

Folding Cartons

THE FOLDING CARTON OPPORTUNITY

Folding cartons are boxes, typically made from paperboard, that act as the external container for an item or product. Typically manufactured from a single-sheet board that feels like thick cardstock, folding cartons are printed, laminated, diecut, folded, and glued. They can be designed in an almost limitless range of shapes and sizes and printed using a variety of substrates.

MARKET SIZE

According to Smithers, the global folding carton packaging market is expected to be near \$200 billion by 2028. In *The Future of Folding Cartons to 2028*, Smithers reports the folding carton market has shown growth since the pandemic, growing 2.5% in 2021 and more than 5% in 2022. In the *2023-24 Trends: Industry Outlook & Market Data Research* report, which is produced by Fastmarkets RISI for the Paperboard Packaging Council and covers the United States and Canadian paperboard packaging industry, a 0.4% annual demand growth is predicted from 2022 to 2027, at which point the folding carton market will reach 5.4 million tons.

TYPES OF FOLDING CARTONS

Folding cartons are typically manufactured using board stock that is diecut according to a template, and then folded into its final form.

The purpose and contents of the package are the key determinants of the shape, size, and substrate thickness of a folding carton. There are many style options, including:

- Four panel boxes
- Trays
- Sleeves
- Pillow boxes
- Display boxes
- Specialty shaped boxes

After printing, they are typically shipped flat to a packager, where the carton is folded into its final shape as a container for a product. A primary advantage of a folding carton is that because they can be shipped flat, they offer cost savings in shipping.

KEY USER MARKETS

Folding cartons are used across several industries, but are commonly found in these markets:

- Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG)
- B2B Commercial & Manufactured Supply Chain Goods
- Food & Beverage
- Pharmaceutical/Nutraceutical
- Health, Beauty, Cosmetic
- Luxury Brands

ENTRY INTO THE SEGMENT

Because folding cartons are produced from heavier paper-based stocks, they can be printed by a range of processes, including offset, flexography, digital toner, and digital inkjet.

For those just entering the market, digital presses offer a host of benefits for customers and print providers. The overall advantages offered by digital printing, such as affordable short-run production, fast turnarounds, versioning, and personalization apply to folding cartons as well.

PRINTING METHODS

- Digital printing both inkjet and electrophotographic (dry and liquid) for shorter run work and jobs requiring personalization or many versions.
- Offset lithographic printing for high-volume, static runs.
- Flexographic printing allows for low-cost, fast production of long, static runs.

SUBSTRATES

Folding cartons typically utilize paperboard as their base material to uphold their structural integrity. Most folding cartons are constructed from single-ply paperboard ranging from 14 to 24 points. The size of the carton and the weight of its intended contents often determine the thickness of the paperboard being used.

Substrates are an important consideration and decision criteria include cost, quality, appearance, strength, environmental perception, and finish.

FINISHING

Folding carton production typically requires intensive finishing, including cutting, folding, and gluing.

In addition, enhancing folding cartons with decorative elements is gaining in popularity, particularly among luxury brands, which value the high-end appearance that folding cartons provide. Here are methods for enhancing folding cartons.

- Paperboard can be scored, folded, curved, and custom diecut in an assortment of ways.
- Embossing lifts type and images off the surface of the board, creating an engaging tactile experience.
- Foils capture attention and add an element of luxury.
- UV coatings add a lustrous, protective sheen to either the entirety, or specific segments of a folding carton.

BEST PRACTICE TIPS

- Start with existing clients. Review client lists and determine if they use folding cartons or could benefit from using them.
- Ask current clients that use folding cartons about their requirements.
- Determine if current printing equipment can print folding cartons and supplement with investment in finishing and substrates.
- Digital printing has lowered entry barriers, but an informed adoption strategy is important to success.
- Learn the distinct advantages of folding cartons including luxury appearance, structural integrity, and recyclability of paperboard.
- Consider special effects and embellishment capabilities.
- Do not overlook finishing investment selection.
- Use the resources of associations serving folding cartons.
- Read packaging industry publications, including *Packaging Impressions* (www.packagingimpressions.com).
- Visit folding carton suppliers at the PRINTING United Expo.

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