



## Reusable Packaging You Should Know About

by Nicole C Fitz | Feb 4, 2019 | Recycle, Save the Planet, Sustainability

It is about time! I am so excited about the Loop reusable packaging joint venture. This is exactly what's needed right now – collaboration. Big brand corporations that are combining efforts and trying something new to create real change in the consumer-packaged goods market. Because no one company, brand, or group of people is responsible for all of our package pollution problems. Still, we all need to put in the effort to solve those problems. And Loop is a significant effort.

### The Real Issue

Recycling by itself is not enough. There's already too much existing plastic and too many variations of materials. At the same time, there are not enough recycling facilities to handle the volume or the different kinds of materials that make up our packaging and a large part of our landfill and ocean pollution problems.

No matter how much waste we as consumers don't create (think of the zero-waste movement), the packaging and products are still being made. And that is the base of the problem. If we don't have the packaging to throw away, there will be less of it. If packaging that is necessary is made with materials that are compostable rather than recyclable – that would be another win. The only thing missing is the infrastructure needed to accommodate composting on a large scale that also makes it as easily accessible as regular garbage disposal.

*Even though we are constantly trying to improve our recycling efforts, we are still throwing away a lot more than we are recycling.*

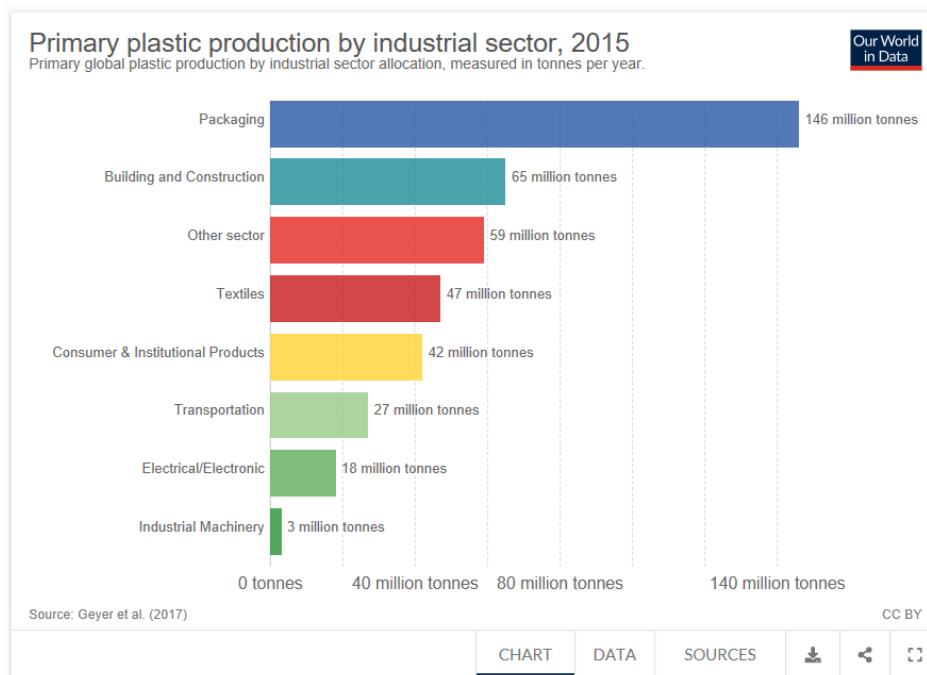
Not everyone realizes what happens to plastic after it has been recycled. The process cannot repeat indefinitely. A product can be recycled down into a different product, but that product more than likely will not be recyclable.

