

REDUCING WORKPLACE WASTE IN THE RETAIL SECTOR

A practical guide to help retail businesses towards zero waste

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WHY SHOULD I REDUCE MY WASTE?

Environmental sustainability is now a key part of doing business. By minimising your waste, you can cut your disposal costs, reduce your carbon footprint, and build your brand's reputation with staff and customers alike.

In 2023, Queenstown Lakes District businesses were surveyed to get a snapshot of how organisations were managing their waste and how they could be supported to reduce and minimise their waste outputs. The majority of respondents said that reducing their environmental impact was a key motivator to minimise waste and 92% said that waste reduction was important or very important to their business.

QLDC is committed to helping our communities become a low waste and low emissions district, and to helping your business achieve its waste minimisation goals.



For every one rubbish bin of waste that you put out on the kerb, 70 rubbish bins of waste were made upstream just to make that one bin on the kerb. Even if we could recycle 100% of the waste coming out of our households, it does not get to the core of the problem. Correct recycling is vital, but we need to think about cutting off the waste streams and bringing less waste into our businesses in the first place. **The Story of Stuff** is essential reading and talks more about this.



Credit: Freepik

KEY WASTE STREAMS IN RETAIL



Work and consultation with businesses of all sizes across the region has helped identify the key waste streams for the retail sector and has offered up practical solutions to help you reduce your waste.

Retail is such a varied sector that there will be things that may not be relevant to your business. Nonetheless, this and the **other industry guides** will hopefully help you on your way and get you thinking about other waste minimisation strategies that can be applied to bring about changes within your business.

Making a start can be the hardest part. Together with your team and stakeholders, identify what you can tackle first. Engaging your colleagues and staff is vital. If you have an engaged team committed to your waste goals, you'll see results quicker and will be able to communicate your values far more easily to your customers. Encourage their input and suggestions.

Wastebusters has put together **a document** to help you communicate your waste minimisation strategies to your team, with wording for staff induction manuals. It's a great idea to have a policy in place so that waste minimisation is seen as the norm from the outset.



Credit: Anna Oliinyk

IN THE OFFICE

According to a 2018 Environmental Protection Agency study, the average office worker generates about **900g worth of paper and paperboard products every day** and uses roughly **10,000 sheets of copy paper per year!** Worse, a study from Xerox found that nearly half of all printed documents are thrown away within **24 hours**, and **30% are never picked up from the printer at all.**



- Make sure all of your team is on board. Practise what you preach in your office workspaces and kitchens. Have clear recycling stations and consider removing some of your office place rubbish bins to discourage unnecessary waste. Have a look at the [QLDC website](#) to make sure you know what materials you can recycle in the district and [check out these guidelines for tips on how set up effective rubbish and recycling stations.](#)
- Make the most of technology and cut down on your printing. Cloud software, shared online files and e-signatures can instantly reduce your paper footprint.
- If you do need paper, buy environmentally responsible and certified paper in recyclable packaging.
- When you need to print, go double-sided, black and white, and use draft settings to reduce ink.
- Repurpose shredded paper for packing orders.
- Consider renting office equipment and furniture and check second-hand options before you go for something new. If buying new, opt for durable and repairable items.
- Make sure everyone understands how to recycle batteries and electronic waste responsibly. Batteries cannot be placed into rubbish or recycling bins as they pose a significant fire risk to collection trucks and waste facilities. Refer to the [A-Z Rubbish and Recycling Directory](#) for information on how to recycle batteries and other electronic waste responsibly.
- Consider introducing waste into your regular reporting and involve all of your team.
- Have a look at the [office waste guide](#) for more ideas on how to minimise your waste.



Credit: racool_studio

TELL YOUR STORY!

Consumers want to feel good about their purchasing decisions; how many times have you heard someone talk about what it is they have bought when there's a story behind it?

