

IT'S BIN FUN



AN ENTICING DISPLAY OF COFFEE BINs CAN DRIVE SALES ALL ACROSS THE BOARD.

Photo courtesy of Innovated Products Mfg.

THE IDEAL COFFEE BEAN BINS WILL BOTH PROTECT THE PRODUCT AND DRIVE SALES IN ALL AREAS.

BY BRENDA PORTER-ROCKWELL

Protecting coffee beans from the four common enemies—heat, moisture, air and light—is a simple part of doing business. However, the actual implementation—the container you choose to display and dispense your beans—is likely the hardest part of protecting your commodity. Options are many, creating a never-ending battle between fashion and function.

According to the National Coffee Association, glass, while it looks good, is really not the best option for storing coffee. Instead, there are several other types of bins available such as food-grade styrene, acrylic, metal or polycarbonate material, all designed to help keep your coffee as fresh and vibrant as the day it was roasted.

“Well, this is where there is controversy,” says MaryAnn Oletic, president of Innovated Products Manufacturing, Brampton, Ontario. Over the last 26 years she has been told by “many, many coffee specialists” that the bean does not like the light and clear bins. So black plastics and wood are best. “Of course my favorite is stainless steel.”

Fresh beans make the best coffee and make for the happiest customers. In those self-serve cafes, coffee bins are typically placed where customers can help themselves.

“The beauty of this is that the customer now becomes involved with trying new blends,” Oletic says. “One tap of this, two taps of that, three of another ... mix it up and voila, they have their personal blend.”

ANTIQUE STYLE

Innovated Products manufactures and distributes a range of quality, antique-style metal coffee bean display and dispensing bins. The dispenser uses a side pull, free flow, spring loaded ball system. According to the company, the bins will retain their quality even after years of wipe-downs. In addition, their chrome plated rotating dispensing ball systems will roll out billions of beans without missing a beat.

The stainless-steel interiors at Innovated Products provide a bean-friendly environment that resists stains and pitting. Beans move to the back of the bin as they are dispensed, so while the interior appears to be full, the Plexiglas window remains clean and clear.

Also, self-service allows customers “to purchase as much or as little as they want,” says Tom Van Beusekom, president of Crown Plastics, Plymouth, Minn.

But there is a downside to self-serve: Store owners are very much aware of the cost of bulk beans. “If the customer allows a few beans to go on the floor, that represents [lost] profits to the owner,” Van Beuskon says. “Our units are all equipped [with] self-closing gates to hopefully minimize any spillage and consequently inventory shrinkage.”

Crown Plastics’ bins, like its Affordable Elegance acrylic line, range in size from 5-pound stackable bins to 15-pounders. All are gravity-feed with self-closing gates. Crown Plastics’ units are embellished with brass fronts and trim, presenting an upscale look, Van Beuskon notes.

Although many specialty coffee shops offer beans to take home, Harold Waldman, president of Plastic Parameters, Markham, Ontario, says in his many years of experience, the beans are usually behind the counter to facilitate their availability by the staff when brewing their coffee.

“In many cases, there is just not sufficient space in a coffee shop to allow for both behind the counter and self-serve options of whole bean,” Waldman says.

COUNTER-INTUITIVE

Oletic acknowledged that some cafés prefer to have dispensers behind the counter. However, she finds this location to be detrimental to sales.

“My client base all use the ‘self-serve bin’ and most definitely there are advantages,” she says. “As I mentioned, the customer has fun with coffee. They can blend and blend and blend. They actually create their own personal blend of coffee. This creates the loyalty, as they will return to you to create that same blend.

“Ultimately, the bins are there to sell coffee,” Oletic adds. “I prefer ‘free flow’ to portion control. Again, selling more coffee.”

And selling coffee is what these machines are engineered to do. All of Crown Plastic’s units allow for replacement of any moving parts, something others in the industry cannot typically offer, Von Beuskon says. They are also made in the USA, were Crown says it can custom design and manufacture

to meet specific space considerations upon request.

Bins from Plastic Parameters have a capacity ranging from 7 to 30 pounds. “Keep in mind that the actual weight will vary depending on the variety of roast,” Waldman says. “Our most popular bins sizes are 7- to 8-pound and 10- to 12-pound bins. This allows a bin to be refilled with a 5-pound refill before it becomes totally empty.”

GET THE RIGHT LOOK

Café owners should first look for a system that does the job it needs to do and offers a look as modern and contemporary as your shop—or that hint of coffee dispensing from days gone by.

Berardi’s Coffee’s, Cleveland, has acrylic bins that feature gold trim, sign holders and easy to operate spring-loaded dispensers in sizes ranging from 5 to 7 pounds.

Tope, of Toronto, has included a cylindrical shape in its lineup of dispensers. Its Cylindrical Bean Dispenser (or what it calls it TKBS 5silo) is portable for easy placement, refilling and cleaning. Each silo is made of Plexiglas, making it easy to clean and resistant to breakage. It also offers an 85 percent clear view at all times. A label can be affixed to each silo for easy batch identification, while its easy-discharge mechanism allows for quick access to the beans.

Plastic Parameters’ CF series of cylindrical dispensing systems are controlled-flow bins allowing the café owner to



A BALL-VALVE DISPENSER HELPS WORKERS AND CUSTOMERS MEASURE OUT BEANS ACCURATELY. Photo courtesy of Plastic Parameters

pre-determine the amount of beans dispensed. These CF units dispense approximately a quarter of a pound of beans with three turns of the handle.

Toper's rectangular coffee dispenser, the company says, is just as functional as it is beautiful. The TKBS 1 silo has all the

same features as its cylindrical counterpart, with a front glass view of beans and a deflector which gives the impression that the silo is always full. In addition to their solid construction, Crown Plastics' units, for example, also feature false fronts to give the units the appearance of being full even though they may be very well near empty.

ECO-COOL

Taking a cue from many eco-cool celebrity kitchens displaying rows of metal containers—even for coffee storage—many stores are opting for stainless-steel containers. Berardi's front-loading steel dispensers feature chrome frames, stainless steel construction, hammered brass, chrome, bright or antique copper face plates and coordinating name tags.

Similarly, Innovative Manufacturers' bins are faced with hammered brass/chrome/antique or bright copper plates.

This allows the shop owner to fill these units only to the level where the inventory is kept very fresh. A shop owner may want maintain the slower moving varieties to a lower level to insure quick product turns, thereby keeping their products at the peak of freshness.

According to the manufacturers, a café owner does not have to sacrifice fashion or function in its coffee bean dispensers. This appears to be one area where you can have it all. SCR