

Plastic Packaging: Thermoformed Plastic Trays and Pallets

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Feb. 8, 2008 - [PRLog](#) -- Heavy gauge thermoforming is as much a staple to the returnable plastic packaging industry as Chevy is to General Motors. It's always been there, not known for its cutting edge design but more because it is solid, durable, and dependable. Thermoforming plastic trays and pallets can also be misunderstood. It remains one of the longest lasting and reasonably priced returnable packaging products available yet customers are reluctant to try it. Why?

Research has shown that many people assume plastic trays and pallets made via heavy gauge thermoforming have the same high priced tooling as injection molding. Further, many folks are convinced the tooling takes just as long to produce. This is not true. Returnable plastic trays and pallets come with a moderate tooling charge (usually less than \$7500) and can be made in 4 weeks or less, depending on the design.

Here are 10 tips regarding thermoformed plastic trays and pallets your salesman would rather you not know about:

1. Provide the actual product you need packaged to your supplier. This allows the supplier to see, touch, and feel the product and design the plastic tray or plastic pallet accordingly. You'll get a better initial design and a firmer price quote.
2. Assess if your actual product can be stacked upon and support weight. If this is possible, your returnable plastic trays will not need to be as deep which means a smaller plastic tray and a lower price per tray.
3. Design returnable plastic trays and plastic pallets that are stackable and nestable. This means that the plastic trays and plastic pallets can stack when fully loaded and nest inside each other when empty. Nested thermoformed plastic trays and plastic pallets take up less space and save on both storage and freight costs.
4. Consider having the thermoformed plastic trays marked with a stripe at least 1 inch wide and running either the entire length or width in a different color than the plastic trays. These stripes help your operators know when the plastic trays are loaded or empty, saving in labor costs and storage efficiency.
5. Ask for concept sketches with overall dimensions of your plastic trays or plastic pallets before proceeding with a production order. This helps everyone remain clear on how the plastic trays or plastic pallets need to look and function.
6. Make a production tool for your thermoformed plastic trays instead of a wood prototype tool if possible. Prototype tooling is very rough and takes about 2 weeks to make. Production tooling can be modified and adjusted, within reason. This speeds up the overall design and production schedule and saves on the additional cost of a prototype tool which is worthless after it is used once.
7. Evaluate different thicknesses of plastic once your production tooling is done. If a thermoformed plastic tray or plastic pallet could be made using thinner material this will save money. It is also possible a thicker material will perform better after thermoforming. You can see the difference and make an educated decision before running a large quantity.
8. Mark your thermoformed plastic trays or plastic pallets with an identification stamp or insert plate that has your company name, address, and any other important information such as Property of XYZ Corporation. This will help assure that the plastic trays or plastic pallets are returned to the correct address when empty.
9. Ask your supplier if they will purchase your thermoformed plastic trays or plastic pallets for recycling if and when they become obsolete. The price paid will be a scrap value but it is better than nothing.

10. Consider purchasing 10-25 extra plastic trays or pallets with your initial order for emergencies. Most companies misplace plastic trays and pallets and it is much more cost effective to run them in a larger quantity than having to pay for a special run later on.

Thermoformed Plastic Trays and Pallets Conclusion:

If shipping parts to a dedicated customer or destination on a regular basis, consider thermoformed plastic trays and pallets as a packaging solution. While they aren't indestructible, they can handle normal abuse and easily pay for themselves within 1 to 1 ½ years. As always, rely on your packaging professional for guidance and direction.

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