



# Sustainability Pioneers (Brands) 1.0

Gillian Garside-Wight explores how brands across different categories of products, from large corporates to small independent brands can all have a positive impact on our lives and on our planet

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# Introduction

Firstly, let's examine two words: sustainability and pioneer.

## Sustainability (noun):

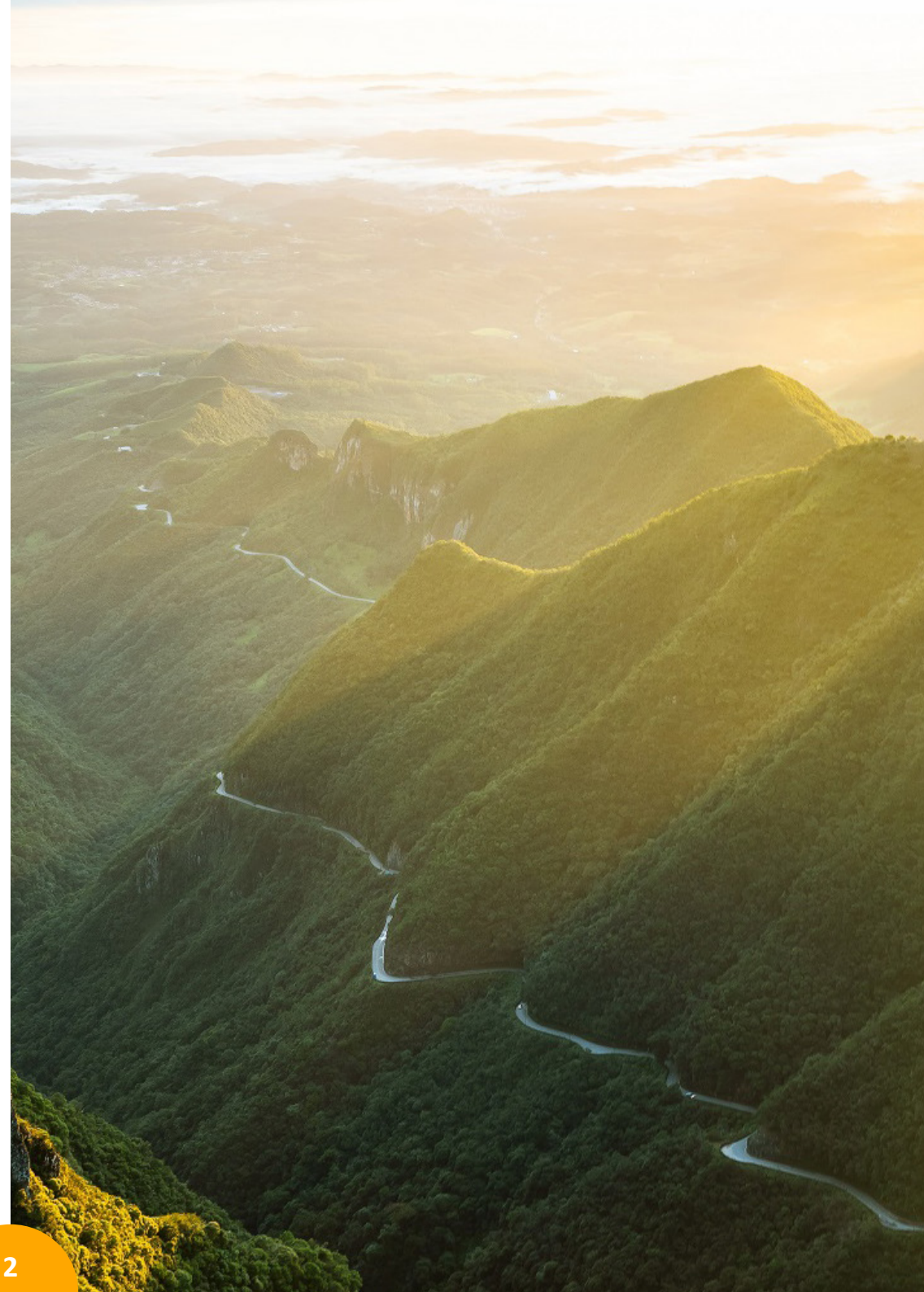
1. The ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level.
2. Avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance.

