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by thomas j. basile

Beyond Ordinary

NextLife seeks the extraordinary in plastics recycling.

The first thing that the folks at NextLife (www.NextLife.com) will tell you is that they are not recyclers—they're sustainability innovators. Part consulting firm, part product developer and part sustainability solutions provider, NextLife blurs the lines among all the players in the recycling process.

With prices for recyclables dropping, markets limited, and the industry scrambling, NextLife, Boca Raton, Fla., seeks to create a continuum between retailers, manufacturers and the recycler. "We are finally closing the recycling loop, making ordinary plastic products extraordinary," says NextLife founder and Co-chairman Danny Schragar.

When it comes to innovation, the recycling industry has been a leader for decades. From the earliest programs to today's expansive operations, when people discuss how technology and the marketplace can work together to deal with the challenges of waste management, the environment and raw materials, the recycling industry remains ahead of the curve. Still, as little as 5 percent of the plastic scrap generated in the U.S. each year is recycled.

While the recycling industry, like most others, has been affected by the current economic crisis, the NextLife team says it believes the possibilities for exciting new applications and solutions are greater than ever before. "We are looking to tackle these challenges in a groundbreaking way," Schragar says.

Schragar has spent more than 20 years in the plastics recycling field, working with clients like Wal-Mart, Macy's, Polo, Kohl's and other large retailers. "We can be a catalyst for real systemic



change in the way we handle much of the waste that ends up in our landfills," he says. "It's about creating a true end-to-end solution for retailers and consumers."

THE CONCEPT

NextLife designs custom recycling solutions, transforming clients' plastic scrap

into new sustainable plastic products to be sold on their shelves or used in their operations. "As a company, we were asking ourselves, 'What will make recycling programs more effective at all levels?' What we came up with was a unique end-to-end solution that is highly visible for companies, employees and customers."

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its recycled resin producers and partners. CDS has 450 scientists, chemists and engineers and multiple testing facilities throughout the world to perform the requisite certification services. "Our partnership with Ciba provides our clients with the peace of mind they need when looking to move toward our model for

handling their recyclables," says Schragar. "Working with our staff and the experts at Ciba, companies can be assured they are getting a truly 'green' product."

NextLife works with recyclers and certified producers of recycled plastic resin to source quality, post-consumer recycle for its product manufacturing ef-

forts. "The recyclers are a critical part of the process. We aim to identify recyclers that are transparent in the sourcing and resin production process. Again, this is to ensure that we can create the right mix of post-consumer material for a particular application," Schragar says.

Sources are tracked and, depending on the client, plastic scrap from a particular source can be dedicated to specific product manufacturing operations. For instance, a retailer's plastic scrap can be dedicated to producing new industrial and consumer product lines for its stores.

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IDEAS IN ACTION

In 2008, working together with Vanguard Plastics, one of the largest basket manufacturers in North America, NextLife created a shopping basket made from 25 percent post-consumer plastic sourced from the plastic shopping bags. Major grocery chains such as Stop & Shop, Giant, Wegmans, Hy-Vee, Fred Meyer and others are presently incorporating the NextLife basket into their stores across the country.

NextLife also has been working with Wal-Mart on post-consumer recycled consumer and industrial products for the past two years. The company's marquee products made from Wal-Mart's own plastic scrap launched in early 2008. These products included lawn and garden edging sold under the "ReStore" brand name and a line of pillows made from more than 30 recycled plastic soda bottles marketed under the NextLife name.

The team at NextLife says it believes its model represents the wave of the future. NextLife is seeking to bridge the gaps among all the business components that can make recycling and recycled products part of our lives in ways we've never before contemplated.

"It can be a whole new world of sustainable, post-consumer recycled products and makes recycling a win-win business for the recycler, retailer, consumer and the planet—regardless of commodities' values," Schragar says. "With the sudden decline of recycling markets worldwide, today more than ever, closing the recycling loop is an ideal way to maintain a long-term consistent recycling program," he adds. ■

The author is a former director of communications for the U.S. EPA. He is managing director of the MidEnergy Sustainability Group in New York and submitted this story on behalf of NextLife.

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In developing NextLife, Schragar and his team wanted companies and customers to see real, tangible results from their recycling programs. "The products and the process are very powerful toward telling the story of just how effective recycling can be to our lives and to the company bottom line. When someone asks the question, 'Where does it all go?' we want them to have an answer," he says.

To do that, NextLife provides its clients a suite of services ranging from waste management solutions to environmental auditing to life cycle assessments and "green" product development. With NextLife, plastic begins a new life cycle under the control of the source even after it is removed and recycled. "It comes back to the company and provides new possibilities for revenue," Schragar says. The company forms partnerships with existing manufacturers and retailers of plastic products through licensing or contract manufacturing arrangements, across all categories, to produce NextLife branded or NextLife certified plastic products.

THE PROCESS

The NextLife sustainability "SWAT" team of engineering, design, merchandising and marketing and packaging experts assists in the development of the sustainable products with the retailer or licensee. All NextLife products must adhere to certain Standards of Sustainability to bear the NextLife brand. NextLife's Standards of Sustainability address five key product performance indicators: integration of recycled and sustainable raw materials; carbon footprint reduction; sustainable quality and performance; packaging and education; and support of the domestic economy.

With what it calls a deep well of intellectual capital, the company has enlisted Ciba Expert Services (CES), the North American EHS/sustainability consulting arm of global plastics company, Ciba, to provide the science and certification for

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