

# Conscious consumers driving sustainability in the beverage industry

From biodegradable straws to compostable takeaway coffee cups, consumer demand for sustainability in the food and beverage industry is on the rise. Millennials and Gen Z, in particular, are looking to reduce their impact on the natural environment by prioritising products that are green at every stage of their lifecycle - from production through to recycling.



Alex Glenday at Brew Kombucha brewery

Beverage companies that make it easier for consumers to be eco-conscious have an opportunity to build brand loyalty while making positive change.

“Young consumers are recognising the role that individual choices make in combatting climate change. By supporting businesses that do the work of being sustainable on their behalf, they are enforcing meaningful, demand-driven change – instead of relying solely on NGOs and NPOs to push green policies,” says Alex Glenday, director at Brew Kombucha, South Africa’s first producer of certified organic kombucha.

Coca-Cola, Pepsico and Nestlé have recently been named the most polluting companies in the world, for the third time in a row, in Break Free From Plastic’s Global Audit Report. The amount of plastic waste generated by Coca-Cola in 2020, 13,834 pieces across 51 countries, was more than the waste collected by Pepsico and Nestlé combined.

Despite investing in solutions to the plastic crisis, increasing reliance on single-use plastics by multinational food and beverage companies could double plastic production by 2030, and triple by 2050.

“Many companies – big and small – will skip out on sustainable practices to ensure they can maximise profit. Non-recyclable packaging and production processes that are not regulated are much cheaper than sustainable ones, so many companies revert to these by default,” says Glenday. “Now that consumers are becoming more conscious, they’re forced to make changes – for the better.”



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Lauren Hartzenberg 11 Feb 2021



Recycled or recyclable packaging – such as glass or paper – are key trends in the sustainability movement. In addition to this, green practices gaining in popularity include using raw, organic ingredients that are free of harmful pesticides, reducing or re-using waste materials.

“Products that are made in an environmentally-friendly way are generally better for your body too, and this can be a huge draw factor for health-conscious consumers,” says Glenday.

She adds that as a minimum, Brew Kombucha recycles, repurposes and composts 95% of its waste – including its wastewater, which is free of any toxins due to the organic nature of the products and the use of environmentally-preferred cleaning materials. The brand's packaging is also made up of recycled materials and is 99% single-use plastic-free.



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## Reducing carbon footprint

Beyond the product itself, companies like Brew Kombucha are looking at ways to reduce their carbon footprint by optimising logistics and launching sustainability initiatives, such as beach clean-ups, planting trees, or other initiatives that tie into their brand. “It’s essential to educate consumers about which parts of the product can be recycled and how to do it – this also gives companies an opportunity to reduce waste associated with their business,” says Glenday.

“Companies need to be careful to avoid ‘greenwashing’ or using environmental awareness as a marketing tactic. Being environmentally conscious is not a trend for brands to jump on to push their product. In order to gain customer trust, real actions need to be taken to back up any claims made towards being green,” concludes Glenday.

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