

Interview with Stéphane Thiollier, the newly appointed President of Pro Carton

FCI	<i>Firstly congratulations on your recent appointment. Can you first tell me what involvement you have had with Pro Carton before this?</i>
ST	<p>Certainly. Prior to being voted in as President, I have been Chairman of Pro Carton France for a number of years and also, for the last three years, Vice President of Pro Carton International. During my time in France I feel that good progress was made with a number of new initiatives that have spread understanding about cartons and carton board much more widely than previously. I found that there was a great need in France for better information about what cartons can add to a business and many of the activities we undertook were aimed at providing better and more useful information. One of the major successes was a range of technical briefing papers that have been distributed largely in France in recent years. These were focussed on specific end use markets such as confectionery, frozen food and the like and gave a greater insight into the technical aspects of carton packaging and how they can help brand owners and packaging specifiers get more out of their packaging.</p> <p>Another great success was the publication of a practical guide to eco-design, which has been widely used by key decision makers of our target groups, as well as in design schools.</p>
FCI	<i>We have heard the announcement of radical changes in the way Pro carton operates – can you give us the background?</i>
ST	<p>When the previous President, Mike Clarke, began his period of office he felt that after nearly twenty years, it was a good time to look at the way Pro Carton operates to see if there was a better, more effective way of meeting its aim to promote the wider use of cartons and cartonboard. As you will understand this was a complex task and took some time to undertake but now having made those changes, I am confident that we are in a better position to move forward and deliver value and benefits to both our members and our target groups.</p> <p>We felt that the markets in which we operate have changed and we had not changed sufficiently to be able to meet the new conditions. Back in 1988 when Pro Carton International was originally founded national issues were very much to the fore but since then with the opening up of Eastern Europe and the general globalisation of brands,</p>

	<p>retailers and packaging markets, we felt that it was necessary to focus more on an international rather than a national approach, while keeping in mind some national particularities that need to be understood and taken into consideration.</p> <p>It is of course always sad to make changes that affect people and having operated in 15 countries through 11 offices it was a difficult decision but on balance we felt that it would be beneficial to focus all our efforts internationally to ensure that the same messages were being received by all our target groups.</p>
<i>FCI</i>	<i>So how will the new organisation look?</i>
ST	<p>To ensure we deliver the programme we need, we have appointed three people as the key team to manage Pro Carton's activities. Richard Dalgleish will be Managing Director and as such will take overall responsibility to implementation of the full programme. He will be supported by Suzanne McEwen who has been appointed Head of Marketing and Communications and Jennifer Buhaenko who will be Head of Public Affairs. They will of course be supported by others when necessary and we will whenever possible utilise the services of people who have background knowledge of Pro Carton.</p> <p>We have also formed a Steering Group which is the group that will decide on the strategy, agree the targets and finalise the plan of activities and the budget associated with that plan. As President of Pro Carton I will chair that Group and will be supported by Per Lundeen of A & R Cartons and Chairman of ECMA, Jules Lejeune of ECMA, Roland Rex of Weig Karton, Peter Karell of M-real and finally Franz Rappold of Mayr Melnhof Karton who is also Chairman of CEPI Cartonboard. This is an experience and knowledgeable team and brings to Pro Carton an extensive involvement in and knowledge of the carton and cartonboard industries and as such will be able to ensure that the right activities are planned and implemented to the benefit of all our target groups and members.</p>
<i>FCI</i>	<i>So am I correct in saying the national offices will close?</i>
ST	<p>Sadly yes. In bringing the organisation into a fully European operation it means that the eleven national offices we currently have will close at the end of 2008. It is always sad when this type of thing happens especially as they have all delivered excellent programmes for Pro Carton over many years and have been run by dedicated professionals to whom we owe a great deal. But many of the ideas and events started in different countries will be built upon and used in the future as we seek to develop better events and information for all our target groups. This has been a difficult decision and was not taken</p>

