

The Business Case for Zero Waste Design

Questions and Answers

The following Q&A comes from the chat box of a National Zero Waste Council Webinar titled *The Business Case for Zero Waste Design* (Nov.22, 2016). This featured pioneers in the field: Munu Hicken-Gabberia, President and CEO, Live For Tomorrow; Geoff Christou, Co-founder, Our Paper Life; and Jason Boyce, Sustainability Manager, Nature's Path. The webinar was moderated by Alan Blake, former Executive Director, PAC Next.

QUESTIONS FOR MUNU HICKEN-GABERRIA, LIVE FOR TOMORROW



Q: Munu, how does the product compare to the older laundry cleaning competitors on the shelf? (Jack Heath)

A: Our products are not only better for the user (gentle coconut-based cleaning agents, 100% pure essential oils – which are either food in personal care or food-grade products), but also better for the environment: concentrated, using less water, with a lower carbon-dioxide footprint and reusable/recyclable packaging.

On trend for today's consumers, Generation Z, 72% are more likely to support and pay more for products which come from companies committed to positive social and environmental outcomes (Nielsen, 2015). By comparison, the older products are toxic, do not address consumers' concerns regarding the ingredients and environment, and are all about price and performance.

Q: Can Jason or Munu comment on the use of standardized re-usable packaging such as glass mason jars. Are there benefits to using standardized (and proven) packaging like mason jars? (Geoff Christou)

A: (Munu) There is definitely value in using standardized packaging. However, any use would need to [include] directions of use, safety and other mandated or other information and branding. Our society has not yet evolved to a point where branding and packaging are unimportant.

QUESTIONS FOR GEOFF CHRISTOU, OUR PAPER LIFE



Q: What types of inks do you use on your cardboard? Do they impact recyclability? (Emily McGill)

A: The inks we used are water-based. Industry research states these are recyclable. A lot depends on the municipality that is doing the recycling and its capacity.

Q: Are you using any alternative fibres for your cardboard: e.g. hemp, agricultural waste, wheat? (Emily McGill)

A: No. Cardboard is made with almost all recycled content these days. We focus on delivering products made from cardboard and don't for see switching blends.

Q: Geoff, why does the corrugated industry not trumpet their close-to-100% PCR production success? (R. Brian Burke)

A: Brian, cardboard is a commodity so manufacturers are often simply intent on selling as much possible: with this numbers-approach the [post-consumer] recycled (PCR) content isn't really going to sell more for them. I can tell you they are proud of using 100% PCR though!

Q: Geoff, do you have a specific recycler for your product? Or, do you use one of the recyclers you would find at many industrial and commercial sites? (Jack Heath)

A: We ship our products all over North America and it is the end-user that does the recycling in those cases. In our own production facility, we use standard municipal recycling services, although we generate very little material for the recycling service as there a million uses for pieces of cardboard such as for packaging, shimming, etc.

Q: Geoff, please encourage the industry to supply you with stamps that add 100% PCR, along with bursting strength, etc. (R. Brian Burke)

A: Hi Brian. We don't want our raw corrugate to have any stamps on it, as this would compromise the final appearance of the items when we print and assemble them. Additionally because of the way our customers use the products, information like bursting strength is irrelevant (i.e to a conference display). This might be more relevant for consumer products like boxes though.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL PRESENTERS

Q: What do the presenters see as the major obstacles to adoption of similar product and packaging innovations by major brand owners and retail channels?

A: (Munu) The big challenge for brand owners is brand differentiation. Coca-Cola has spent billions on marketing and the brand. They have some standard items like the cans. However, they have vehemently protected infringement of the Coca-Cola glass bottle. If there was a move to standardization, how would the smaller brand owners or new products compete with the larger brands with deep pockets? I believe if we go down the standardization route, we should encourage re-use and move away from the “throw-away” culture. Retail channels will hate re-use, but prefer standardized packaging. The right solution might have to include both options.

A: (Christou) [Some] think there is a lack of clear reasons [as to] why major retailers or brands should go zero-waste: e.g. this might be thought of as a nuisance rather than an opportunity. But, beyond the environmental implications, there are cost-savings from increasing efficiency, as well as marketing potential.

Q: Each of your companies began with a sustainability approach, from the company’s inception. For an established company, with status quos of how things are done, where would you suggest they start, if they are interested in transitioning to zero waste? (Christina)

A: (Munu) The buy-in must be from all levels of the business including ownership/C-level. The transition may not be easy. I would suggest small steps first, so you can see some returns and focus on the wins: e.g. car-free day, ride-sharing, reduce paper waste, look at operations and see where wastage could be cut.

A: (Christou) Appointing a sustainability director might be a start; but without buy-in this person will not have much luck. Perhaps a tax on waste is the major factor needed!

Comment: (Emily McGill) Christina, a good company to ask that question of is another one featured in the National Zero Waste Council Design Portfolio: Eclipse Awards .

Q: On the issue of chicken versus egg for the better material versus a system that can accept it, what comes first? And how do we shape the system? (Emily McGill)

A: (Munu) We can allow market forces to help develop a system; but there would be a greater impact in less time if a system were developed with a provincial or federal mandate.

OTHER QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS BY PARTICIPANTS

Q: The Ecopacs and compostable bags cannot be recycled in municipal recycling programs. Where can consumers take the bags? (Sandra Davidon)

Comment: Sandra, MMBC in BC takes back single layer flexible packaging at Bottle Depots. They claim they can recycle Ecopac style packaging if it is labelled as #2. Etc. resin codes. (R. Brian Burke)

Comment: Certified compostable pouches would go to an industrial composting site, not recycling. (I. Lopez)

