What’s In A Box?

Creating a Sustainable Model for Carr’s Crackers in 2016

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Overview

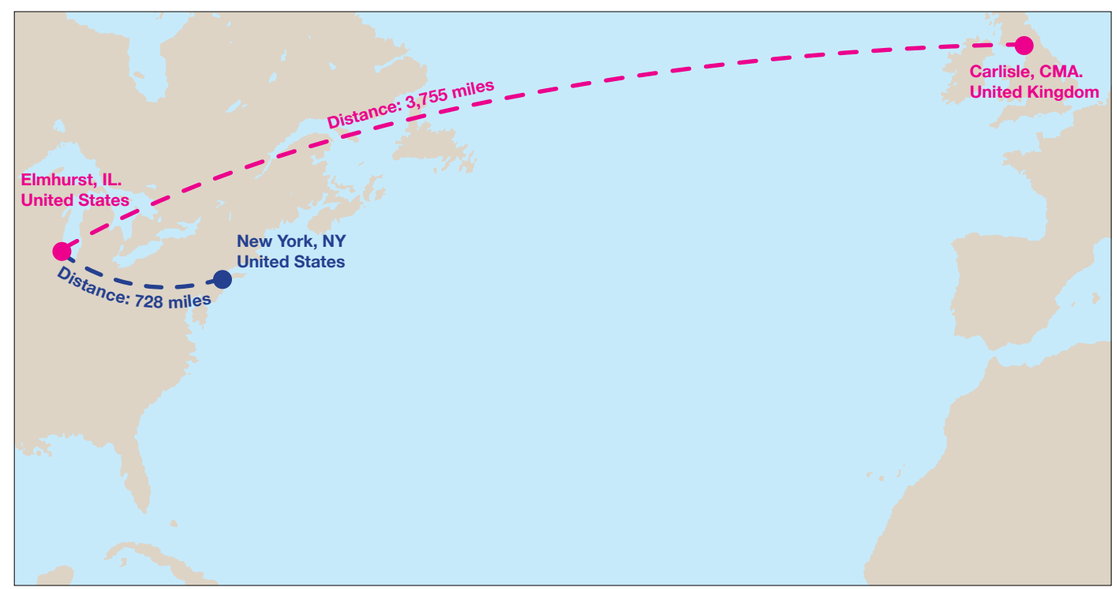
Carr’s Table Waters crackers are classic. Since 1831, they have remained virtually unchanged in both their form and function. The character of these crackers lies in their subtle texture and ability to accommodate virtually any topping. They also possess an above average shelf life for a cracker.

So, what’s in a box?

38 crackers sealed in plastic. Next comes clay-coated card stock printed with 4 color process inks and 1 or 2 spot color inks. The yellow may actually be the yellow in the 4 color process. Around the box, there is a layer of tightly folded plastic.

The crackers are made of 4 basic ingredients (Flour, Water, Oil, Salt). They are baked and packaged in a factory in Carlisle, England. The packages are then shipped to North America and distributed by a firm in Illinois. In all the crackers travel about 5,000 miles to my local market.

Carr’s Table Water Crackers. The classic. Accept no substitute!



The entire trip of a box of Carr’s Table Water Crackers. From the factory to my doorstep.

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“How is this Box like an Onion?…”

Because the stuff we leave around has a cumulative effect on the earth, the first order of action is to jump right into one of the 5Rs of great design and “Reduce” what goes into the package.

Step 1. Take the top layer of plastic off. It seems to serve no function other than water resistance and because the plastic is folded and glued (often leaving tiny lacerations in the folds) it isn’t much good for that either. If there is some kind of issue with container (moisture, etc.) then try to find a better way to seal the boxes and palettes, but more about that later.

Step 2. The layer of petroleum-based plastic surrounding the crackers should be replaced with PLA. This will allow the product to breath, but also protecting it from moisture.

Box with and without plastic layer. Looks the same, doesn’t it?

38 crackers sealed in a pretroleum-based plastic to protect from moisture. PLA could be implemented instead with no change to overall execution.

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Full Coverage

Step 3. Let’s “Shrink the Ink”. As the box stands, it’s printed in 4-color process with 1 metallic spot color[1]. By changing the yellow type white, the package can be printed in 3 colors total. The gold remains where it is. The black and brown are used to create a duotone cracker as well as a rich black[2]. It is also possible (though admittedly hard) to print on uncoated stock in order to allow the packaging to be more readily recyclable.

As for ink coverage, everybody loves a full colored box and the design of the product creates a system from this (the black box, the white box, the green box, the red box). If we limit the ink coverage to a smaller area of the box for example, to the field around the Queen’s seal, the remaining type can be printed in black and a system can remain. Perhaps it wouldn’t be as flashy, but it could, nonetheless, be regal and respectful to the brand while increasing the box’s ability to be recycled.

A smaller change would be to use the 4-color process, but instead of using a metallic, the gold could be mimicked. There is such little coverage on the box, that it’s usefulness as an actual metallic ink is lost.

Figure 1. Box as it now stands.

Figure 2. Box recreated in 3 colors.

Figure 3. 3 color box with reduced ink coverage. The black field around the logo and royal seal can change colors to serve brand extensions.

