

PAPERBOARD PACKAGING COMPETITION

Rules & Guidelines



ABOUT THE COMPETITION

The Paperboard Packaging Council's (PPC) Annual Paperboard Packaging Competition is the premier competition for converters of paperboard packaging. Judged by a diverse panel of packaging experts, the competition reflects the evolving trends in carton design and showcases the industry's commitment to innovation and advancement.

The competition celebrates excellence in beauty, innovation, sustainability, and craftsmanship, highlighting the strengths of paper-based packaging within the supply chain. Each entry is evaluated on innovation, craftsmanship, and impact, ensuring that the most transformative designs receive top honors.

Companies of all sizes, from global publicly traded organizations to small independent box shops, are encouraged to participate. All entries are judged equally, with converter names and printed logos kept anonymous to ensure a fair and unbiased selection process.

PREPARING YOUR ENTRY

ELIGIBILITY

By submitting an entry into the competition, each member confirms that the entry represents the member's original design; that all information, descriptions, and explanations provided are true and accurate; and that no aspect of the design, information, descriptions, explanations, or any other material included with the entry violates or infringes upon the intellectual property rights (including any patent, trademark, copyright, or trade secrets) of any other person or entity.

In addition, all entries must adhere to the following criteria:

- **Any package produced in a PPC's members facility (domestic or global) is qualified.** To win a top award, the package must have been commercialized (sold) by the member to another organization.
- Packages must have been **produced and commercialized** (sold) by PPC members for the first time between **January 1, 2025, to May 1, 2026** (excluding the self-promotional category).
- Packages must consist of at least **50% paperboard by weight**. Laminated grades incorporating **E-flute, F-flute, and other micro-flute corrugated** qualify, as do **molded fiber** components.
- **Prototypes and pre-commercialization concepts are not eligible** to enter.
- Entries must not have been submitted into a previous PPC competition.
- **Self-promotion packages**—designed specifically to showcase a member's capabilities—are **eligible for Excellence or Gold Awards** but are not eligible for a top award other than a **Judge's Award**. These packages do not need to be sold or commercialized in the traditional sense.

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Rules & Guidelines

SUBMISSION CRITERIA



All submissions must include an entry write-up submitted through Judgify, our online competition platform, and include a minimum of the following to qualify: **Package Name, Client Name, Product Retail Category, Judging Category, Paperboard Description, and Executive Summary.**

Each form field in the entry submission form has been thoughtfully created to tell the story of your entry to the judges, and each write-up is covered in detail during the judges' process. **To ensure equity across submissions, each write-up question will be limited to 250 words, except for the Elevator Pitch, which will be limited to 150 words.** The more thorough and compelling the write-up, the better the judges will understand your entry's development, objectives, and impact.

You should be prepared to answer the following:

- **Main Company Contact Information:** We'll contact this person for any questions regarding your entry and will send them information later if you win an award.
- **Package Information:** Package Name, Client Name, Retail Category, Award Category. Make sure the package and client names are accurate—we'll use this information in all future promotions and publications.
- **Designer Names:** Full names and companies for your structural designers and graphic designers. We'll use this if you order an award for them in the future.
- **Materials:** Type of paperboard and any other materials you used with a short description explaining why you made that selection.
- **Elevator Pitch (required):** Why does this submission deserve to win a top award? No more than 150 words.
- Discuss the **concept and design** (graphic and structural) and how it fulfilled the customer's objective. Include any special or hidden features of the package that may not be readily apparent.
- Discuss the **converting process**. Include steps and how your facility leveraged its equipment, people, and processes that led you to fulfilling the customer objectives.
- Discuss the **distribution and fulfillment** process including palletization, cubing, and any significant material savings as a result.
- Discuss the **shelf appeal and user experience**. Explain how the design stands out visually and/or encourages consumer interaction. Highlight any unique aesthetic elements or tactile features that enhance engagement.
- Please attach any relevant photos (max. size 5 MB). Videos are not accepted.
In addition to the write-up, physical samples must be shipped to PPC Headquarters to complete the entry. Please note that samples will not be returned after shipment. Samples should include a minimum of:
 - At least two assembled cartons (**one with product if not perishable**)
 - At least two flats of every size

Physical samples should be mailed to:

Paperboard Packaging Council
1350 Main Street, Suite 400
Springfield, MA 01103

The identity of participating converters is intended to remain

anonymous to the judges. Please cover your logo, including dielines wherever possible, and omit your company name in the write-up (excluding the self-promotion category). We do encourage you to specify the brand of paperboard used, even if it was produced by your own company.

JUDGING PROCESS

The competition is evaluated by a diverse panel of packaging professionals including designers, retailers, consultants, retired PPC members, and professors, all with expertise in folding cartons and paperboard packaging. This panel reflects different functions and positions in the packaging value chain. To ensure impartiality, no current employees of member companies or PPC staff are allowed to participate in the judging process.

