



EXCLUSIVE ARTICLE

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SHAPING THE AEROSOL INDUSTRY – a summary of the last 50 years: 1960-2010

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[908 words]

The aerosol was born in the 1920s from a simple desire by a Norwegian skier¹ to spray wax evenly on his skis. The idea grew slowly and it wasn't until after World War II, and the success of the Bug Bomb², that aerosols were successfully mass produced. The first aerosol produced in Australia was a can of Mortein™ flyspray in the early 1950s. This brand, like the aerosol package, has survived the test of time.

Today's aerosol offers the ultimate in modern, user-friendly technology. Recyclable and CFC free in Australia since 1989, it is one of the outstanding manufacturing concepts of modern times.

Over 12 billion aerosols are produced worldwide annually. In Australia, we use over 220 million of them each year – that's 10 aerosols for every man, woman and child. In the past fifty years, annual Australian aerosol fillings have grown from around five million cans to 230 million cans. Personal care aerosols take the major share of the market, followed by household products and insecticides.

The basic aerosol container has essentially remained the same, although there has been a progression from soldered to welded side seams on tinplate cans. This has enhanced the look of the aerosol as it allowed manufacturers to print almost seamless around the can. Manufacturers and marketers continue to innovate, introducing more shaped cans, novel actuators and decorative finishes. Notably, there has been a move away from lithographed tinplate cans to sleeved films. This has given the manufacturer the flexibility to buy unprinted cans and to change can designs more easily. The original small overcap used to cover just the nozzle made way for a full overcap and subsequently the integrated overcap (replacing the nozzle and cap) became popular. Packaging design has certainly started to change in the more recent past, and another innovation may be on the horizon, in the form of the plastic aerosol.

During the mid 1990s, our industry changed. Having had a fairly insular existence, the Australian industry became part of the global market. This allowed multinational companies to introduce global formulations and international products, not necessarily formulated or manufactured in Australia. Multinationals closed the doors of their New Zealand manufacturing operations in the late 1980s and consolidated their manufacturing for both countries in Australia. Sadly, the general trend since then has been one of reduced ownership and manufacture in Australia. This move also impacted the local advertising industry, as multinationals used global advertisements rather than specific local ones.

The effect of globalisation has been felt in Australia and around the world. Companies and brands have changed hands and there have been many takeovers:

- Proctor and Gamble now own brands like Gillette and Wella, two previously independent companies. Their recent purchase of Ambi Pur™ from Sara Lee adds a major aerosol air freshener brand to their offering.
- Unilever continues to dominate the deodorant and body fragrance markets with brands like Rexona™, Dove™ and Impulse™. They too have also recently acquired products from Sara Lee.
- S C Johnson, the largest global aerosol company, purchased Baygon and Autan from Bayer a few years ago. More recently their purchase of the New Zealand automatic aerosol insecticide, Robocan™, and investment in Raid Automatic™ has contributed to aerosol growth here in Australia.
- Samuel Taylor, the pioneering local aerosol company that filled the first Australian aerosols and gave birth to the brand names of Mortein™, Aerogard™ and Mr Sheen™, was taken over by Reckitt and Colman, now Reckitt Benckiser.
- Samuel Taylor phased out of making aerosol valves, paving the way for Precision Valve to become the dominant Australian valve manufacturer.
- Locally-listed can manufacturer, Containers Ltd was absorbed into a larger packaging group and has since become part of the European Impress.
- Tinsplate for aerosol cans was made by BHP (later Bluescope) at Port Kembla, but this operation ceased a few years ago meaning that tinsplate is now wholly imported.
- NCI, Orica and Origin Energy are now the only Australian-listed companies that have major aerosol interests.
- Contract packing is an important part of the aerosol scene through companies like Pax, Ensign Laboratories, Multi Fill and Aaron Laboratories. These companies now fill for many well-known internationals.

Unfortunately, no industry is without its issues. Two unfortunate social issues, sniffing and graffiti, have been associated with aerosols, as well as other consumer products. Sniffing led to a Senate Select Committee enquiry and subsequently to the propellant declaration on all aerosols. Graffiti has led to lockup requirements of spray paints in some states.

Regulatory challenges have continually increased, proving costly and time consuming to the industry. In the 1960s, most legislation was state-based. There has been steady change to national legislation although there are still areas where state legislation applies. Areas of considerable change range have occurred in the Transportation of Dangerous Goods, WorkCover, National Measurement, Graffiti legislation, Pesticides, ACCC with an unseeing end to the release of reviews and position papers for comment.

The Aerosol Association of Australia was formed in 1964 and so is also approaching its 50th year. From what was essentially a technical group covering industry issues, the Association has evolved to assist and promote the aerosol industry and the unique aerosol package. The Association fosters high industry standards, provides technical and legal guidance, offers industry training, whilst maintaining its focus on its unique regulatory industry issues. To know more about the aerosol industry, contact the Aerosol Association of Australia on 02 9633 9011 or www.aerosol.com.au.

1. *Eric Rotheim*
2. *a product that saved many U.S. soldiers from malaria*

Ends

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Aerosol fillings graph follows.

Australian Aerosol Filling 1961 - 2006

Source: Aerosol Association of Australia Inc.

