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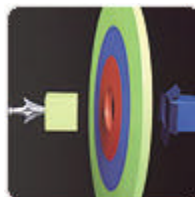
Get to Market Faster

Package It: Thinking About the Box

Desirée de Myer, [Ziff Davis Smart Business](#)
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Good packaging sells a product, protects it during shipment to customers, and minimizes freight costs.

Hewlett-Packard's core business is making printers and desktop computers, not cartons. Still, the boxes that contain HP's LaserJet printers are incredibly complex. There are literally hundreds of specifications for the packaging, and each element—from custom-molded foam to accessory trays—has to be built to the precise dimensions of the product. The last thing anyone wants is to slow down a product's delivery because the box isn't ready. "As a packaging engineer, you never want packaging to be in the critical path," says Tim Lalley, corporate packaging engineer for Hewlett-Packard.



Last November HP began using [webPKG](#), a Web-based hub created to help companies connect the dispersed parties involved in package creation. WebPKG provides a browser-based hosted space where product design engineers can share requirements with package designers, package creators can share design documents with manufacturing facilities, and outside contractors that may be supplying the cardboard or producing package ideas can see what they need to see, whether it's CAD drawings or marketing graphics.

HP designs its LaserJet shipping cases in Boise, Idaho, where it designs the printers. Packaging engineers work with CAD files supplied by HP printer designers and, in some cases, outside package designers. But once the boxes are conceived, they're manufactured somewhere else, generally where the printers themselves are completed. For printers it sells in Germany, for example, HP buys finishing components like power cords and does final packaging there. That's where it produces boxes for those units. "All of those places need to get this information to buy tooling, print the boxes, plan floor

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space, and find the suppliers they need for manufacturing," says Lalley. "WebPKG gets the information into their hands sooner."

Though webPKG can't get the product out the door faster, it can help improve the quality of the package. Traditionally in a nine-month period HP might do five or six package-design revisions, says Lalley. "Now, we can do 10 design revisions in that time frame—to get a finer product."

Once it's fully implemented—HP piloted the online tool with LaserJets that hit the streets in May—webPKG is expected to cut other costs. Without the online database, Lalley says he's in Boise "kind of working in my own world, and even though there might be a box that already exists that was created in Singapore, I don't know about that." With webPKG, he can search for a package design by packaging style, dimensions, creation date, material type, and even the number of colors printed on it. "If it already exists, I can use it," he says.

The company also can use the tool to calculate how much cardboard it needs. "We can find all the corrugated components loaded into the system and calculate the square footage," Lalley explains. "Now we can go to International Paper, for example, and say, 'Next year we're going to buy x million tons of corrugated material. What kind of price break can you give us?'"

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