



hand-crafted to move glass safely and efficiently down a packaging line” stated Jim Mackay, CEO of Ska Fabricating. “From jars to bottles to pharmaceutical containers, our depalletisers unload full pallets of glass vessels of all shapes and sizes onto packaging lines for cleaning, filling, capping, labelling – you name it.”

“When it comes to serving the brewing industry, our bread and butter, glass has always been a favourite choice” Mr Mackay continued. “As we’ve grown and expanded to industries beyond beer, we’ve seen environmentally-conscious businesses choosing glass (or cans) over PET/ plastic more frequently than ever. We’ve taken a stand against the use of plastic and in favour of glass and aluminium by turning down any business that deals in PET/plastic containers.”

According to Mr Mackay “2019 seems like a lifetime ago. We grew our business about 30% that year from 2018. We have already surpassed our 2019 sales and revenue after three quarters [in 2020]. Covid-19 has driven consumers to buy packaged drinks that they can take home, and that has been very good for us.” He sees potential for innovation in 2021: “One of our biggest goals in the coming year is to create a bigger, better machine that can handle more glass/weight, so we aren’t actively attempting to turn away from glass by any means. If anything, we’re leaning in.”

National Beer Wholesalers Association

One of the changes seen in the glass packaging industry for a number of years has been a transition from glass bottles to aluminium cans for beer packaging. “At the end of 2019, about 30% of beer in the USA was sold in glass bottles and about 60% was sold in aluminium cans, and about 10% was draft beer” stated Lester Jones, Chief Economist of the National Beer Wholesalers Association. “During the past ten years, glass packaging has lost about one percentage point each year, whilst aluminium cans gained about one percentage point annually. Draft sales have been relatively consistent during the years – until 2020. The closure of bars and restaurants due to the Covid-19 coronavirus devastated the draft beer market.”

Mr Jones related that changes in the beer market have helped fuel the changes in packaging. As craft beers became more mainstream, he indicated that aluminium cans were more likely



This is a rendering of the new facility being built by Arglass Yamamura in Valdosta, Georgia. See also the Arglass ‘On the Spot’ interview in this issue. (Photo provided courtesy of Arglass Yamamura).

to be used in packaging for off-premise sales. He also noted that where beer is consumed generally impacts the type of packaging chosen by consumers. “Packaging follows occasions” Mr Jones continued. “Cans are more likely to be the packaging of choice on boats, whilst hiking, or sitting at a concert.

Sherpa Chai

Whilst the beer industry has seen a shift from glass to aluminium for packaging, some other types of businesses have shifted to glass containers from other types of packaging.

“We use a 32oz [0.9l] Amber Boston Round glass bottle for our shelf-stable tea concentrate” stated David McKean, CEO of Sherpa Chai, LLC. “We supply a Chai tea shelf-stable concentrate product that is a family recipe and has been passed down through the generations. Our typical customer is 65% female and between the ages of 15 and 65.” The firm is based in Lafayette, Colorado, and focuses on sales within the USA.

The company previously used plastic bottles. “We have found that our customers prefer the glass look and feel,” remarked Mr McKean. “Our customers also value the environmental benefit of a recyclable product.”

Mr McKean indicated that sales have increased each year since the company was founded in 2014. He detailed that Sherpa Chai did about (US) \$400,000 in sales in 2018, and about (US) \$775,000 in sales in 2019.

The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic impacted Sherpa Chai. According to Mr McKean, there was “one setback: [we] lost almost all retail sales due to Covid-19, but anticipate it to bounce back at the beginning of 2021. Considering the pandemic, we are still doing very well despite the

changes in retail with the loss of income. We have been able to take this time to review our product offerings and concentrate on future endeavours. We are still looking to process \$1.3 to \$1.5 million [in revenue] this year, and next year, we looking to due \$2.5 million in sales.”

That level of projected revenue may be altered depending on the course of the pandemic in 2021. “If Covid-19 is still with us next year, we are unlikely to see the coffee shop business return” continued Mr McKean. Coffee shop business “was 40% of our pre-Covid-19 revenue. This would likely make us readjust our goals.”

Live Wise Naturals

Health care products are one of the larger segments of the glass packaging industry. Live Wise Naturals, a company that sells dietary supplements, uses glass to package its products. “We use glass bottles and droppers,” stated Greg Bulgarelli, President of Live Wise Naturals. “We chose glass over plastic due to the fact that plastic interacts with some ingredients and can also leach into the products.”

Unlike many businesses, Live Wise Naturals has seen sales increase, according to Mr Bulgarelli, year-over-year: “Live Wise Naturals is on pace to finish Q4 [of 2020] with sales up 50%... Covid-19 has actually helped our sales.”

The business is based in Bradenton, Florida. Sales are currently focused on the USA market, with the company indicating that it intends to expand more internationally in the years ahead.

The glass packaging industry shows promise in a number of segments even as some market segments, like the beer industry, are likely to continue to see a decrease in overall usage of glass bottles. Investments continue to be made among large manufacturers that see opportunities for future growth in the USA and beyond. The fact that glass is a product that can be recycled on a continuous basis will likely continue to place glass in a key position when businesses and consumers consider sustainability. ●

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