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CANADIAN BUSINESS

Maritime Paper Products: Canada's Best Managed Companies 2018

Thinking out of the box with cardboard

Mar 8, 2018 Rosemary Counter



Employees preparing the machinery at Maritime Paper Products. (Aaron McKenzie Fraser)

As Amazon steamrolls over businesses of all kinds, one industry isn't objecting to their giant looming presence at all: corrugated cardboard. "Online shopping has put a tremendous new demand on the corrugated industry," says Gary Johnson, president of Maritime Paper Products Ltd. Rarely does a century-plus-old product find itself so well-suited to a new era.

Founded in 1931—a late start considering corrugated cardboard's invention in the 1880s, but the first of its kind in Atlantic Canada—Maritime Paper Products began making boxes in Halifax for the fishing industry when wooden cartons were the norm. "A box today hasn't changed much structurally," explains Johnson, "but what has changed is the manufacturing techniques. We can make it stronger and faster."

Two hundred employees in three facilities build boxes with high-end, seven-colour graphics. “These are not just brown boxes—these are highly decorated marketing products,” Johnson says.

When you’re on the East Coast, no matter what century you’re in, perishable seafood is a mainstay of your business—about 80% of Maritime Paper’s corrugated cardboard holds food and drink. Packaging lobsters, oysters and mussels presents unique challenges. “We always look at innovation from two perspectives: our own products, of course, but also from the supply side,” Johnson says. For those time-crunched fishermen, for example, they developed labour-saving packaging that’s pre-assembled and pre-glued. “We worked directly with them to redesign a box that works for them, and anything we can do to reduce time and labour, we do.”



(Aaron McKenzie Fraser)

While the box business has seen tough times, says Johnson, this is not one of them. Consumers in the past two decades have begun to expect and then demand environmental responsibility—something corrugated cardboard was already doing without even trying.

“The product by nature lends itself to recycling, and our collection rate is up in the 80% range. We use 100% recycled fibres, and all our waste is re-pulped and reused in a completely closed loop,” says Johnson.

So while other companies struggle to go green, Maritime Paper is using its resources to go greener. “Now we’re using technology to try to reduce the fibre content, making it lighter and easier to ship.” Good news for online shoppers and great news for Maritime Paper Products, which is gearing up for exponential growth in the years to come.