

PACKAGING PROFILE



It's all in... the trees

Julian Money, RAP's charismatic founder, has been behind some of the most radical innovations in UK sandwich packaging, and there's more to come, as **Nellie Nichols** discovered in a recent interview

I have become totally obsessed about recycling. No matter how small the item, everything that can possibly be re-routed into one of my Council's very attractive Easy Jet orange bags will be. Even my tiny little Yakult bottles get rinsed out and end up in one of my many baskets, along with the tiny foil lid in another.

This is all based on the theory that every bit will help. I am forever ferreting in the bin after everyone who uses it to virtuously recall some random bottle and then spend ages rinsing out all the dog shampoo because I worry about the effect it may have on the planet. Then of course I've started worrying about the fact that the shampoo residue is going into the water system. Will my guilt ever end?

Looking at the European packaging waste per person figures they throw up some surprising data. Sweden, Finland, Portugal, and Greece come out smelling more of roses, Ireland and France are far from it at the bottom and we are somewhat in the middle. However, Ireland did introduce a plastic bag tax in 2002 which has reduced their use by 90% and the French do consider it an offence to wrap four tomatoes in plastic – it is the land of open markets after all. Germany admirably on the other hand recycles nearly all the packaging waste it produces, more than any other European country. On this side of the Channel though, despite our retailers' new plastic bag regimes, apparently one third of our packaging waste is still plastic and 16% is plastic film.

I've always had a deep rooted hatred of all

things plastic, but I'm not the only one and I've come to what has to be one of the most beautiful offices in London by the Thames in Mortlake to talk to the infamous Julian Money of the tremendously successful company RAP.

I'm absurdly jealous of how anyone can have such a stunning view of such a chunk of the Thames and eight foot windows that open over it, which, should anyone feel tempted to jump out of, would land you straight into the path of a passing rowing boat.

Julian in 1996 won the BBC Design Award, beating, amongst others, Eurostar for their train and Sainsbury's for architecture. Coming from a background of the Falmouth Art School, having achieved a degree in Graphics, he developed a fascination for all things three dimensional.

His first job was as an apprentice to the packaging specialist Siebert Head, (often quoted as saying 'no one is allowed to call me Dick') who involved him in ground breaking new packaging concepts such as the move from the world famous sloping shoulders of the Head and Shoulders shampoo bottle, to the now widely accepted rectangular shape.

Dyslexic as a child, at a time when it was totally unknown and unrecognised, Julian was, like so many others who suffered the same, pointlessly made to take on extra reading and writing. He believes this led to his obsession with objects and pictures, form and shape – to achieve a good design he needed to be able to visually interpret it.

The own-label boom of the late 80's led him to



Julian Money



JULIAN MONEY



set up a design company. Travelling the world looking at different markets, he became fascinated in how things were made and produced. He wasn't interested in just straight design and handing over the production to others, what he wanted was continuous ownership.

His travels led him in the direction of paper and board; to paper mills and printing factories. Intrigued by Germany's Green Dot tax on paper, board, tin, glass and wood which carries a weight penalty, Julian came to believe packaging could be made considerably lighter if it was made of more than one component and this led him into designing one of the most successful of the packaging concepts he produces today: the award winning Flexible Food Wrap. This is a combination of board and paper, which creates a closing carrying device for not only cold but also hot food.

Immediately taken up by Abracadabra, one of the largest and successful fast food chains in Ireland, Julian opened the first of his three Irish factories to produce what became a multitude of packaging designs to hold baguettes, burgers, kebabs and fries. Ergonomic, environmental and economic, here was a piece of packaging that achieved all three. Julian was well on his road to success.

I've known him for a long time I suppose. He's always appealed to me because he is a 'straight as a dye' plain talking inspirational innovator and I've always liked those. Passionate is now sadly too

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over-used and, anyway, he is far better described as totally committed, fervent and zealous.

Here and now he's not really happy talking about himself and has an irritating tendency to slow down if he has to, but then speeds up animatedly when I ask about his work, all of which plays havoc with my note taking. He has ridiculously charismatic pale blue eyes and is, as ever, immaculately dressed, both huge plus points in my book anyway. When we walk around his offices you can sense he is well liked and respected and everyone is relaxed in his company. He is clearly a bit of father figure to them all and they are a close-knit team of exceptional calibre.