## Pioneer (noun):

1. A person who is among the first to explore or settle a new country or area.

source: [www.oxfordlearningsdictionaries.com/](http://www.oxfordlearningsdictionaries.com/)

So in the context of this e-book we are examining the brands who are among the first to explore areas of sustainability.



# Introduction

Sustainability has become a bit of a buzz word, its true meaning has become diluted but for me it is a demonstration of doing the right and responsible thing for people, our planet and not forgetting profit. 'Greenwashing' is everywhere, however recognition needs to be given to the brands that stand out from the crowd and behave with good conscience, our sustainability pioneers.

This e-book will explore five of these brands, brands who have changed their business models or given something back to communities and all have sustainability at heart. From one of the first brands to champion environmental causes, Patagonia, to Who Gives a Crap who have only been in business for 9 years however have donated £3.2 million this year alone to sanitation infrastructure charities.

I hope to demonstrate that brands across different categories of products, from large corporates to small independent brands can all have a positive impact on our lives and on our planet. I hope this e-book inspires you to not only reconsider your personal purchasing choices but also consider how brands could embrace sustainability and promote a circular economy.



## Patagonia: One man or a sustainability movement?

Globally recognised as one of the most iconic sustainable brands, what is the secret to Patagonia's success? Is it Yvon Chouinard's original vision and passion for our environment or is it bigger than that? True pioneers don't just have a voice, they create a movement. They bring people with them to not only highlight the need for change but support others to do the same, and most importantly, evolve to remain relevant. Not only has Patagonia thrived over decades, refusing to stand still, it has realised several environmental initiatives, supported others, and as a consequence, received deserved recognition.

Established in 1973 making tools for climbers and then selling clothes specifically designed for adventures in the great outdoors, Patagonia was led by Yvon Chouinard, who not only was (and still is) an inspiring business leader but also a rock climber and environmentalist. Patagonia has enjoyed great highs but also faced some tough times over the decades, including the 1990 recession which forced the closure of showrooms and offices and redundancy of 20% of the company's workforce.

After surviving the downturn, a small team of senior executives went on a mission of self-discovery to the mountains of Patagonia where Yvon Chouinard asked his team, "Why are we in business, anyway?" They decided that not only were they dedicated to making the best quality products which were durable, simple, require little care and have minimal impact on the environment but they were also dedicated to supporting environmental causes with its profit. The trip was regarded as a watershed moment with Yvon saying "I knew after 35 years, why I was in business".

Patagonia has refused to stand still. This is evident with recent ventures into food with Patagonia Provisions and a venture capital fund to support small start-up companies. Patagonia has also partnered with four other businesses and solar-power installer Sungevity, together they have created a \$35 million fund to finance residential rooftop solar power. Sustainability at all levels is being tackled by Patagonia and there appear to be no limits in its success and its future aspirations.

In 2019 Patagonia received one of the highest honours when it won the UN Champion of the Earth award in the category: outstanding entrepreneurial vision. It's obvious that from day one Patagonia have incorporated sustainability into their DNA.

‘Patagonia is not just an eco-conscious brand trying to manage its own environmental footprint, it’s a force for change in business and in the world’



## Patagonia: One man or a sustainability movement?

With a clear mission statement, 'We're in business to save our home planet' who can argue they are not achieving that when the brand is dedicated to creating sustainable products but most importantly doing so with a conscience.

Patagonia has realised multiple initiatives for the environment including:

- The Worn Wear Program – an e-comm shop where you can buy second-hand Patagonia products, extending the life of their product instead of always buying new
- 1% for the Planet – in 2002 Yvon Chouinard co-founded the non-profit initiative, by joining companies pledge to donate 1% of their sales to good causes
- Action Works – a website that allows you to connect to local / regional environmental protection groups globally

As expected, Yvon Chouinard and Patagonia are looking for new challenges with fresh summits. It aims to be carbon neutral by 2025, source 100% of their energy from renewable sources and move toward 100% renewable and recycled raw materials.

There is no doubt in my mind that Yvon Chouinard is the orchestrator of Patagonia's success and evolution, but this remarkable man created something much bigger than a brand, he created momentum long before the recent awareness of environmental concerns and encouraged others to do the same – he created a movement. Even the world's biggest retailer, Wal-Mart, asked Patagonia for advice to become more sustainable.

