what the priorities are: zero food waste, and then reduce packaging.”

Ciotti turned to Nicolas Lorenz, chief commercial officer for Paccor Packaging, and asked him what one thing he’d ask Frans Timmermans, the executive vice-president of the European Commission, to implement.

“I was in front of him once and that day he said ‘we love what you’re doing,’” remarked

Lorenz. “Now, we’re discussing a lot of solutions but I am missing proper discussion and interaction. That’s what I expect from these guys, to be more open and listen, and support the ideas that exist, and some of them are not really that expensive.”

In part, Lorenz is referring here to digital watermarks, which his company is heavily involved in (and which we will cover in greater depth in next month’s issue). He is not including chemical recycling, which is an area that he openly opposes as he thinks it’s costly. He wants a focus on mechanical recycling, first and foremost.

Asked how the industry will secure independence from fossil resources by neglecting chemical recycling, Lorenz responded: “Right now, we have a lot of material available in our process, and a lot of packaging we produce that is not coming back (bottles and trays). Today, we are putting into incineration or landfill a load of material that we can reuse. In packaging I make this claim. Would I use depolymerisation for [ocean] plastics? As it cannot be recycled for food-grade, then I might see it as an opportunity.”

Whatever the focus, sustainability is the name of the game. P

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