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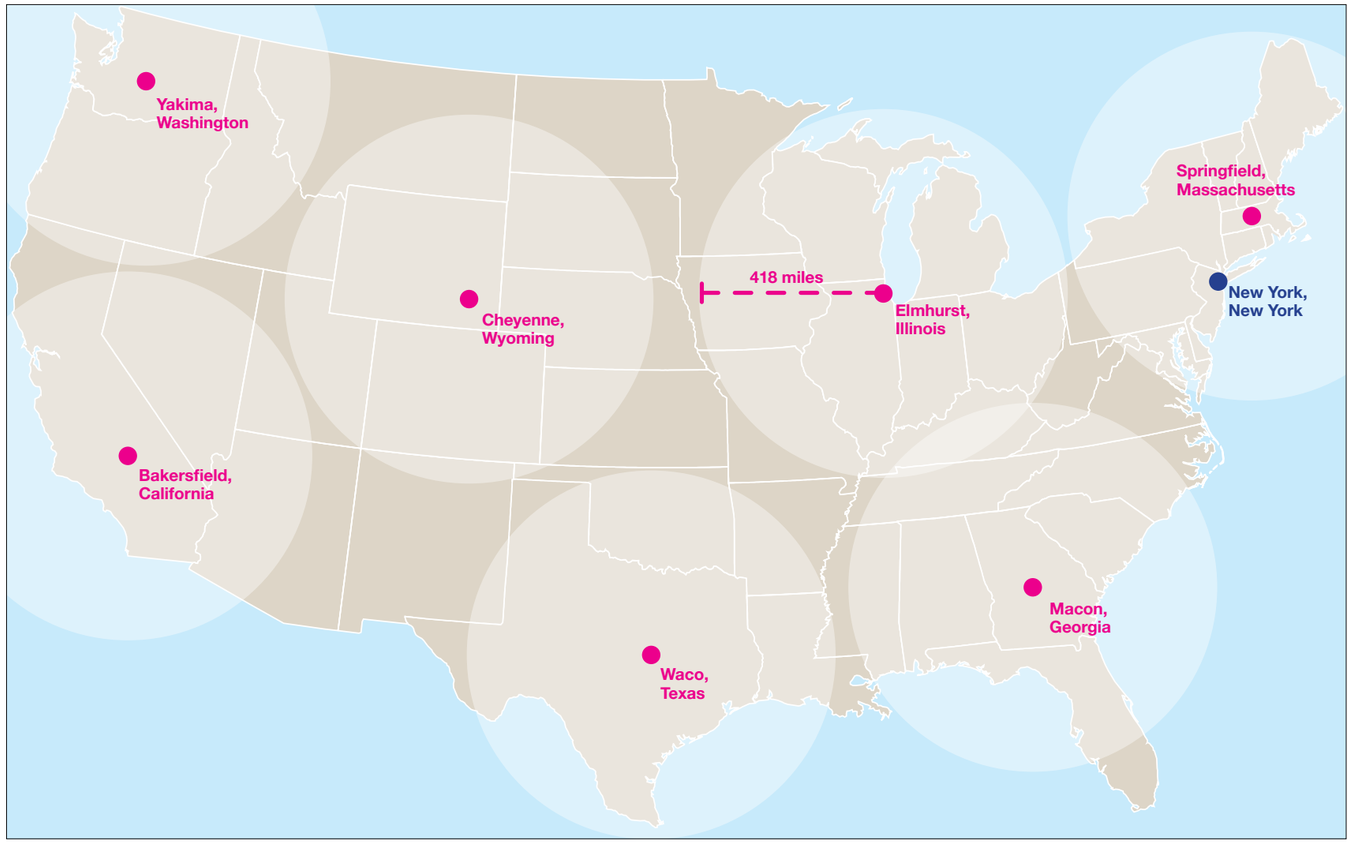
Distribution

Because we take too much irreplaceable stuff from the earth, the second order of action is to look at why these 4.25 oz boxes of crackers, need to travel 5,000 miles to get to my market. Once again, we need to "Reduce". But now we need to reduce what we use to move the package. The most notable stretch of the cracker's journey is the transatlantic boat ride it takes from England to the USA. To drop this leg could mean tremendous cost savings for the company from a traditional economic perspective as well as through the lens of natural capitalism.

Changing the business model can decrease the all around need for shipping. Since Carr's is owned by Kellogg's in the USA and the ingredients for the water crackers are very basic, there is no reason why the crackers can't be produced in North America. But, that doesn't mean just setting up a factory stateside. By taking a tip from the Anheuser-Busch InBev model, we can use the various Kellogg's factories around the country to produce Carr's for their regions. Therefor the recipe remains intact and industrial equipment is repurposed for the production of various styles of crackers and cookies. This would decrease shipping costs, as well as production costs and packaging costs because the right amount of crackers can be made for the right market at the right time.

Also, by keeping the baking technology "open access" between the brands, there will be more occasion for cross-pollination and innovation. The over-all efficiency of each factory could also increase, as well as the ability for these brands to move to sustainable and fair-trade ingredients.



Potential regional distribution overview, utilizing existing Kellogg's factories.