In other words, water bottles aren't recycled into new water bottles. They're usually made into stuffing for cold weather wear. At that point, we still have a plastic based product that isn't going anywhere. So that same plastic

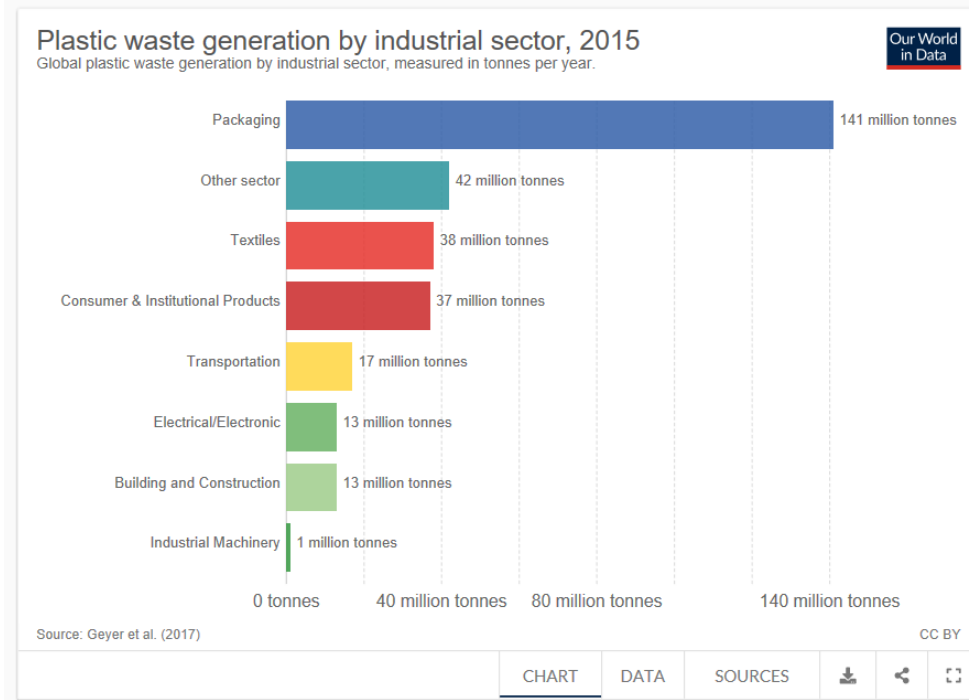
continues to exist on the planet.

[Our World In Data.org](https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution) published an article in 2015 on [plastic pollution](https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution) that showed the vast increase in plastic production from the 1950s up to 2015. It also showed how discarding plastic products had been handled in that time as well as global plastic waste generation, total plastic waste by country, and several plastic projections.

The charts below show the plastic producing industrial sectors and the plastic waste produced by each sector globally in 2015. By far, the sector with the highest amount of plastic production was packaging. The sector that generated the largest amount of waste was also packaging.



*There were 146 million tons of plastic produced for packaging in 2015. There has been a steady increase in plastic production, including bio-based variations, since then.*



*Though its aim is to reduce waste, the current recycling infrastructure does not easily accommodate diverse or mixed materials, making recycling even less effective.*

Even though we are constantly trying to improve our recycling efforts, we are still throwing away a lot more than we are recycling.

“The United States throws away \$11.4 billion worth of recyclable containers and packaging every year.”<sup>1</sup> Many of which end up in landfills and oceans.

So if recycling isn't the answer to the plastic problem (no one thing is), then what are the alternatives?

## An Alternative Option

### **Less packaging.**

Individuals are answering the less packaging – less waste call. Every day a new person or family works toward having a zero-waste household. Though it is not an easy task, it is effective and becoming quite popular.

But if the plastic problem is shared by everyone, then individuals shouldn't have to tackle it on their own. There are too many people who won't, for whatever reason, be able to go zero-waste.

What else can be done?

## **Repackaging.**

Brands, corporations, and government need to work together to find a solution, rather than leaving it up to any one entity or the consumers while package production continues at the same pace.

That's not to say there haven't been any attempts by brands to change the package to waste process in the past. There have been many packaging redesign experiments and just as many failures.

In 2010, PepsiCo's Frito-Lay division made a valiant attempt to reduce the amount of plastic it produced by developing a biodegradable bio-based bag for Sun Chips. The result was that sales took a hit. The reason? Consumers felt that the bag was too noisy.

Judging by the videos on YouTube, the bags were noisy. But weren't all chips bags noisy when they first came out? Potato chips were initially packaged in wax paper bags. So that new packaging – cellophane – would not have been easy on the ears. It certainly wasn't a natural sound, but you get used to it.