I'm sure Yvon Chouinard encountered many obstacles and commercial challenges along the way but he continued to persevere and evolve the brand anyway. Patagonia is not just an eco-conscious brand trying to manage its own environmental footprint, it's a force for change in business and in the world.



‘Divine is 44% owned by the Kuapa Kokoo cocoa farmers co-operative in Ghana’



## Divine: Chocolate like no other!

You may recognise Divine by its beautiful, decorative wrappers, its organic range or for its Fairtrade certification. But did you know it is the only chocolate company that gives its profits back to the farmers that grow the cocoa beans?

Divine Chocolate launched in the UK over 20 years ago, and instead of targeting niche markets it decided to produce mainstream Fairtrade chocolate. What makes Divine different to all of its competitors, is its ownership model. It is 44% owned by the Kuapa Kokoo cocoa farmers' co-operative in Ghana. The Kuapa Kokoo have a motto "Pa Pa Paa" which translated from their local Twi language means "the best of the best" and who can argue! Great chocolate with a unique business model.

To be honest their business model is more like a social mission, with gender equality being one of the issues it faced head on. Of the 100,000 Kuapa Kokoo farmers, more than a third of them are women. With Kuapa Kokoo, Divine gave female farmers a voice, and actively empowered them to develop the skills and confidence to grow better cocoa, thrive in business and make a dignified living.

Not content with just its unique business model, in 2016 Divine was certified as a B Corp. This is the only certification that measures a company's entire social and environmental performance, not just in terms of the product but in all aspects. The passion behind Divine not only empowers the farmers but also sets an example for others to do business differently. If this isn't an example of true sustainability then I'm not sure what is, and thankfully they haven't forgotten about their packaging.

As you would expect, Divine are committed to sustainable packaging. All its paper and board is FSC certified, cellophane has been removed where possible and their Easter Egg packaging has been reduced and is plastic free. Importantly Divine has also taken an important step back and assessed its supply chain, cutting down on 'chocolate miles' and sourcing (almost all) of its seasonal packaging locally in the UK.

The unique ownership structure and Fairtrade status of Divine drove most of the early marketing activity, with one high-profile campaign showing some of female Ghanaian farmers that work in Kuapa Kokoo. Although attention grabbing and certainly very different to competing brands advertising, I'm not sure it really did the chocolate justice. Its business model unfortunately is not the reason people buy chocolate.

## Divine: Chocolate like no other!

There are a lot of chocolate lovers out there giving into temptation, me being one of them! I love Fairtrade and I fully support equality and if the chocolate of my choice tasted amazing AND was Fairtrade certified AND had strong ethical values then there would be no choice to make.

Thankfully in 2019 'Owned by cocoa farmers. Made for chocolate lovers' became Divine's new slogan which I think creates the perfect balance. Balance is everything, from work/life balance to balancing people, planet and profit. However – getting the right balance can sometimes take time, and several attempts.

'Divine gave female farmers a voice, and actively empowered them to develop the skills and confidence to grow better cocoa, thrive in business and make a dignified living'

‘Green Toys have recycled over 74 million milk jugs to make its toys. All the plastics used to make the toys are 100% recycled’



## Green Toys - Planet and play at its heart

Green Toys is a California-based toy manufacturer that first launched its environmentally responsible range of toys in 2008. Although the toys are plastic, they are made from 100% recycled materials with US-based manufacturing. Green Toys say that “every day is Earth Day”, it undoubtedly delivers a commitment to sustainability and playfulness as part of its DNA. This passion to do the right thing and allow our children to grow and play while being respectful to our planet should be celebrated.

It should be no surprise that there is money in the sustainability business for brands like Green Toys. We have seen Organic Baby Food rise over the last decade and according to Market Reports World, the Global Organic Baby Food Market is poised to grow at a CAGR of 11. 1% by 2024. This is mostly due to parents growing concerns with children’s health, despite the premium placed on Organic produce. This trend is global, with North America accounting for the largest share of the organic baby food market followed closely by Europe and it’s predicted that many Asia Pacific countries will follow, including China and Indonesia.

If I were to relate the organic baby food trends to Green Toys, I would predict that its sales will continue to rise and there is likely to be many more brands that emerge with a similar business model. What Green Toys does very well is communicate its sustainability credentials in easily relatable language without detracting from the prerequisite that safety comes first.

