



Session: **Bin Jiang: The impact of innovation and sustainability in packaging**

With Shannon Curran, Michael Ireland and Bin Jiang

- Shannon Curran Hey everyone! Welcome to the Packaging Unwrapped podcast. This is Shannon Curran, and I'm joined today by my co-host, Michael Ireland. We're talking with Bin Jiang, our Director of Global Sourcing and Product Development. Welcome to the podcast, Bin!
- Bin Jiang Hello, Shannon. Hello, Michael. Thank you for having me here.
- Shannon Curran Thanks for joining us. So excited to have you. So, that's a big title: Director of Global Sourcing and Product Development. Can you give us a little bit of your background and what that means?
- Bin Jiang Sure. So, I have been with Veritiv for 12 years in lots of different roles, including operation, design, product development, marketing, engineering, and program management. I'm currently in charge of our global sourcing team. My team supports the procurement activities for the company outside of the North American market. After I got my master's degree in mechanical engineering, I started my first job at a leading semiconductor brand company as a mechanical analyst doing some performance simulation for product and packaging. I joined Veritiv in 2007, and have been here ever since then.
- Shannon Curran Thanks for sharing that. It sounds like packaging goes back pretty far for you. Tell us about growing up... what did you dream about being when you were a child? Has packaging always been part of that?
- Bin Jiang Probably not. So, when I was little, I always want to be an architect designer. I really enjoy traveling around the world to visit all kinds of cool buildings. It's fascinating to see all the smart design and beautiful architectures that were built, even many years back. The design part is definitely connected to the packaging side of the world
- Shannon Curran Yeah... design, structure. I could totally see that. In talking about your childhood, who's influenced you the most in your life?
- Bin Jiang My father. I've learned a lot of things from him. The most important thing that I learned from him is really the willingness to contribute... to devote and sacrifice. That's been rooted so deeply with me. And I always want to offer help and try to be a good citizen and, play an active role in my community.
- Shannon Curran I can tell you, just by being able to work with you in this past year... you reflect all that you admire in your dad. It's been a great journey working with you on sustainability. Thank you. His influence, where you've come from... how does that impact your approach to what you're learning and how your team stays on top of things? What drives you and your team?

Bin Jiang I think a few things. Probably the most important thing is feeling passionate about what you're doing. We're very lucky to have a group of very passionate individuals that are really trying to find the best solution and do the right things. We are very lucky. We work with a group of top tier customers who are also very passionate and constantly pushing for innovation and more sustainable options. So with all of their push, we got a lot of chances to touch new things... learn about new materials and work together as a team figuring out a better solution. And keep challenging ourselves until we find the best solution for that problem.

Shannon Curran Having that inspiration around you all the time—it sounds like an amazing team to work with. You talked about your top tier customers, I don't want to go into too many specifics, but can you give us some examples of the markets you support?

Bin Jiang So, we are supporting lots of customers in the consumer electronics, retail industry. That's probably one of the most complex markets involving multiple materials, multiple substrates. Multiple material development solutions is the nature of every single project we're supporting. How to combine those materials to put together the best solution—to be able to address unique and specific issues... not only from packaging development perspective, but also from a manufacturer perspective. Those are all lot's of different values that our team has added to our customers.

Shannon Curran Gotcha. That's a great transition into what I wanted to ask you next. And you've touched on it a little bit. But what are the some of those key challenges—not even challenges but opportunities too, that you see your customers facing or running after right now?

Bin Jiang Well the top one is sustainability. So, every customer we're supporting today are trying to find a better and more sustainable solution for their packaging categories. At the same time, finding that right material, and also find a scalable production capability worldwide, can be very challenging. At the same time, I think how to manage the business more efficiently, to reduce the overall lead time of product development... catching up the short lead time for a production schedule to launch a new product. And of course, continue working on improvement from a design engineering perspective year over year—smaller size, smaller space, how to reduce total logistic and supply chain cost. Those are all big challenges we're facing and our customers are asking for support.

Michael Ireland How do you bring new ideas and innovation to those needs that they're bringing to you?