Luckily, PepsiCo persevered and designed a new, not so noisy biodegradable Sun Chips bag. Although learning that consumers rule with their wallets (and YouTube reviews) was painful, PepsiCo wasn't the only company to learn the lesson.

A lot of the consumer negativity is usually in response to a change that has taken place without the consumer's awareness. Consumers ultimately determine whether changes, even those changes that are for the better will work or not.

But change, coming from the top down, is what we need now.

The Loop shopping system collaboration is something that allows consumers to play an interactive part that is not so different from how they are already shopping. Those gorgeous stainless-steel containers won't suddenly arrive on store shelves. Eco-conscious consumers will knowingly order them.

## **Loop**

The customer gets the product, but the company owns the package.

This is an amazing concept that would cut down on a tremendous amount of waste. Think about everything you buy from the grocery store, use, and then discard the packaging it came in. This creates the need to continuously produce more packaging. With Loop, you buy the product, use it, then send the packaging back to be reused.

And many big brands are in agreement. The top three producers of what ends up as plastic waste – Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Coca-Cola – are all onboard. Many familiar names have also joined in such as Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Mars, Clorox, and Danone for starters. UPS is also participating and will be a large part of the program as they will be delivering the reusable products to your door (and picking them up).

So basically, you order from any of the brand partners on the loop store site or the brand's site. Your products are delivered in a Loop Tote, which is also used to send all of the empty product containers

back. The reusable packaging is durable and elegantly designed. You are not going to want to hide them. And that specially-made for Loop, stylish packaging belongs to the brand. When your product runs out, you get a new delivery sent to you. The best part is – there is nothing to throw away. All of the packaging is returned, cleaned and sanitized, and put back into circulation.

On the Loop Store site, there are 25 brands, 11 of which are currently in use in my home, and several which I would consider simply because they are a part of this program.

Loop launches this spring in Paris and New York. Lucky devils. I've already put my name on the waiting list.

When I first learned about Loop from the January 25th [GreenBiz Circular Weekly](#), I was quite impressed that so many brands were already on board. But I was also happy to learn about other packaging innovators who have been up and running for a while, right here in the U.S.

I looked into these companies because I hadn't heard of them before.

1. LimeLoop
2. GO Box
3. Package Free Shop

## [LimeLoop](#)

“Reinventing the way goods are sent and received.”

The LimeLoop (not to be confused with TerraCycle's Loop) process is simple and hassle-free for the online shopper. The store ships its merchandise to you in a LimeLoop reusable bag. When you receive the package, you remove your items and secure the bag with the provided zip tie. You then place the pre-paid return label in the same slot the shipping label was in and return it via your mailbox or Postal Service. The bag can then go on to be reused, countless times, up to 10 years.

The bags are made of upcycled billboard vinyl and lined with recycled cotton and are waterproof. Because the bags are flat, they are easy to ship in a standard USPS mailbox.

LimeLoop also provides the shipper (e-commerce store owner) with a software platform that allows them to track the bags after they've been shipped, get customer feedback, and monitor the environmental impact that the use of the bags is having. The more the bags are used, the more trees, oil, and water are saved, and each shipper will know the exact impact they are making.

These bags remove the need for the items to be individually wrapped in plastic, placed in a box, and then shipped in yet another cardboard box. You would receive your shipment and have nothing to throw out after.

[Wearwell](#), [Toad&Co.](#), and [Maika](#) are brand partners. Imagine the overall environmental impact if even half of e-commerce clothing sites in the U.S. shipped goods using LimeLoop?

## [GO Box](#)

GO Box is a new take on take-out.

It's Taco Tuesday. You pull up to the drive-thru of your local taco restaurant and place your order. You get tacos. But you also get a million packets of hot sauce, mild sauce, in-between sauce. You get napkins, the packaging that each taco is wrapped in, possibly some plastic utensils, and a plastic bag to help you carry it all to your home.

Or maybe you have the food delivered. It's the same for burgers, pizza, Chinese, and anything that you don't cook for yourself. You get the meal and a lot of packaging with it. Packaging that ends up contributing to landfill methane and carbon dioxide gases.