Green Toys describe the environmental benefits of its products as evidence that recycling can make a difference, that recycling can result in something new and tangible. In fact they say, ‘Our toys are living proof that milk jugs, just like the ones in your refrigerator and recycling bin, can ultimately end up back in your playroom. This helps close the loop for kids because they can see their own environmental efforts in action.’ No-one can argue with this when, to date, Green Toys have recycled over 74 million milk jugs to make its toys. All the plastics used to make the toys are 100% recycled, not just HDPE but also PP and LDPE.

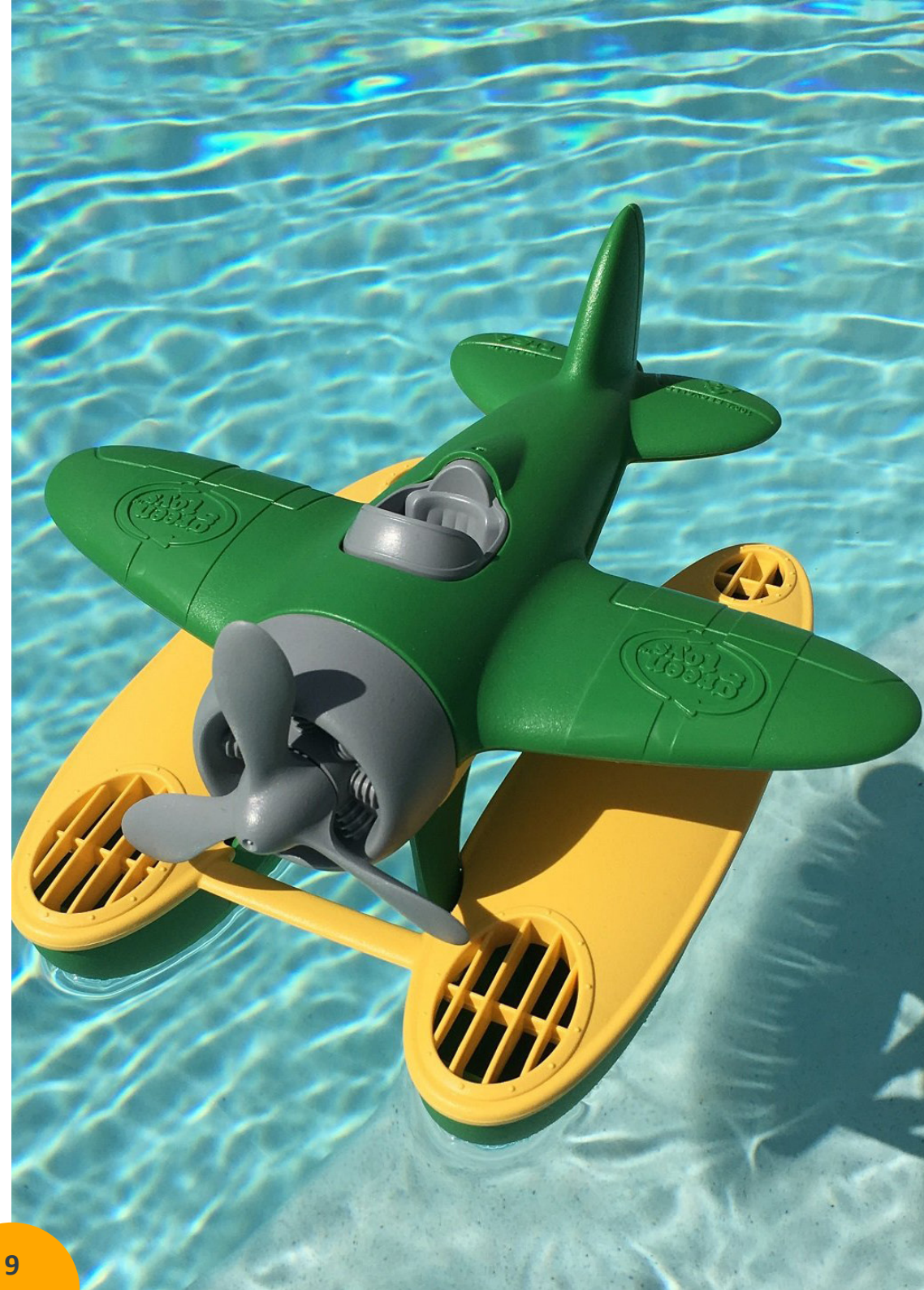
As expected this doesn’t just apply to the toys but also the packaging; Back in 2009 Green Toys received the prestigious Greener Packaging Award. All its toys are packaged in 100% recyclable cardboard with no annoying add-ons like blister packs, twist ties or plastic wrappers and printed with minimal colour. On the rare occasion plastic is used, this is again 100% recycled content.



