



## Emerging from the pandemic, glass packaging is set for growth

By Scott Cooper

Since the invention of the automated glass bottle machine in the early 1920s, glass has been a staple to safely store, transport, and enjoy food and beverages.

World events over the decades naturally led to ebbs and flows of the prominence of glass on shelves and in home pantries. In the post-World War II era of the 1950s and '60s, glass had a strong presence in homes as products like milk and beer were delivered in refillable glass bottles, with systems to collect and clean the bottles. The 1970s brought a plastic revolution continuing into the early 2000s, which introduced a culture of “throw away” packaging and decreased the demand for glass. However, in the 2000s, emerging economies such as Brazil, India, China, and the former Soviet Union lifted the overall global demand for packaged food and beverages, and a corresponding increase for glass. Following the Great Recession in 2008, consumers were more price-sensitive, which encouraged mass market beer to shift from glass to aluminum packaging.

Now at the end of 2022, the International Year of Glass, the fundamentals for glass packaging are at the strongest in more than 20 years. This current market power is due to several factors.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic greatly accelerated change in our world—and without a doubt, behavior toward food and beverage consumption as well. As people stayed at home, there was a reinvigoration of cooking and eating well at home. Rather than treating themselves at restaurants, people preferred to indulge at home with higher-end foods, sauces, or cocktails, which tend to be packaged in glass rather than other materials.

Second, a preference for healthier products such as kombuchas, enhanced waters, and low alcohol drinks began before the pandemic and has continued. Glass inherently aligns with brands that project a “better for you” image.

Third, consumers are slowly becoming more aware of the sustainability impact created by their packaging. As reports continue to emerge of the environmental toll from plastic packaging, glass is uniquely positioned as a material because it is truly recyclable.

As the world's largest manufacturer of glass packaging, O-I has supported these changes in the world. For example, in the last five years, O-I's North America product mix shifted in



Credit: O-I Glass

**O-I's new Drinktainer packaging innovation provides restaurants a way to offer drinks to-go.**

response to consumer demands from largely beer-focused to greater production of food, nonalcoholic, and spirits products.

The pandemic offered a unique opportunity to successfully pilot and launch a packaging innovation: the Drinktainer. This product is a unique wide-mouth design that can be filled onsite at the brewery or bar and served to-go. It offers the sensory experience of drinking from a wide-mouthed glass while also being functional by being capped and sealed for transport. This design was piloted during the pandemic as restaurants were looking for ways to offer drinks to-go. The Drinktainer is now commercially available with Lagunitas Brewing in Petaluma, Calif., and Blue Moon Brewing in Denver, Co., being just a few who are using this new to-go packaging option.

The challenges of the last three years demonstrated that glass is an essential material in the supply chain of food and beverages. The glass packaging industry strongly persisted through the challenges of those years, and is ready to seize new opportunities in the post-pandemic world.

### About the author

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