



# Child's Play

Lumber supplier solves its product packaging dilemma with oversized, thin-walled corrugated boxes

While the staggering choice and the technological wizardry of toys available to today's kids may be overwhelming for a vast majority of their parents, it may be reassuring for many of them to know that some classic old-time children's play-time companions—such as the good old wooden playhouse sets—are still very much around.

Founded in 1946, Mooresville, N.C.-based hardware retailer **Lowe's Companies, Inc.**—today ranking as the second-largest home improvement product retailer worldwide—has undoubtedly seen many trends come and go throughout its 60-year-plus history.

And through it all, the company stuck to its founding principles of offering consumers a good-quality product at the lowest possible price to steer itself to enviable market success, today ranking as the seventh-largest U.S. retailer.

Naturally, this success is in many ways dependent on cultivating good working relationships with reliable and trustworthy suppliers—such as the Mississauga, Ont.-headquartered **Rockett Lumber & Building Supplies Limited**.

Contracted to supply Lowe's with the finished wood pieces comprising the popular and affordable **My Very Own Playhouse** sets—retailing exclusively in the U.S.—Rockett Lumber has approached its production challenge as it would any other, more conventional jobs it does for its many customers in the residential housing construction industry, according to vice-president of operations Robert McLellan.

“Rockett Lumber's forté has always been about providing quality products for residential construction, like shipping lumber to builders,” McLellan told *Canadian Packaging* during a recent visit to the company's expansive, 14-acre production site in Mississauga, housing three manufacturing facilities that add up to 117,000 square feet of production space.

“We also do manufactured products like roof trusses, wall panels, floor systems and stairs.”

While making playhouse components accounts for a mere fraction of the company's business, according to McLellan, it is still an important product niche with promising growth possibilities.

“For the past two years, we've worked with a customer to create garden sheds, fence panels and even another version of the playhouse for the Big Box retail chain Home Depot,” says McLellan, explaining that all the playhouse components—including roofing shingles, primed exterior walls, pre-hung doors, etc.—must be fabricated in such a way as to enable kids to put a toy house together in about 90 minutes.

Originally, McLellan recalls, Rockett planned to ship the entire 25-piece, 160-pound, solid-wood construction kit to Lowe's by laying out the pieces flat and stretchwrapping the whole set by hand.

But as the customer's packaging requirements grew—namely by having to add different color labels to the packaging—applying top and side labels to the stretchwrap film by hand quickly turned into something of a packaging nightmare.

In addition, McLellan adds, stretchwrap film alone did not of-



Robert McLellan, vice-president of operations with Rockett Lumber (left) and Heather Phillips of the marketing firm, The Clarkson Group, show off the packaging created by Norampac for a wooden playhouse built for Lowe's.

fer adequate protection for the playhouse components against breakage and chipping during transport.

To overcome these shortcomings, McLellan summoned the help of Heather Phillips, a representative of Rockett's marketing firm, **The Clarkson Group**, to find a more suitable packaging alternative.

“We examined how other companies packaged outdoor furniture, and noticed that pretty much everything was packaged in boxes,” recalls Phillips. “And those products that were just machine-wrapped actually looked kind of shabby.”

After a thorough search for a suitable and reliable box option, Rockett ultimately turned to Canada's largest containerboard producer **Norampac Inc.**

“Except for Norampac, we found that other companies offered little support,” McLellan recounts. “Sure, the quotes would come back, but Norampac was the only one to actually come and see what it was we wanted to package; where that package where it was going; and what type of graphics we wanted on that package.”

Originally, Norampac suggested the use of a plain B-flute telescopic cover, recalls Norampac's technical sales rep Paul Prebianca, but soon realized that it would take five

passes through a labeler to attach the required five multicolor labels.

To resolve that, Prebianca suggested pre-printing the B-flute board in a four-color, flexographic press run.

“One of the things we needed to overcome was the sizing issue,” recalls Prebianca. “We were under strict orders that the packages needed to be able to stand two across in a trailer—and with each package coming in at 48-inches-wide, it left nearly nothing for the packaging itself.”

“To work within this parameter, we suggested a slight alteration to the packaging width, while continuing to use a B-flute telescopic body and cover.

“It's a thin corrugated cover, but then the internal pieces of the playground would sit snug enough in the package so that no additional padding or filler would be necessary to ensure product integrity,” states Prebianca, adding that the recent installation of a made-in-Germany flexographic folder/gluer/press from **BGM (Bahmüller Gopfert Maschinenbau) GmbH** at Norampac's Etobicoke facility in Toronto's west end helped bring the entire project to life.

“Since time was of the essence, we were able to quickly turn the project out with a pre-print run at our Etobicoke plant, consisting of 13,000 bodies and covers, in about a week-and-a-half,” Prebianca states.

McLellan concurs: “The finished product delivered by Norampac is simply stunning. Comparing what we were originally going to deliver to Lowe's to what they have now is



By using a thin B-flute corrugated cover, Norampac helped Rockett ensure that the wooden pieces of the playhouse set could sit safe and snug in the packaging without additional protective materials.

really like night and day.”

According to McLellan, Lowe's was impressed enough to talk about placing an order for another, more detailed playhouse set version for a shipment in 2008.

“And this time,” concludes McLellan, “we're much better armed with information and experience that should make it no problem to supply them with another playhouse in a visually stunning package.”



At its Mississauga facility, Slava Khabian, an assembler with Rockett, puts the final touches to a Dutch door, part of 13,000 solid wood playhouses constructed for Lowe's.

For more information on:

**Norampac Inc.**  
**BMG GmbH**

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