- Whatever your waste minimisation initiatives, promote them online, instore and on your social media. Engage with your Regional Tourism Organisation (Destination Queenstown and Lake Wānaka Tourism) and local waste champions like **Wastebusters** and **Sustainable Queenstown** to help spread awareness about what you're doing.
- Create your own zero waste campaign. Zero Waste Wednesday? Waste Free Friday? Find the time and space to celebrate suppliers and customers who are working with you to reduce your waste.
- Manage expectations. Behaviour change can take time, but it happens, so long as people are prepared. If you are making changes that will affect your customers, have a roll-out plan in place and make sure your staff feel comfortable communicating these.
- Need signs in your shop? What about using window chalk or a blackboard and a good old-fashioned chalk stick?
- Are you a food retailer that encourages people to bring their own containers? **Wastebusters** has signage that you can include in your shop frontage and at the counter.
- Be creative. Could you have a display of zero waste items in your shop? Perhaps you have items from local suppliers that have been delivered with no packaging - highlight and celebrate these!



Credit: Plastic Free Wānaka

PACKAGING

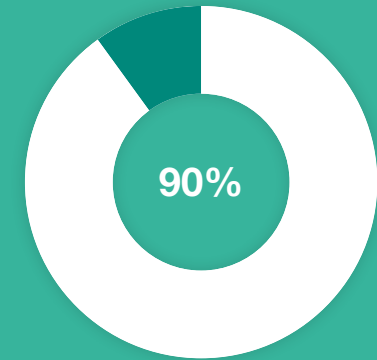
Packaging is the main waste stream in retail and, while it might seem hard to eliminate, it's not impossible. When considering packaging, it's useful to think about The Waste Hierarchy, in which waste is avoided or minimised before you consider recycling. Recycling is of course preferable to landfill, but consider methods that will cut off the waste at source.

According to the Sustainability Business Network, about 70% of your business' sustainability impact comes from your supply chain. Whether it's talking to your existing suppliers or looking for alternatives, beginning at the source is key.

- Talk to your suppliers about their packaging. Is it necessary? Is it recyclable? Can they take back packaging or will they supply the same product in reusable outer containers?
- Consider the way in which your products are packaged. Is the packaging as efficient as possible? Cosmetic company Kohls invested in technology that enabled the automatic trimming of packaging to use only the bare minimum. Can your suppliers offer something similar?

- Consider industry collaboration. They may be your competitors but other businesses may be key to your success. Involve the big guys too. Can you buy in bulk, share resources and reduce packaging waste? Can you lobby suppliers to make the changes you want to see? There's strength in numbers and it really can make a difference.
- Understand your packaging. Compostable packaging may seem like a good alternative but, more often than not, it ends up in landfill where it cannot biodegrade. Plus, it is still single use and requires virgin resources to produce these items. Reducing your packaging entirely is the best option. The WasteMINZ Organic Materials Sector Group has produced a series of guidelines for compostable and biodegradable packaging. **These can be found online here.**
- Does your business use textiles? Can you repurpose offcuts or excess material for another product? If not, consider offering them to community repurpose ventures, zero waste hubs or even local schools for arts and crafts projects.

- Consider local suppliers who can provide products with no or less packaging. Plus, you're supporting local!
- Reuse any packaging that you may receive for your own orders and despatches. If a customer doesn't have their own bag, you can offer a box or container in which you received an order yourself.
- Use refillable containers. Whether it's ink cartridges, whiteboard markers, soap, cleaning products or kitchen items, opt for products that can be refilled.
- Offer reusable bags and containers to customers.
- Use bagless vacuum cleaners. You'll save immediately on supplies and your waste bills.
- If you use an external cleaning company, talk to them about your goals and expectations and get them on board. Add waste minimisation objectives and KPIs to contracts.



Mons Royale conducted a waste audit with Wastebusters, covering all business channels. They have phased out 90% of their virgin plastic clothing tags and replaced them with recycled, natural material. They offer a cuff repair kit, using offcuts or excess material and are constantly exploring new ways in which to minimise their waste produced in the production process.



Credit: Soul Food

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO TO REDUCE OUR WASTE?