## Green Toys - Planet and play at its heart

What I love about the language used by Green Toys is that it's relatable to all. They tell their consumers that 'every pound of recycled milk jugs used to create a Green Toy product saves enough energy to power 3,000 AAA batteries, a TV for 3 weeks, or a laptop computer for a month'. This not only makes it real to parents but also the children. If we educated all generations now imagine what we might achieve in the future.

Green Toys are predominantly sold in the US, so manufactured, assembled and distributed all (relatively) locally therefore reducing greenhouse gases, energy and transportation while providing local employment. What's not to like about these great toys made using a truly responsible business model? Honestly, there are only good things to say. It is evident that Green Toys truly believes in what it is doing, it embraces sustainability in every area of the business and is part of its DNA. One of Green Toys beliefs is that 'the best way to encourage environmental change is through goods people buy and use every day' and I couldn't agree more.





## Who Gives a Crap - Improving the world one wipe at a time

Until recently, many commodity products were stagnant, leaving premium, giftable or higher price point items to explore new and different packaging formats and purchasing models. This is no longer the case: from washing detergent to razors, we've seen a huge shift in purchasing routes. However, today I want to talk about one of the most sought-after products of 2020, specifically at the start of lockdown... yes, I bet you stocked up too even if you didn't really need it! Let's talk toilet paper.

Over the last few years, a host of start-ups have disrupted the toilet paper market and started the toilet paper revolution. Okay 'revolution' may be a strong word, but we now have options that were never available to us before. We have the option to buy in bulk, without filling our whole trolley at a supermarket, and we can buy through subscription, so no need to ever run out. Importantly, we can also buy based on sustainability and ethical credentials rather than cute puppies and koalas.

The first of the new generation of toilet paper companies is Who Gives a Crap. The company launched with an Indiegogo campaign in July 2012, after the founders learnt that over 2 billion people don't have access to a toilet, roughly 40% of the global population. The sad fact is hundreds of thousands of children die every year from diseases caused by poor water and sanitation. So, they made it their explicit aim for Who Gives a Crap to make enough profit to donate to sanitation infrastructure.

Who Gives a Crap is a certified B corporation, that donates 50% of its profits to a variety of organisations around the world. These organisations might dig pit latrines, install septic systems, or maintain clean and safe toilets, those who are doing the highest impact work receive unrestricted funding. Who Gives a Crap was built on the idea that 'we can make the world a better place by helping people make little choices that give back' and they are certainly delivering. On the 6th July this year they donated £3.2million (or \$5.85 million Aus dollars / \$4million US dollars), five times greater than 2020: this is fantastic, and it all started with a crowd funding initiative, amazing!

# Who Gives a Crap - Improving the world one wipe at a time

It's not just its ethical and sustainability credentials that makes it great, it's also a premium feeling product with well-considered packaging. Although I am not a 'plastic hater', I love the fact Who Gives a Crap is plastic free through conscious thought and analysis.

Each individual roll is double the number of sheets compared to conventional toilet paper and individually wrapped in paper with modern graphics which you'd be happy to display in your bathroom. They could be wrapped in bundles of six, but the specification would need to be heavier to protect the product, so there's no benefit.

I also love the re-use encouraged by Who Gives a Crap. All of us with kids are accomplished at making 'stuff' from toilet paper cores and yoghurt pots but this is really encouraged on its website and not just by kids. Importantly, it's also not just from the core but also from the outer wrapper too and why not? I think every design is worth celebrating and putting on display for a little longer.

I'm sure you're thinking, so what's the downside, is it 10x more expensive? It is more expensive than 'traditional' supermarket bought toilet paper but not by much. It works out around 25p more expensive when comparing rolls, but remember, Who Gives a Crap are double length rolls so that's only 12.5p difference and I think it's well worth it. The biggest downside of toilet paper is that generally it is bad; bad for the environment, bad for plumbing and bad for energy consumption BUT if we make the right choices, we can also do some good.

