



## PACKAGING

Gail Powell

# Grab-N-Go Grilled Cheese

*New microwavable pocket is a perfect fit for today's "heat-n-eat" culture*

"The microwave is currently seen for three things," says Dan Keefe, marketing director for Georgia-based Graphic Packaging International (GPI). "Reheating beverages, popcorn and for reheating leftovers. GPI is striving to extend the reach of microwaves and in essence help consumers get over some of those bad experiences and past perceptions."

With the help of GPI's patented microwavable packaging technology called Quilt Wave, Vancouver-based Sepps Gourmet Foods developed North America's first microwavable grilled cheese sandwich. Consumers will now be able to take this sandwich from freezer to microwave to table in about one minute.

Even without an embedded image of the Virgin Mary, Sepps microwavable grilled cheese sandwich cooks up crispy and that, in itself, is nothing short of a miracle.

"We did a lot of product formulation development to avoid a sandwich that was soggy or hard to chew," says Carl Tillberg, president of Sepps bakery division. "We're trying to replicate the frying pan experience as close as we can with just a little bit of crispiness, but not so crunchy that it's dry." When Tillberg and his team began working with grilled cheese sandwiches, they also faced the challenge of finding ways to retherm them properly.

Quilt Wave takes care of that. A combination of paper, plastic and metal make up each 4 1/2 inch x 6 inch Quilt Wave package. There's also another layer of film on the outside to provide that "cool to the touch" experience. It's this outside layer of film that starts out smooth and flush with the package then when microwaved becomes "quilted."

GPI's Keefe explains, "It's kind of like bubble wrap. It shrinks down around the sandwich creating air pockets of insulation, allowing consumers to reach into the microwave oven and grab the product. It's hot on the inside, but the outside of the pocket is cool enough to be handled safely." In order for the film on the inside to work to transfer the

heat to the product it has to be in touch with the product, says Keefe. He adds, "To help brown and control the moisture in the middle of the sandwich, the Quilt Wave sleeve shrinks down over top of the middle part while not overcooking the crust." The intent of the "quilting action" in the sandwich pocket is so that it conforms to the grilled cheese sandwich providing "good intimate contact."

To produce the grilled cheese sandwich, Sepps has modified existing equipment in its Burnaby, B.C., plant and will add a line or two (once the product launch is in full-swing) to the company's Toronto plant where it currently manufactures waffles and tortillas.

With the Quilt Wave package itself, there's an "ease of machinability," says Tillberg. "We don't need any special forming or sealing equipment. We run it on the flow wrapper."

The two companies admit that the marriage between the sandwich and the Quilt Wave wrap is what makes this product successful. "The film technology really works well if the product is consistent and that means it has to be grilled properly," shares Tillberg.

While Sepps is mainly focussing on C-Store and foodservice applications in Western Canada this month (January), the graphics on the package provide maximum flexibility for many applications, including retail and vending operations.

"The product is not simply a convenience item for the consumer, it's a convenience item for operators, owners and C-stores," says Tillberg. "It's a broad application of convenience."

The company is currently working on formulating the product for stateside customers and will test market it in Washington and Oregon this spring.

So with over two billion grilled cheese sandwiches consumed each year in the U.S., one can only ask...Got Ketchup?



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*Gail Powell is a Georgetown, Ont.-based freelance writer/editor.*