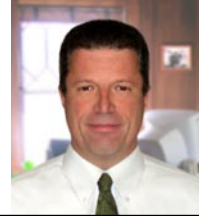




Tissue World Magazine

market issues



Are we going the way of the “2-by-4”?

By Jon Thomson, Marketing Manager, von Drehle Corporation, USA

Many people may not remember, but it used to be that, in North America, you could go to a lumber mill or hardware store and purchase a “two-by-four” - and what you received was a piece of lumber that was two inches thick by four inches wide (5 x 10 cm). Over the years, the lumber industry - in an effort to increase profits - has reduced the so-called “two-by-four” to today’s standard of one and one-half inches by three and one-half inches. But no one ever goes into a hardware store and says, “Hi, I would like to buy a one and a half-by-three and a half.”

Many of today’s towel and tissue manufacturers are beginning to follow this trend. A standard 9” (23 cm) roll of jumbo roll tissue (JRT) has always contained a standard of one thousand linear feet (approx 300 m) of tissue. Many manufacturers offer larger rolls, but the minimum standard has always been one thousand feet - until now.

In the same effort to increase profits, many paper manufacturers - both domestic and foreign - are now producing 9” jumbo rolls that contain 800 linear feet per roll or even less. They will “fluff” the rolls or roll them “looser” to achieve the 9” diameter that their customers expect. Do they advertise or openly inform their customers of this new shorter length? Usually not. Many manufacturers will simply mark their containers as being 9” JRT and count on the fact that their customers will assume that it contains the same linear feet of product.

Are you getting what you pay for?

Some manufacturers print the feet-per-roll on their containers and then provide much less. As much as 36% less! Recent testing and measuring of towel and tissue products have shown that a large percentage of the products do not come close to meeting their advertised specifications. Hardwounds, centrepulls and tissue products of all configurations have all tested short.

Furthermore, length is not the only issue. The basis weight (density) of the paper is also commonly compromised. One towel product was specified as 20 lb. paper but actually tested out as 15.6 lb. To make matters worse, it also tested short. Another example showed that one manufacturer’s towel product had the same basis weight as its tissue product.

Why the deception? The simple reason many manufacturers and converters provide short rolls or under-spec products is to save money and increase profits. Basically, most towel and tissue products are priced by the pound. The longer the roll and/or the heavier the paper, the higher the price will be, as well as the associated costs of manufacturing. If a manufacturer can produce towel or tissue that is below stated or perceived specifications - and charge nearly the same price as the expected specified products - profits go up dramatically.

Furthermore, if the manufacturer reduces its sale price - which it can because its manufacturing costs are



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much less - it will be able to undercut the competition that provides products that meet the stated or perceived specifications.

Better value or just cheaper? Just because a case of tissue or towels is \$2.00 a case cheaper, it doesn't necessarily mean it's a good deal. If a manufacturer is giving you 25% less footage and 25% less basis weight at a 15% "savings" over its competitors - you are actually paying 35% more for its product. In addition, it will take approximately 50% more of its substandard product to equal the same amount of quality, spec product.

Essentially all of us are affected by this new trend. End users get an inferior product. End buyers are paying for product that they are not receiving. Usage increases due to short rolls or substandard specifications and customer complaints increase significantly.

Distributors are also paying for product that they are not receiving and complaints are passed on from the end users. Ethical manufacturers lose sales because they cannot meet the pricing structures of those that provide short or low-grade products.

What's the solution?

In a perfect world, every paper manufacturer would provide quality products that meet or exceed stated or expected specifications. A 9" roll of JRT would always contain a minimum of 1,000 linear feet of quality tissue. A hardwound roll towel that is advertised as 600 linear feet would always have a minimum of 600 feet. Unfortunately, this is not a perfect world and there will always be those that attempt to cut corners and increase profits.

Ask the manufacturer's sales rep for product spec sheets for every product you consider or currently pur-

chase. Make sure that the length is clearly printed on the spec sheet and the containers. Do not assume that just because it says that it is a 9" JRT that it contains 1,000 linear feet of tissue. Ask the manufacturer's rep if he has a portable measuring device. Ask him or her to measure its products in front of you. An ethical manufacturer will not hesitate to demonstrate the quality of its products and the integrity of its company.

Continuous testing can help ensure that you are getting exactly what you pay for. Randomly chosen sample rolls should be measured on a regular basis as some manufactures have shown to provide quality specified products in the beginning and then start providing shorter or lower quality products as time goes on. If you find that your supplier is not giving you what you are paying for - find another manufacturer.

Today, there are many towel and tissue manufacturers and converters to choose from. Having the information to distinguish between a "cheap deal" and a "good deal" is critical. Do you want a "one and a half-by-three and a half" or are you wanting to get what you pay for?

Fortunately for all of us, there are still some ethical manufacturers who want your business and continue to offer true "2-by-4"s. **TW**

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