

Redesigning packaging with reduce, reuse, recycle in mind

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The AIP's executive director, Nerida Kelton, explains why the 5Rs are important for consumers.



Reduce, reuse and recycle are the three most important areas for long-term changes when it comes to packaging design.

As a consumer, you might have heard about the “Waste Hierarchy” and the 5Rs. From a consumer perspective they are:

- Refuse – do not purchase unwanted items.
- Reduce – eliminate single-use packaging wherever possible. This means declining plastic coffee cups, shopping bags, straws and buying products that are sustainable.
- Reuse products more than once. Purchase reusable water bottles, keep-a-cups, and recyclable shopping bags
- Recycle – ensure that you place your products in the recycling bins and purchase products that are recyclable. Look for products that are using the new Australasian Recycling Label

(ARL) to better understand the true recyclability of the materials.

- Repurpose – purchase products that are made from recycled materials – consciously purchase bags, shoes, furniture, jewellery that you know is made from recycled content.

Mindsets have shifted over the last few years, and globally consumers are actively driving brands and their packaging departments to supplement sustainable packaging design to incorporate the 5Rs and to redesign with environmental impacts in mind.

Packaging technologists are being asked to reconsider the outcomes of their packaging design all the way across the supply chain from manufacturing to recycling, and also consider a closed-loop and more circular approach. Packaging

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design can no longer be linear.

When discussing the waste hierarchy from a packaging design perspective, reduce, reuse and recycle are the three most important areas for long-term changes as they are the preventative measures with the highest level of impact.

Achievable steps for packaging technologists can include redesigning the shape and size of a product, reducing thickness and weight of materials, shifting to recyclable materials, and developing a closed-loop system for products. However, any adaptations to the packaging design, structure and form must not compromise the ultimate purpose of packaging, which is maintain the ability to protect, preserve, contain, communicate and transport a product to the consumer. First and foremost, packaging must remain fit-for-purpose before any structural changes are made to a pack. The AIP encourages all packaging teams to undertake a lifecycle assessment where possible before any pack is altered. A redesign feature of packaging that consumers are embracing is reuse whereby a customer can refill their products using the same packaging.

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It is important to note that reusable containers have less impact on the environment than one that is single use. Packaging technologists need to re-imagine their packaging for continued use and the ability to have multiple uses for the consumer.

Consumers are also driving the focus to what is really happening with packaging and the end of life. Packaging technologists are now being asked to stop and review their packaging and find out whether it is actually being recycled or landfilled in the country it is sold in. The availability of the APCO PREP tool enables this decision making. In addition, if the material is capable of being recycled in the country in which it is sold, then consumer waste and greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced across the lifespan of the product. This in turn achieves the

2025 National Packaging Targets that all brands are working towards.

If the material is unable to be recycled, then look at the possibility of moving to a recycled content, and even the use of renewable resource raw materials. Once again, the AIP urges consumers to undertake a full lifecycle assessment if possible, before moving to recycled content to determine if this is in fact the best decision for a product.

A recent example of the reuse, refill and recycle concept that has considered the product all the way through the supply chain is Cif ecorefill. Unilever announced on its global website the launch of Cif ecorefill, the new at-home technology that allows consumers to refill and reuse their Cif spray bottles for life. Cif has worked to create a no-mess solution, becoming the first

household cleaning brand to do so with this pioneering twist and click refill design. Made with 75 per cent less plastic, Cif ecorefill attaches to the current Cif Power & Shine bottles. Through its technology, it seamlessly releases the super-concentrated product into the bottle, which is filled with water at home. The ecorefills are 100 per cent recyclable once the plastic sleeves are removed and, by the end of 2020, the ambition is for all Cif ecorefills and spray bottles to be made from 100 per cent recycled plastic. Going smaller is certainly better – the ecorefills are lightweight and save on storage space. Diluting the product at home means 97 per cent less water is being transported, fewer trucks on the road and less greenhouse gas emissions.

Every day, more companies are announcing refillable packaging solutions including cosmetics and beauty, toiletries such as shampoo and soaps, cleaning products and beverages. The journey to sustainable packaging has only just begun and it is exciting to see what innovative designs packaging technologists are working on that address reduce, reuse, refill and recycle. **F**

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