

Will consumers put their money where their mouth is when it comes to sustainability?

Winfried Muehling, General Manager of Pro Carton

Will consumers put their money where their mouth is when it comes to sustainability? That's a question asked by every brand and retailer, and one that seems to have many different answers. For example, major supermarket chain, Asda, recently launched research suggesting that half of UK consumers are unwilling to pay extra for more sustainable products. Whilst willingness may differ to reality, I am not sure this data paints a true picture of the situation, particularly when it comes to packaging; in fact our research had different findings. The Europe-wide survey found that nearly three quarters (73%) of UK shoppers would pay more for a product if the packaging had less impact on the environment.

Interestingly, the survey found that especially younger British consumers – aged 22-28 – were most willing to spend more (88%) for the sake of the environment whereas those in the over-65 category, were the least likely to pay more. Still, three in five (59%) would spend extra for more eco-friendly packaging. What's more, cartonboard was confirmed as the packaging material of choice with 78% of consumers naming cartonboard as their preferred solution for an environmentally friendly packaging. The younger generation in particular is concerned about the impact their purchasing decisions have on the environment.

We recognise that whilst consumers may in theory be willing to pay more, perhaps in a bid to do good, there are limitations to the shelf price in practice. What's clear is that there is a monetary threshold in which the scale of willingness is tipped. Out of the 73% who were willing to pay more for a product packaged sustainably, 34% said they would pay 0-5% more and 26% said they were willing to pay 5-10% more. However, these numbers dropped significantly past this threshold, with just 11% willing to pay 10-20% more and just 2% willing to pay more than 20% extra.

Going back to Asda's research, there was one aspect of the report that I fully agree with: that it takes full alignment along the value chain to decide on the solutions with a lower environmental impact and to minimize the 'price barrier' to greener choices. The long-term impact of consumption is deeply concerning, and the recent discussions at COP26 highlight just how quickly we need change. Climate concerns are a shared problem that we all must solve together.

ENDS