



UNPACKAGED ECO

Reuse is an exciting area of opportunity for the sustainable packaging market in Australia. In 2020, APCO conducted a project to measure the impact of reusables. It was found that five common reusable packaging systems avoided the use of an estimated 1.7 million tonnes of single-use packaging in 2018-19.

One Melbourne based organisation that is helping pioneer Australia's reusable packaging offering is APCO Member Unpackaged Eco. Founded in 2018, Unpackaged Eco is on a mission to provide customers with a simple way to shop and refill everyday household items, without plastic packaging.

Designing a business with sustainability at its core

Unpackaged Eco's core offering is a range of cleaning products supplied in reusable bottles, which can be topped up at in-store refill stations currently available at 25 partner retail outlets. The brand also has a range of dry bath and body products sold in recyclable paper packaging, with no single-use plastic. Reuse is also a priority behind the scenes, where the Unpackaged Eco team uses reusable bulk refill containers through

its current return-and-pickup process for local retailers. To date, the business has saved over 13,000 bottles from entering landfill.

Irene Chen, Founder of Unpackaged Eco, explained how sustainability was the founding principle that inspired the creation of the business: "Sustainability is our core mission and drives both our strategy and everyday decision-making across all functional areas from design and sourcing to fulfilment. For example, refilling in-store is a great way to eliminate single-use packaging altogether whilst keeping carbon miles to an absolute minimum. Our packaging is focused on renewable and highly recyclable or compostable materials such as glass and paper. Our innovation efforts are also focused on developing solutions that take our sustainability to the next level.

"Our approach at Unpackaged Eco is centred around eliminating single-use plastic waste, and we prioritise reduce, refill and reuse as our sustainable packaging point of difference." To drive this agenda, the Melbourne based start-up is working to a set of three sustainability targets, which are aligned with Australia's 2025 National Packaging Targets.



These are:

1. 100% reusable or compostable packaging by 2021: Unpackaged Eco will lead the zero-waste packaging initiative by delivering 100% of its packaging in reusable or compostable formats by 2021. It will also take accountability for all production inputs to ensure circular principles are applied across total packaging and product design.
2. 100% of packaging being reused or composted by 2025: Technology is being developed to unlock another level of transparency in determining the effectiveness of its shop-refill model and implement strategies to encourage customers to refill or compost their packaging, diverting it away from landfill.
3. 100% of packaging and products being made from sustainable sources by 2025: Unpackaged Eco will ensure that all inputs into product and packaging come from sustainable resources, defined as materials that can be renewed indefinitely at little or no cost to the environment. It currently uses renewable and highly recyclable material such as glass, stainless steel and FSC certified timber in the bulk of its packaging and products.

Overcoming challenges

The new business model has experienced some challenges along the way. With a packaging design unconventionally centred around refill and reuse, it is often challenging to find readily available solutions in the market that cater to the business' needs - which are both commercial and sustainable. Their glass bottles, for example, are heavy and subject to breakage despite being a renewable, reusable and highly recyclable material.

The refill stations also require a dedicated amount of retail space and can be a challenge for smaller retailers. Helping those businesses to see the powerful opportunity that reuse presents has been critical to overcoming this challenge. "Most stores now acknowledge the trend towards sustainable practices such as reuse through glass bottles. Given this, we can position the bottles as a point of distinction from other products, which use plastic, and encourage prospective stores to jump on the growing market trend of reusable packaging. We are working on various alternatives to our refill stations to accommodate our online market and smaller stores".

Continued innovation

The Unpackaged Eco team is continuing to innovate to improve its packaging sustainability offering. They have reduced the use of plastic labels where possible and have moved to screen printed glass bottles to increase reusability and decrease waste. They have also adopted the use of paper packaging across non-liquid lines in the effort to stay plastic free.

Collaboration with customers and stakeholders has played a big part in guiding this innovative approach. Unpackaged Eco regularly engage their clients to adapt their products to better suit their needs and that of their customers. "A recent example would be our dual bar code system which enables supermarkets to scan a new bottle price in the customer's first visit and a refill barcode on their return visit. This was developed in consultation with our supermarket retail partners and makes refilling simple for both retailers and their customers."

Joining the APCO community

Unpackaged Eco joined APCO in 2019 to be part of the plastic waste solution and seek opportunities to learn and work with like-minded members of the business community. "Our Membership experience has been a good one so far. APCO has provided us with access to training workshops and useful resources which has been helpful in assisting us in furthering our mission towards ending single-use plastic waste.

"APCO plays a key role in bringing together various industry members and government bodies to help solve some of our largest waste and packaging issues. Being a Member gives us access to helpful resources whilst providing the opportunity to understand the challenges and solutions available in the wider ecosystem".

Looking ahead

Unpackaged Eco has several initiatives in the pipeline to keep improving its sustainability offering. Joining the Australasian Recycling Label Program is one example. The team is also developing an exciting range of zero-waste products that will take the Unpackaged Eco offering to the next level in sustainability. The brand also aims to become a national one by 2025 and is seeking partnerships with national



retailers and distributors committed to help eliminate single-use plastic waste. For other organisations considering reuse, the Unpackaged Eco team say that reusable packaging is the way of the future and a clear point of difference for a growing cohort of environmentally conscious customers. "Using innovative design and technology, I believe that delivering products package-free is possible and we would love to collaborate with any business that shares this mission with us.

"Our advice is to stay on the front foot as this is an evolving piece and the businesses that don't rethink packaging will fall behind. Customers are demanding sustainable products and this market will be the key driver of growth in the future. We are excited by the growing macro trend towards more sustainable products and practices and are keen to work with APCO and national retailers that share our mission around reuse and eliminating single-use plastic waste".

For more information about joining the APCO community visit www.apco.org.au