Bin Jiang We have a group of awesome solution providers with very strong material, engineering, design and global supply chain background and expertise. We have some really good problem solvers. I think the mentality of standing on top of the problem and being able to find an appropriate solution for those problems is probably the top one thing we feel we can help our customer with the most. Secondly, we are very aggressive and passionate about new product development. We have a dedicated team working on new product development pipeline management. So, we present our pipeline to our customers on a regular basis to brainstorm new ideas, potential applications, then tell the good options versus the not so good directions. After we got all the awesome feedback from the industry leaders, we will then continue our developmental journey to finish off the validation, qualification and start implementation.

Shannon Curran And in talking about those challenges and opportunities, you had mentioned sustainability. I want to dive back into that a little bit deeper, because, like I said earlier, I've had the pleasure

of working with you on our sustainability platform that we've been trying to build within the company. A lot of folks have been using the term Life Cycle Analysis. I know you and the team have put a renewed focus on Life Cycle Analysis. For those that might not know about it, can you explain what LCA is, and how it helps customers or clients and value that brings to them?

Bin Jiang Life Cycle Analysis is probably the most data driven method for customers to use to make their decision around the material choices. This is the tool that gives you a cradle to grave analysis, including manufacturing, conversion, distribution, and even end of life. So you have a full spectrum of your material potential impact for the environment. By having the Life Cycle Analysis tool with the set of data that's in front of you, this is probably the best way for you to decide which material is better than the ones you're using today. Or maybe better in some perspective, and worse in another perspective. With that data, it covers all the different perspectives—from water consumption, energy consumption, and greenhouse gas emission impact. Again, it depends on your company's priority... you can pick and choose the data that can best contribute to your company's goals and objectives around sustainability.

Shannon Curran Yeah, all about making better decisions. Right?

Bin Jiang Exactly.

Shannon Curran Are there other tech tools solutions out there that you're either working on or learning about that you can share with us today?

Bin Jiang So, one of the most fascinating projects our team is working on is the ocean bound plastic solution. Not every problem is the same... there's not one single solution that fits all the needs in the packaging world. We were lucky to be introduced by one of our top tier customer into this ocean bound plastic solution platform. We have started to work with collection centers in Indonesia, and converters in the local area as well who convert the ocean bound collected bottles into resin and pellets. Then we coordinate the distribution and importation into our Asia converter base, and then convert them into thermoform trays for our customer. We've done a lot of different development around the most percentage of ocean bound plastics recycled content. We can add it into the raw materials to increase the usage of the ocean bound plastic material. This is probably one of the coolest projects that our team feels happy to support.

Shannon Curran That's a huge problem, right? Ocean bound plastics is obviously a huge problem. And maybe that's the answer to my next question, but you tell me... what's one problem you wish you could solve in packaging right now?

Bin Jiang Well, I think everybody talks about plastic problems. So, in solving the plastic problem, I think there are many different paths to take to find potential solutions for. Ocean bound plastics is one of the directions where you can try to consume waste and turn it into something useful. This is probably one of the perfect cases to try to build a circular economy. Use recycled and reclaimed material and just avoid the material dumping into the landfill. The second direction, we're also putting a lot of effort around finding fiber-based material alternatives to replace plastic or resin based materials. We're working on several material alternative evaluation projects with our consumer electronics industry customers... trying to evaluate if some of the fiber-based material can be a good alternative to replace the current plastic bags they're using. So, we're evaluating the performance through abrasion testing, vibration, and try to

really replicate the transportation evaluation testing to make sure the new materials can perform just as well as plastic.

Shannon Curran

There's so much to think about there... you want to make sure that the product gets to the customer. And we're helping those businesses to make sure their products are getting to their customers safely. Because if it gets there and it's damaged, then you have all those returns. And that's against sustainability, all in and of itself right there. But then also making it easy for that customer to make that decision when they get that package. They open it up—there's that experience they have—and then I know for myself, in particular, I open a package and I look at it. And if I see a ton of plastic bags and everything, I know I can recycle some of this... I have to figure that part out, look for those numbers. And if there's any way we can make it easier for them to open that box up and see something that... yep! Goes right to the curb to be recycled, it's so much easier. The easier you can make it, the better efforts and end results you're going to have.