Judging is to be conducted blindly with the identity of converters being anonymous to the judges. They read through submissions and have meaningful conversations to ask questions, draw comparisons, and then score each design.

— Judging Session Phase 1: Preliminary Judging

Scoring Process for Gold and Excellence Awards

Judges work in teams to evaluate entries, scoring them according to established criteria, awarding up to four points awarded in each category. Entries are ranked by numerical score, from highest to lowest to determine Gold and Excellence award status.

- **Excellence Awards:** Approximately 30% of entries, based on their scores, receive an Excellence Award.
- **Gold Awards:** About 30% of the highest-scoring packages are awarded Gold Awards. While not always the case, Top Awards are typically selected from among the Gold winners.

Judging Criteria:

I. Concept and Design

This category recognizes creative and technical efforts that lay the foundation for exceptional packaging. Entries should highlight graphic and structural design and problem-solving approaches that achieve both functional and aesthetic excellence.

II. Converting

This category recognizes production achievements that push the boundaries of quality and efficiency. Entries should demonstrate how facilities leveraged equipment, workforce, and processes to drive innovation and achieve superior packaging results.

III. Distribution, Fulfillment & Retail (Post-Shipping Impact)

This category recognizes packaging solutions that transform how consumer goods companies and retailers bring products to market. Judges will evaluate innovations that enhance shipping efficiency, space utilization, logistics, and shelf presence.

IV. Shelf Appeal and User Experience (new in 2025)

This category recognizes packaging designs that excel in visual appeal and structural ingenuity. Entries should showcase exceptional aesthetics and/or interactive elements that engage consumers and elevate the overall experience.

— Judging Session Phase 2: Final Judging

Top Awards

Final entry scores are tallied to identify highest ranking submissions that will receive Gold and Excellence Award recognition. Once these entries are identified, the judges meet as a group to discuss each of the highest-ranking submissions to identify winners for top award categories:

- Paperboard Package of the Year
- Folding Carton of the Year
- Rigid Box of the Year
- Digital Application Award of the Year
- Innovation Award of the Year
- Sustainability Award of the Year
- Richard DePaul Award for Creative Converting and Design
- Judges' Awards

Each top award winner will be notified that they've won prior to the awards ceremony at **PPC's Fall Meeting & Leadership Conference**. There, they will receive recognition from the stage for their award, and a representative from their team will be invited to present on the conference's designer panel. All top award winners will receive a custom crystal trophy to be shipped following the awards ceremony.

The winning carton will also be featured in the annual competition magazine, annual competition video, on the PPC website, PPC social media channels, and in the press throughout the year. Top award winner's write ups will be publicly shared as a reference for future participants in the following year's competition.

AWARD CATEGORY DESCRIPTIONS

All entries will be automatically considered in the general award category. In addition, you may select award categories to also be considered in: Innovation and Sustainability.

Digital Application Category:

Awards in the Digital Application Category recognize innovative use of variable images and data. Entries may receive Excellence or Gold awards in the Digital Application Category, and the top entry will receive the 2026 Digital Award. *To qualify for this award, the package must have been sold commercially; no self-promotional entries qualify for this award. This award is not guaranteed in each competition and will be awarded at the judges' discretion.*

Innovation Category:

Awards in the Innovation Category recognize new and unique package or graphic design, converting techniques, or other concepts otherwise new to the industry. Entries may receive Excellence or Gold awards in the Innovation Category, and the top entry will receive the 2026 Innovation Award. *To qualify for this award, the package must have been sold commercially; no self-promotional entries qualify for this award.*

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Sustainability Category:

Awards in the Sustainability Category recognize extremely sustainable packaging, outstanding use of paperboard in replacing a non-paperboard substrate, other innovative materials, and/or the fostering of materials reductions for better cubing. Entries may receive Excellence or Gold awards in the Sustainability Category, and the top entry will receive the 2026 Sustainability Award. *To qualify for this award, the package must have been sold commercially; no self-promotional entries qualify for this award.*

When the entry is a redesign of a previous package, please send the old package if possible. If not, photos/drawings of the “before” and “after” packages are highly encouraged.

Richard DePaul Award for Creative Design & Converting (Structural Award)

The Richard DePaul Award honors the legacy of the late Dick DePaul, a renowned industry veteran and longtime judge of the PPC's competition. This award recognizes entries that demonstrate exceptional creativity and craftsmanship in structural design and for groundbreaking concepts. *To qualify for this award, the package must have been sold commercially; no self-promotional entries qualify for this award. This award is not guaranteed in each competition and will be awarded at the judges' discretion.*

Judges' Award

The Judges' Award is a special recognition given to entries that stand out as personal favorites among the judging panel, showcasing remarkable creativity, innovation, or craftsmanship that may not align perfectly with other award categories or eligibility. *All entries are eligible.*