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## Purchasing's 2010 vision series: Packaging will follow product

**Robert DeNola, founder & CEO, webPKG, Inc.**

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The packaging process historically has been managed without benefit of comprehensive technology solutions. But all that is changing. Companies are realizing there is a competitive advantage to managing packaging as part of the total product, especially in highly customized projects. Today's trend toward leveraging enterprise information systems to support decision making processes through integration with highly specialized applications opens the possibility to finally integrate packaging with products throughout product lifecycles across supply chains.

Over time, the information needed to rapidly develop and deploy highly suitable packaging across ever more complex supply chains will become increasingly visible and available.

Who will develop and deploy these packages and packaging systems?

Within the product manufacturing enterprise, core competencies tend to exist in the supply chain around the product lines being developed. However packaging experts tend to focus on the materials and converting processes produced by their companies. The result is that when a product manufacturer goes to the supply chain to seek a comprehensive solution it finds no one whose core competency is general packaging.

Comprehensive solutions are needed and the packaging industry is not accustomed to looking at whole problems or addressing the total cost of product impacted by packaging. This goes way beyond the cost of packaging components and the packaging industry is not alone in its lack of sensitivity to these issues. Product manufacturers are notorious for being unable to share complete information about product and all the considerations that affect packaging such as distribution, regulatory, financial, logistical and manufacturing concerns. The complexity of these considerations are magnified by ever more disbursed supply chains.

The trend toward supply chain efficiencies is driving the need for more comprehensive packaging solutions. The outsourcing trend is bringing big value to many manufacturers, but in that process, packaging considerations become less connected to the source that drives them. A new kind of intermediary will emerge as a result to provide an end-to-end solution to the packaging process--develop and deliver packaging worldwide on a demand basis to enable a build-to-order model for the packaging user.

This new intermediary may be either a global distribution company or a confederation of providers integrated as a virtual joint venture, made possible by technologies and services that are intimately bound to enterprise data while linked to external systems and partners. Where this technology resides will be less important. It will not reside with either the buyer or supplier of packaging. The technology will provide a matrix within which enterprises can create their own packaging systems and processes. It will act virtually within their own borders while providing access to essential

information across the supply chain.

The packaging industry still has not made the transition to placing its focus upon the needs of product manufacturers. The industry will be left even further behind if it doesn't quickly grasp this failure, because yet another transition is in the making. The focus will need to be on products rather than on companies. More and more, product production in many areas is beginning to resemble Hollywood productions--ad hoc assemblies of specialists on a project-by-project basis with loosely linked federations of companies collaborating with advanced technologies to accomplish the development, marketing, production and distribution of products on demand.

*WebPKG provides Internet-delivered, B2B enterprise solutions for all participants in the packaging supply chain. It offers fully integrated packaging specifications management, supply chain collaboration, and package engineering automation.*



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