- Consider making e-receipts and invoices your default option and print them only when requested. This can also, depending on your business, be a good way to build up a client database (with their permission, of course!).
- Discount damaged stock. Don't send damaged stock to landfill, offer it at a discounted rate. If it isn't fit for retail, offer it at a discounted rate to staff or donate to a local charity.
- Optimise your inventory management to minimise surplus stock. Depending on your business, there may be suitable software to help you avoid overstocking. This causes a chain reaction that removes excess items from the supply chain and pushes current products to the front of the line. Use predictive analytics to forecast demand more accurately.
- Review how you display and sell your products. Are plastic, unrecyclable clothes hangers necessary?
- Do you have a way of incentivising the reuse or repurposing of items within your business? Could a waste reducing action by a customer earn them a gift voucher? You're rewarding your customer's initiative and, by offering a voucher, increasing the likelihood of a future sale.
- When it's time to move them on, donate furniture, fittings and other material to charities or advertise them in local community groups.
- Repair damaged and worn uniforms for continued use. When they're no longer fit-for-purpose, they'll make great cleaning rags.
- Businesses can end up with hundreds of redundant items when it's time to refresh or rebrand. For any old uniform, take a look at the **Re-Action** initiative that rescues and repurposes items for resale
- Promote repair businesses that support your industry. Showing you care about the longevity of products can help build a loyal customer base.



Credit: Wastebusters

Outdoor apparel company, **Patagonia**, has a well earned reputation when it comes to sustainability. It facilitates the repair and reuse of its clothing first and then, when a piece of clothing is really at the end of its life, will take it back for recycling. They'll use it to make some other product or figure out another way to recycle it.

Icebreaker has partnered with **Upparel**, an Australian textile recovery and

recycling company, to rescue clothes that might otherwise be destined for landfill. Individuals can drop off their unwanted textiles, regardless of brand, and Upparel will collect and sort them. Fit-for-purpose items are donated to charities and social enterprises for further use while any unsuitable items are processed for recycling, shredded and spun with new fibres into items such as cushioning and home insulation.



SO MANY IDEAS, SO MANY QUESTIONS! WHERE SHOULD I LOOK NEXT?

Remember you're not alone and help is at hand! Here are some useful links to support you on your waste reducing journey:

- Take a look at this **general guide for businesses**, which gives additional ideas on how to implement changes in the workplace with helpful links and resources.
- **Check out these other industry resource guides**. You may find more ideas there to help you on the path to zero waste.
- You can find some rubbish and recycling signage on the QLDC website here: **QLDC - Waste Minimisation for Businesses**.
- **Talk to Zero Waste champions in Aotearoa** like **Wastebusters**, **Zero Waste Network NZ**, **Sustainable Queenstown**, **Zero Waste Glenorchy**, **Wao**, **Sustainable Business Network**, and **WasteMINZ**. Sign up to their newsletters, join their zero waste events and be part of the conversation.
- **Go global**. Read what's being done in retail around the world. Retail giants, Walmart, have a **clear waste minimisation strategy** that is worth reading. They have huge market share which makes it easier, but ripple effects happen, especially in consumer behaviour! **Waste success stories by the EPA** and the **McKinsey 2024 report on sustainable packaging in retail** offer some interesting insights. The **British Independent Retailers Association** has some good resources on waste.
- **Make good purchasing decisions** using this **smart purchasing guide** to ask questions of your suppliers.
- **Connect with other low-waste businesses** via **circular economy directory** or **CiRCLR** - a simple B2B platform that encourages circular economies, which turns the existing cost of waste disposal into new revenue streams for businesses.
- **Consider undertaking a waste audit** - you can't take action if you don't know what you're dealing with. Waste audits connect you with zero waste experts who have the know-how to help you with simple and measurable waste solutions.
- **Get back to basics**. Find out who is offering **waste management services** in your area.
- **Be inspired**. Read **local case studies** to see what other businesses have done to reduce their waste.



Credit: Pixabay

This guide was written by Wastebusters and designed by QLDC under the QLDC Zero Waste District Programme funding as part of the Resourceful Communities initiative.

Resourceful Communities aims to make the link between global work on the circular economy and local reduction and reuse activities.

The year-round programme inspires and supports behaviours that are part of the transition to a more circular economy.

Our aim is to help to build a culture where resources are valued and kept in use, and waste minimisation is the norm.