What's one of the biggest misunderstandings or common misunderstandings about the packaging industry right now?

Bin Jiang

When I first joined Veritiv, one of the things that I heard the most from our customers initially was, *oh, packaging is easy*. Packaging is always the last thing people think about when they are planning for a new product release. When I started to get deeper into the packaging industry, it is a very engineering and a science based industry—like many other industries, from material science, to design engineering, to all the testing simulation. So there are a lot of very data driven science behind the packaging. Just because it's used to pack product doesn't mean it's easy.

Shannon Curran

Not at all. Not at all. No, it just like we were talking... all the all the little facets you have to think of from beginning to end, just in the packaging in and of itself. It, yeah, I love your comment. It needs to come and be part of the process of the beginning instead of the afterthought. And the the scurry. The scurry of getting it getting it right.

I feel like I might know this answer, but I'm curious, what do you love most about your job and the work that you're doing?

Bin Jiang

So I think the part I like I like the most is really the people. That's also one of the things I feel very lucky about since I joined Veritiv for these 12 years. I've worked with many super passionate and smart and capable people. Having a great team to work with that kind of motivate me all the time throughout my years with Veritiv. So I can't be asking for a better company with these awesome people.

Shannon Curran

That what's the saying? You're a reflection of how many people you surround yourself with every day. I don't know that... I don't remember the exact number. But it's true. You know, when you surround yourself with smart, passionate people. Even if you are already, it continues to rub off, you know, back and forth and back and forth. It just generates that awesome environment and feeling and it just keeps you going. And even when you're so tired, it's like nope, I've got the drive.

Is there anything else big right now that you'd like to discuss?

Bin Jiang

I think one of the really strategic initiatives narrative is driving this year is really around our

sustainability strategy development. We have started our sustainability, working group since last year. We build a pretty good foundation. We know we're heading to the right direction. This year we are putting together a more specific execution plan. So if you're interested to know more about Veritiv's sustainability strategy, visit the sustainability web page through the veritivcorp.com web page.

Michael Ireland

What are one of the top one or two questions you get asked most right now?

Bin Jiang

Recently, the top one question I got asked most is, what sustainable material options do you have to replace my current material?

Shannon Curran

Yeah, it's hot.

Bin Jiang

Everybody's trying to find the better solutions, the best thing I can say about the Veritiv platform, is that we do have a very responsible platform we build throughout these years. So we have access to lots of great planners and manufacturers worldwide, who you know, come to their active with their new innovation and best of material offerings. At the same time, we are working with a group of very awesome and industry leading customers. We are really the party connecting the dots together. You know, we're very confident that we can always identify the most appropriate solution for our customer. That's also kind of aligned with the direction our company's heading to around, you know, change the perception from a traditional distribution business model into a packaging solution provider model.

Shannon Curran

Right. What is your opinion on the state of packaging as a whole?

Bin Jiang

People are looking for innovation and the sustainable solutions. There's a lot of new development around material—bio based plastics—even circular economy supply chain programs. How to apply more recycled material into the production and try to reclaim and reuse them. At the same time, there are some pretty sustainable material we're already using day in, day out. Corrugated being one of them. While people are looking for new solutions, they tend to forget about some of the good things we're already doing and are using. I think there are some pretty good solutions were using today already, you know, like corrugated. And you know, of course, we want to continue to development around new material and new innovation—try to bring better and more sustainable solution.

Shannon Curran

Bin I can't tell you what a pleasure it's been to connect with you and have this interview today. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us. If folks have questions. How would you like them to reach out to you?

Bin Jiang

They can reach out to me through my company email or LinkedIn.

Shannon Curran

We'll make sure we put those in the in the show notes. Thank you again, it was so enlightening. I'm excited about what you're bringing to packaging, you and your team, and it was such a pleasure. Thank you.

Bin Jiang

Thank you.

