



Press Release

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Disruptive ideas for sustainable packaging

Next-generation concepts accelerate progress for sustainable packaging at Henkel's first DESIGNathon

Düsseldorf – At the first-ever Henkel DESIGNathon, bright minds met up to disrupt the status quo in the packaging industry and tackle big challenges related to sustainability. The in-person event welcomed students from across Europe to collaborate with thought-leaders from industry and academia – with cash prizes awarded for the top three designs.

During the two-day event in January, 20 students met in Henkel's Inspiration Center Duesseldorf (ICD) where they worked in groups to further develop packaging designs and services that promote and facilitate reuse.

The event aimed to inspire next-generation ideas for more sustainable packaging. Concepts needed to be capable of making a real-world impact on the market within the next five years. They also had to be consistent with the European Union's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulations (PPWR), which aim to significantly reduce packaging waste in the coming years. "As a leading player in adhesives and coatings for packaging, we see it as our responsibility to foster the generation and development of innovative ideas that will push the industry to a sustainable future," said Kerstin van Wijk, Head of Innovation for Adhesive Technologies Packaging and contest judge, on the inspiration for the event.

After a rigorous application round, the following were shortlisted and workshopped during the DESIGNathon:

- **Reusable pharma blister packs (First place)**

A recyclable blister pack for medical pills made entirely from recyclable PEF material, enhancing recyclability, reducing waste, and improving accessibility while meeting medical-grade packaging standards.

- **Reusable in-flight meal containers (Second place)**
Reduce single-use plastic waste in aviation by introducing high-quality, reusable meal containers for in-flight services, which enhance efficiency and minimize environmental impact through a closed-loop reuse system.
- **Biobased and biodegradable packaging from banana waste (Third place)**
Creating bioplastics for packaging from agricultural waste, primarily bananas, to reduce reliance on petroleum-based plastics, manage waste sustainability and support a circular economy.
- **Refillable cartridge system for non-food filling goods (Honorable mention)**
A reusable tank system for liquid products that reduces waste, encourages reuse through customer incentives and cross-industry applications and supports environmental and economic goals.
- **Reusable e-commerce packaging (Honorable mention)**
A smart, modular, and reusable packaging system for e-commerce, featuring collapsible, durable, and recyclable packages with QR code tracking, promoting transparency, efficiency, and sustainability throughout their life cycle.

“All of the workshopped ideas showed how valuable it is to bring great minds together to bring out-of-the-box thinking to life,” said Rajat Agarwal, Global Head of Henkel Packaging Adhesives, jury member and project sponsor. “The winning idea of reusable pharma packaging convinced us by tackling a significant challenge with a realistic solution that addresses key stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry value chain.”

Henkel has a proven record of pioneering for sustainability. The company offers a world-leading portfolio of adhesives, sealants and functional coatings that helps to reduce emissions and waste across a broad variety of markets worldwide. In the packaging industry, experts from Henkel work closely with partners to create resource-efficient innovations. This DESIGNathon is the latest step in that track record of embracing disruptive new ideas.

“The energy and enthusiasm from Henkel employees made us feel very welcomed, and the opportunities to discuss sustainability was an added bonus,” one of the students said in an anonymous survey after the event. “I really enjoyed the active interaction with industry experts.” Henkel plans to expand the format globally to reach further up-and-coming innovators worldwide. By learning together and working together, the company aims to make a

measurable difference together. In that way, DESIGNathon participants can shape the future of FMCG packaging by masterminding truly game-changing solutions for sustainability.

“The enthusiasm around the event showed us that the next generation of packaging designers is ready to step up to sustainability challenges,” said Kathleen Burzycki, Head of Strategy & Marketing for Henkel Consumer Goods Adhesives and jury member. “And we are ready to listen to them and work with them as we roll the Henkel DESIGNathon concept out globally.”

About Henkel

With its brands, innovations and technologies, Henkel holds leading market positions worldwide in the industrial and consumer businesses. The business unit Adhesive Technologies is the global leader in the market for adhesives, sealants and functional coatings. With Consumer Brands, the company holds leading positions especially in laundry & home care and hair in many markets and categories around the world. The company's three strongest brands are Loctite, Persil and Schwarzkopf. In fiscal 2023, Henkel reported sales of more than 21.5 billion euros and adjusted operating profit of around 2.6 billion euros. Henkel's preferred shares are listed in the German stock index DAX. Sustainability has a long tradition at Henkel, and the company has a clear sustainability strategy with specific targets. Henkel was founded in 1876 and today employs a diverse team of about 48,000 people worldwide – united by a strong corporate culture, shared values and a common purpose: "Pioneers at heart for the good of generations." More information at www.henkel.com

Photo material is available at www.henkel.com/press

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The winning team "Reusable pharma blister packs" with the jury and the grand prize of €10,000. Pictured from left to right are: Elodie Picard, Head of Sustainability Adhesive Technologies Packaging; Jenna Koenneke, Head of Sustainability Adhesive Technologies Consumer Goods; Ulla Hüppe, VP of Sustainability for Adhesive Technologies; Laura Thompson, Pierre Cautaearts, Syed Areeb Ashraf, Duchna Łosiak; Kathleen Burzycki, Head of Marketing & Strategy Adhesive Technologies Consumer Goods; Kerstin van Wijk, Head of Innovation for Adhesive Technologies Packaging; and Rajat Agarwal, Global Head of Adhesive Technologies Packaging.



The students worked on the visualization of their proposals using Vizcom, an AI-based design tool.



The students collaborated in small groups to workshop their sustainable packaging ideas over the course of two days.