What I love most about this brand is that it thinks differently, it was willing to take a risk before anyone else and push boundaries. They identified a need before many customers were even aware of the problem and they (and millions of people globally) are seeing the benefits now.





# IKEA – From flatpack to fearless pioneer

IKEA, world renowned for its affordable, flatpack home furnishing, is also leading the way with sustainability. With ambitious 2030 targets to become a circular and climate positive business, IKEA has lots of ideas up its sleeves.

What I love about IKEA, apart from the obvious affordable furniture and home furnishings, is that it refuses to stand still. For as long as I can remember IKEA has been a specialist at reducing unwanted empty space in its packaging however, to achieve its targets, it needs to rethink everything. Thankfully, that’s exactly what they are doing, through its partnership with The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, it’s looking at all its 10,000 products and investigating how they can be redesigned to circular principles. It’s not just the products that are under the microscope, but also the whole business model.

With the quick realisation that it couldn’t just create a circular company overnight and in isolation, IKEA decided to work in partnership with its supply chain, customers and designers. Together they developed the idea to create a set of global definitions for terms surrounding circular design, with the aim to impact legislation. Legislation is changing, that is for sure. From a packaging perspective, I think IKEA are ahead of the game by using primarily fibre-based packaging today. If it applies the same rule to packaging as it has on product – only recycled or renewable based materials by 2030 and all its products to be reused, repaired and / or recycled, then it shouldn’t have too much of a problem.

Where IKEA steps ahead of other high street retailers is its ability to challenge, reshape and improve itself, and us (their customers). In 2018, an incredible 8.7 million IKEA products were re-packed to be re-sold instead of going to waste. This was in addition to over 1 million orders of spare parts, which helped to repair products for a longer life. This has continued and IKEA are constantly reshaping their business model, including its buy-back initiative.

The buy-back initiative launched in November 2020 which intentionally coincided with Black Friday, in a stand against excessive consumption. IKEA now buy back fully assembled drawer units, tables, chairs, cabinets, desks, shelving and cupboards in 27 countries. Returned pieces of furniture are graded from ‘as new’, which will get you 50% of the original price, to ‘well used’ which will get you 30%. Customers will receive an IKEA voucher card, instead of a cash refund, but importantly the voucher won’t have an expiry date, a move meant to encourage us to only buy furniture when we really need it.

# IKEA – From flatpack to fearless pioneer

Still on buy-back and recycle, IKEA not only sell the buy-back items in store, it has also opened an dedicated second-hand furniture shop in Sweden. This shop is in the “world’s first recycling mall” called ReTuna, which has revolutionised shopping in a circular way. Old items sold in ReTuna are given new life through repair and upcycling and everything sold is either recycled, reused or has been organically or sustainably produced. IKEA furniture and home furnishings will get a second chance, after being repaired and restored to former glory, and then sold at a much lower cost. I personally love this circular and progressive model and I don’t understand why there are not more of these around the world. Unfortunately, charity shops don’t always have the quality we desire and the only other alternative is ebay and other selling platforms, but this shouldn’t be the only way to buy and sell our items that still have life left in them.

However, if we buy and sell so frequently should we even buy at all? If you’re really honest with yourself, do you sell every item you no longer want or need, or just dispose of it? In the UK we dispose of approximately 22 million items of furniture each year, with the majority going to landfill. Research shows that just one in 10 of us consider fixing items in order to extend their lifespan. We have to rethink what we do and how we do it, just as IKEA have and continue to do. With one of its latest initiatives into subscription models, customers are able to rent items for a certain amount of time, then they are refurbished and re-used. This may seem like a waste of money renting when you could own it, but for students and businesses this could offer a lifeline. Student accommodation is temporary, which is why IKEA is offering students in the Netherlands the rental of a bed, desk, table and chairs for a monthly fee of up to 30 euros. IKEA also recognises that businesses need flexibility so are trialling office rentals in Sweden and Switzerland. Why store excess furniture when you could rent and only use what you need, when you need it?



## Summary – Passion forms culture: create a movement that matters

I think it's fair to say that many brands 'play' at sustainability, doing just enough to keep their customers happy. The brands we have explored in this e-book have gone above and beyond, in a way that works for them, but all are driven by passion. This usually starts from passionate leadership which forms a culture and in turn creates a movement.