"Food delivery is a \$43 billion business in the US today."<sup>2</sup>

The take-out and delivery services that are so convenient are also significantly contributing to our pollution problems. The items are used for an hour at the most, possibly, several times a day by countless individuals. The packaging mounts up quickly, even if you recycle most of it.

"Containers and packaging alone contribute over 23% of the material reaching landfills in the U.S., and some of these discarded materials are food-related containers and packaging. Additionally, packaging makes up a majority of the litter that ends up on our beaches and other waterways."<sup>3</sup>

Enter GO Box.

The Portland-based company offers reusable take-out boxes for restaurants and food truck vendors. You go to your favorite lunch spot, order, and then take your meal with you. But instead of throwing away the take-out box when you're done, you return it to one of the drop sites located around town. Nothing to throw away. The GO Boxes are then picked up, taken to be cleaned and sanitized and put back into circulation. The pick-up vehicle? A bike.

There are an impressive 80+ participating food carts and restaurants in the Portland area offering GO Boxes. And there are several drop site locations as well. How do you find the drop sites? The entire program is done by mobile app making the zero-waste concept interactive with consumers. You download the app to join, pay a yearly or monthly subscription, and the mobile app shows you the restaurants using the GO Boxes and the drop sites.

GO Box is looking to expand into other metropolitan areas. Anyone can launch a GO Box business by getting a GO Box license. A lot of business extras come with the license, so you're not left trying to figure things out on your own.

## [The Package Free Shop](#)

In New York, there's an entire store catering to less packaging. It's called the Package Free Shop. The Brooklyn-based store offers package free products and shipping. They promote a zero-waste lifestyle and provide enough items to make it a one-stop waste free shop.

But unfortunately, there's no way that every kind of item can be completely package free. Some products require packaging by the FDA for health reasons, like toothbrushes. So the vendors they source are doing their part to provide products with minimum packaging or packaging that is 100% recyclable and/or compostable. And the shop works tirelessly with their vendors to find ways to avoid unnecessary packaging.

Their online shipping is plastic free, completely recyclable and compostable, and comes in an upcycled or 100% post-consumer box. The shop even has an in-store waste recycling program where shoppers can bring difficult to recycle or non-recyclable products. They teamed up with [TerraCycle](#) (the company behind Loop) for the bins to help people dispose of things like plastic toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes, spray bottles, dryer sheets, and even computer cables, printers, and copiers.

These are just a few of the companies working to reduce the flow of waste on their end so that we can have an easier time doing the same on ours.

## The Opposition

The only opposition to a system like this would be if the number of consumers and businesses who refuse to change, outnumber the ones who will.

Consumers have brought down well intentioned and well thought out plans for sustainability and environmental benefit in the past. As consumers, we don't like change. We don't like inconvenience. And we really don't like spending extra money. All of those things come before the environment for a lot of people. Not to mention the throw-away culture that has persisted (and gotten worse) for decades. It's not even a matter of convenience. It's a habit, a way of doing things, second nature for so many of us.

One of the best things about Loop, and there are several, is that some major brands are behind it. Profit is not the primary motivation, sustainability and the environment are the concern.

## No One Thing...

Loop is not going to single-handedly end overflowing landfills or ocean pollution. Neither is the zero-waste lifestyle. However, the combination of these two ideas has an excellent chance of reducing the existing problem by not adding to it.

An important thing to note is that people, designers, organizations, e-commerce, and brands have all recognized their part in the plastic problem and are looking for ways to correct it. We have a lot of work to do and a long way to go. But we are getting closer. Loop is a huge step in the right direction.

When we all work together, it will make a difference.

[1] <https://www.rubiconglobal.com/blog-statistics-trash-recycling/>

[2] <https://www.vox.com/videos/2018/1/3/16842068/climate-lab-takeout-food>

[3] [https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/reducing\\_wasted\\_food\\_pkg\\_tool.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-08/documents/reducing_wasted_food_pkg_tool.pdf)

#### Additional Information

<https://www.waste360.com/plastics/greenpeace-report-names-top-producers-plastic-trash>

<https://earth911.com/business-policy/how-many-times-recycled/>

Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser (2019) – “Plastic Pollution”. *Published online at OurWorldInData.org*. Retrieved from: ‘<https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution>’ [Online Resource]