	lightly but we are sure that the correct decision has been made and we will build upon what the national offices have started and always delivered professionally and effectively.
<i>FCI</i>	<i>And what plans do you have for 2009?</i>
	<p>In recent years Pro Carton has carried out many events across many countries and our aim is to continue with the most effective of these and develop them still further. For the last twelve years we have run the annual carton awards in association with ECMA and this will be continued in 2009 and in fact planning for this has already started. One of the major events we are planning for 2009 is a Congress. This will be similar to the very successful congresses that have been run in Germany in recent years but in 2009 this will be opened up to an international audience and it is hoped that this will take place late in 2009 with an audience of about 300 people with high quality speakers and also a celebration of the winners of the carton awards.</p> <p>We have over the years commissioned many studies the most recent of which looked at how fast different types of packaging were recognised at the point of sale. This showed clearly that carton packaged brands were recognised more quickly than brands in other types of packaging and a report on this study has been distributed widely as well as being available on our website. We are planning to continue with various studies and are looking at alternatives currently to decide which offer the greatest benefit for our members. In several countries we have held marketing events. Usually just one day, these have proved very popular and so we hope to be able to host these in different places in the years ahead. We also plan to publish a range of booklets and documents and so continue what we have done in the past. The glossary that gives information on both the carton and cartonboard industries will still be available and we will look to update it in due course. It is already available in several different languages and we will look at extending its reach.</p> <p>One other major event we are looking at being involved in is the ECR Congress. This Congress – Efficient Consumer Response – brings together about 2000 delegates from the brand and retail sector and will be held in Barcelona between 3rd and 5th June. So you can see we have a wide range of plans to implement with the new team in 2009</p>
<i>FCI</i>	<i>What groups of people are you planning to focus on?</i>
<i>ST</i>	At the first meeting of the Steering Group we agreed that we would continue to focus on all those people who have an influence on the choice of packaging. These are primarily brand owners, retailers,

	<p>designers and of course politicians and law makers who also have significant influence. The sustainability of cartons and cartonboard is one of the major factors gaining importance currently and we will be enhancing our activities in this area and plan to provide much better information on this subject in the coming months. We have also agreed to increase the budget related to all public affairs issues to ensure that we are able to deliver to our members and target groups accurate and timely information in this area in response to an ever growing need for greater clarity and accuracy.</p>
FCI	<p><i>Are you confident that this new international approach will be successful?</i></p>
ST	<p>In April, May and June 2008, Pro Carton took on its biggest events ever in attending and showing at both Interpack and Drupa. This was a significant challenge for us and we are very pleased at the way it all turned out. For the first time we demonstrated what we do on a truly international stage and the feedback we have had following both those events, convinced us that the international approach is correct. We planned and executed an attractive stand and presence at both exhibitions and at Interpack worked closely with many of our members at the Innovationparc Packaging. This dedicated area allowed visitors to see a wide range of carton and cartonboard manufacturers and to learn what they can do. On the Pro Carton stand we demonstrated all that is good about cartons and cartonboard using winners from the award competition, a wide range of publications and staff who were able to provide useful and accurate advice and help to all our visitors. We also launched the report on the new limbic study that had just been completed and also published for the first time the carbon footprint data for our industries. This in particular was very well received and helped to cement the understanding that the renewability of our material is of critical importance to many, many people.</p> <p>So after this success we are convinced that widening our approach, providing consistent messages and offering accurate and useful information to as wide an audience as possible is vital and this is why we have made the changes we have.</p>
FCI	<p><i>So finally how would you sum up the challenges ahead?</i></p>
	<p>In one word significant. There is no doubt at all that there is a great deal of work ahead for Pro Carton. The importance of environmental issues, the greater competition in all markets and of course the financial difficulties affecting all countries. But we are confident that we have made changes that will increase the impact of Pro Carton whilst at the same time delivering more effective, coherent programmes that will benefit an increasingly wide range of people.</p>

	We look to the future with confidence knowing that having assembled a skilful and professional team to manage and run Pro Carton, we are well placed to achieve the targets we have set and deliver what people need in terms of information and background on cartons and cartonboard.
<i>FCI</i>	<i>Thank you very much</i>

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