I hope like myself, these brand accomplishments will inspire you to think differently. I have consulted in packaging for over 20 years and never has there been the momentum for change that there is now. Legislation is changing globally, and consumer voices are stronger than ever, but we need to educate them and we need to behave responsibly.

From the five brands there are many similarities we can borrow from them and upcycle! These are my top 10 takeouts:

1. **Passion in leadership: great leaders inspire others to be just as passionate**
2. **Communication is key: use relatable language to educate all generations**
3. **Make the right choices: create change qualified by data**
4. **Create reason beyond profit: doing the right thing should be the reward**
5. **Ethics and sustainability go hand in hand and should be at the heart of every business**
6. **Sustainability isn't exclusive to big corporates**
7. **True sustainability should be circular: impacting product, people and planet**
8. **Words are easy: to be successful sustainability needs to be embedded in your DNA**
9. **Empower others: it's just the right thing to do!**
10. **Be brave, but don't lose sight of the end goal**

“True sustainability should be circular: impacting product, people and planet”

## Passion forms culture: create a movement that matters

The inspiration I will take from these brands is that one voice is not enough. There does need to be leadership, support and real passion to achieve improvement and true sustainability. We can all influence others through leading by example, at work and at home. My 7 year old son has become my conscience, he soaks up all information and it constantly telling (anyone who will listen) that we need to look after our planet. He's right!

I'm lucky in so many ways, my passion for sustainability fits easily within my work and as a family we love nature so all areas of my life blend nicely together (most of the time). At work, my passion for all things sustainable also needs to turn a profit, however we do this responsibly as decent human beings, helping our clients to make the right choices.

**So, what are you going to challenge yourself to do differently?** We all need to be thinking about what's next, how we can improve what we do, how we do it and importantly how we create a circular economy where our planet doesn't suffer from our consumption and bad habits.

**Sustainability shouldn't be a once a year sprint to the line but an everyday occurrence.**

A glass jar with string lights inside, lying on a wet beach at sunset. The jar is lying on its side, and the lights are glowing. The background shows a sunset over the ocean with a bright sun low on the horizon. The water is wet and reflects the light from the jar and the sunset.

Start now!



## Sun Strategy - Creating a better future

We are in a unique position to help our clients drive forward, not only are we unbiased and multi-disciplined across all packaging specialisms but we are also supporting our clients to increase efficiency. Through our packaging regulatory team we are able to advise on existing and future global legislation. Not only does this ensure compliance today, we also support a proactive approach to mitigate against future packaging taxes and legislative bans.

What we are not is a massive team, located across the globe. In our sustainability consulting services, we all work from home and will do (like many people) long after Covid is a memory. We make this possible through technology. With e-halo, our sustainable packaging platform, we have the ability to measure packaging, creating valuable packaging data which drives change. We enable clients to accurately measure themselves against their own targets with live reporting. Long gone are the days of best guesses and estimates. If you want to be sustainable you need clear and transparent structural packaging and sustainability data today, to measure and evaluate to achieve improvement.

Our passion is to do the right thing. We are determined to transform the global approach to sustainable packaging. Today, more than ever before, global retailers and brands need to assess their packaging requirements on a macro and micro level to survive and thrive the seismic paradigm shifts across global supply chains, international and national politics, legislation, retailing and consumer expectations. We educate and empower our clients to make responsible decisions, for their brand, their customers and our planet.

Sun Strategy is an end-to-end technology-led packaging consultancy. We provide a packaging vision fit for the future, unifying creative, communication and commerce. We draw upon our multi-disciplined expertise in four key areas: Consumer, Sustainability, Efficiency and Compliance to provide a unique service offering tailored to your goals. We have a track record of continually innovating with global brands and retailers to create strategies to transform the value of their business and measure customer success.





# About the author

## Gillian Garside-Wight – Sustainability Partner

Gillian leads our consulting offer, with over 20 years' experience in the print and packaging industry, strategically developing packaging strategies, roadmaps and packaging solutions to meet the needs of clients and consumers/end users. She has worked with a number of global retailers and household brands on projects spanning sustainability and innovation to supply chain optimisation. With a real passion for sustainable packaging, her quest is to inform and drive a circular economy wherever possible while complementing creativity and technical functionality but never forgetting commercial requirements.



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