One day in the late 90's, he knocked on Julian Metcalfe's door at Pret with his new invention and as luck would have it he appeared at just the right time. The brand was growing like topsy and there was, without doubt, an opportunity for some kind of packaging innovation, not just at Pret but in the industry as a whole.

Both of the Julians knew a sea of plastic packaging wasn't the way forward for Pret and six weeks later a prototype was born. The first cardboard sandwich wedge was created; thousands of copies have followed but this was the first true ground-breaker.

A trial commenced at the Marble Arch store and now Julian tells me charmingly and candidly he really didn't know how to go about anything so enormous. Shortly afterwards he received what he describes as a highly animated call from Julian Metcalfe. Did he know (all) the ink was running off the packs? Investigations showed some smudging - someone had forgotten to apply the sealing varnish.... A second 30 store trial began and with it an order of one million units. The rest is history.

Julian might have won one of the most prestigious design awards but he tells me that seeing so very many sandwiches in his invention was one of the proudest moments of his career. He didn't



One of RAP's three packaging plants around the world



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feel quite so good when it was blatantly copied quickly by one of the competition by reverse engineering – his pack was top loading, the copy end loaded. He is reasonably philosophical. I would have been incandescent with rage if it had of been me. But then what do they say about copying being the best form of flattery?

It's at this moment he explains the true meaning of R & D to me. He calls it Rip Off and Duplicate. And he says, with a twinkle: they know who they are.

From that moment on development hasn't stopped. Bringing out the first heat sealed cardboard sandwich pack for Tesco Finest in 2003, he went on to come up with the first biodegradable pack for the FooGo brand. Innovation followed innovation and continues to this day. He opens his cupboard and shows me two of his latest concepts – it seems he will be breaking new ground yet again. He tells me sweetly what will happen to me if I tell anyone about them - as if I would. I think I hate plagiarism as much as he does.

Factories in Korea and Malaysia have followed Ireland. He supplies the biggest fast food company in the world amongst many others – he describes it as 'globally enabling themselves' – following the brands and it works by them helping each other.

What's next I ask him? Surely he must have thought of retiring – spending more time sailing – one of his biggest passions. He looks at me as if I have lost it altogether. He genuinely loves what he does and there is so much to do. He's speeding up now again and telling me how when he started there was no one worth employing. It was an industry of copycats with a terrible reputation of not attracting young talent. The only way forward he believed, and still does, is through innovation and providing unique products. He feels he now has had a worthwhile effect on the industry by not just supplying packaging but by supplying solutions. He wants to continue doing things no one has done before.

I'm going to have to ask the question of where his conscience lies with the global effect all his packaging is having on the environment. After all, he's feeding in the region of a couple of million consumers every day globally and has, I think, as everyone in this industry of ours does, a huge responsibility.

His eyes shine and he's off again. This time he's telling me about a wild and exciting project he and his team have undertaken with Grundon, the largest waste removal company in the UK who produce a fantastic product: commercial composting.

He says sandwich boxes mustn't keep going into landfill. Many of them might be biodegradable but not if they're ending up in the wrong place. Landfill is close to reaching saturation point. Grundons are capable of processing a ridiculous tonnage of green waste every year.

Using pod tunnels to eradicate smell and litter,



sandwich boxes can be shredded and mixed with natural green waste to produce three grades of composted material; Grade A – C, which can be used as general garden compost, farm usage and landscape filling such as creating golf courses.

I love the idea of biodegradable BLT sandwich boxes becoming tree food, going back to the land. But here's the rub though. Somehow Julian says, we have to get the compostable boxes to a central collection point. Grundons will use the waste only if it can be transported to somewhere central they can then collect from.

Surely this has to be a huge opportunity for the retailers, not to mention a marketing dream for some of the bigger independent brands? One that can be motivated by the numerous sandwich eating consumers? Let's not forget, it wasn't long ago that bottle banks sprang up – why can't councils start another for biodegradable packaging?

Then there's the idea RAP are considering of a symbol – perhaps a tree – with a simple question added to the box to motivate the consumer- 'would you like this sandwich box to become a tree?'. I think this has legs and I so hope it works.

In any event, at least he's trying, which so many companies aren't. It's all very well having biodegradable packaging but, quite frankly, why bother unless we are going to take on the responsibility to see it turned around properly through 360 degrees. I somehow get the feeling if a company can help to get this particular ball rolling it might just be RAP – after all Julian would love RAP to be known as the most innovative packaging company on the planet. Perhaps one day it will.

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