

**Sustainable and Zero Waste Beauty**

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## **The problem and opportunity**

The beauty industry in which we rely on for keeping faces snatched and skin smooth have an opportunity coming to them. The public is gradually focusing on sustainable beauty and the need to implement more sustainable practices in the industry. With the current stage of climate change, consumers are looking into ways they can help the planet along with their skin. Within the industry, being sustainable would mean finding ways to prevent the depletion of our natural resources to maintain a healthy environment throughout. Some notable brands like The Body Shop, are already ahead of the game. The brand has programs that allow consumers to reuse and recycle containers they sell and more. Furthermore, “greenwashing” is often confused for sustainability a concept that is an immoral practice within the beauty industry. The need to be more sustainable in the making and selling of products, should be the focus for many brands. They need to be more environmentally conscious about what they sell, how they make it, and how the product may affect the earth.

The broader problem at hand is the amount of carbon emission being made due to the production and improper disposal of containers and products. Although it does not account for all the carbon emission, it can be reduced to help the cause. “Zero Waste reports that more than 120 billion units of packaging are produced every year by the global cosmetics industry, much of which is not recyclable.” (March 2021). Beauty brands must find ways to lessen their carbon footprint. Two main factors to be aware of in sustainable beauty are the use of toxic ingredients and packaging and its carbon footprint.

In addition, as consumer, we are not doing our part either. For instance, many brands have started the sustainable beauty movement within their operations, but the effort goes to waste as it comes into the consumers hands. Many will dispose of the containers improperly, not

giving the bottle or jar a second life. Often products are not used fully and incorrectly disposed, ending up in landfills or water stream. The ingredients in the leftover product can turn out to be toxic to marine life and release toxic fumes in landfills. Furthermore, the issue of brands being comfortable with greenwashing coincides with being sustainable. “Greenwashing is considered an unsubstantiated claim to deceive consumers into believing that a company's products are environmentally friendly.” (Kenton, 2022).

There needs to be a widespread understanding from the beauty industry of how involving sustainable practices will help a growing disparity. Through these aspects sustainable beauty is a very broad topic that involves many little issues that need to be addressed. Although it may come off as burdensome, the small changes all over the global would make a bigger change. This is where big beauty brands play an important role in helping the cause.

### **Background of the company**

As mentioned previously, The Body Shop is a notable brand that advocate for sustainable practices in the industry. The brand was founded in 1979 in the United Kingdom and had overall sales of over 500 million USD while successfully having location across the globe. The founder of the business, Anita Dame Roddick has said “Business shapes the world. It is capable of changing society in almost any way you can imagine.” (Roddick). When the shop first opened it was evident how different it was from big shot beauty brands. The goal was to be simple and transparent, have natural and ethically sourced ingredients in packaging that you can reuse and refill. Unlike most beauty brands, The Body Shop had social and environmental measurements intermingled in the making of the company.

Moreover, Anita has left a lasting impression on her views of sustainable beauty and desire to fight for what is right. The company now has made a promise to keep the late founders’ words

and morals. On The Body Shop website, the company has stated what they continue to fight for. “We fight for social and environmental justice. It’s our main thing. Our sharpest focus is always wherever people aren’t currently being heard or have no voice at all. Many groups, such as young, or marginalized people and communities (especially women and girls) are commonly underrepresented where decisions are made - so we make a point of amplifying their voices at every opportunity.” (The Body Shop, 2022). Along with social and environmental justice, they also fight for human rights, against the burning of rainforests, and animal testing.

The detail that the company was started with the intention of being a sustainable beauty is what makes them different from most brands right away. In addition to vouching to being environment friendly, they are B Corp certified. To be B Corp certified requires warranting to “high standards of verified performance, accountability, and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials.” (B Corp, 2022). This also involves incorporating the Triple Bottom Line method in their business. Integrating this method means having a balance between people, profit, and planet.

As the awareness of sustainability has been rising, many brands have been making attempts at being environmentally friendly. Aside from The Body Shop brands like Lush, True Botanicals, UpCircle, and Burt’s Bee are recognized as top sustainable brands in recent years. Simply looking up sustainable brands may be tricky as there are many now that claim to be sustainable but in reality, are greenwashing. So, if there are so many brands aware of the need to be more sustainable, why haven’t they made the switch to a more ecological operation.

### **The proposed objective and innovation**

Companies like The Body Shop have been very innovative in their method of involving sustainability and raising awareness. In the past the company has done a test drive on a recycling

program for their product. The program that allowed customers to return, recycle and repeat and participating stores. In 2022, they are working to bring back this “return, recycle, repeat scheme” into over 800 stores across 14 countries as it originally began in the UK.

This scheme are three simple steps, first being to bring in your beauty products that can be from other brands as well, to be clean and empty, second is to bring it to a participating The Body Shop store, lastly the store will work with their partners MYGroup, Scan2Recycle, and ReWorked to give the items a second life. The brand also goes as far as giving a detailed guide on how to recycle in the most beneficial way. It is encouraged to recycle the large bottles made of glass, plastic, and other packaging at home in their respective places. The smaller bits and pieces that consumers often dispose of incorrectly like pesky pumps and lip gloss tubes, are encouraged to bring to The Body Shop for recycling.

Through the power of connectivity and networking the company is able to become partners with groups and organizations that specialize in the recycling and reusing of old beauty products or packaging. Throughout this partnership, The Body Shop want to take sustainability a step further and increase their “impact by recycling items classified as ‘hard to recycle’ items.” (The Body Shop, 2022). Their partner MYGroup also uses mixed materials to repurpose them into tables, benches, and planters etc.

The return, recycle, repeat scheme originated from a recycling scheme called “Bring Back Our Bottle” started by the founder Anita Roddick, in 1993. This innovation was brought back in 2019 to become the to be the scheme it is today. Then in 2020, they started a new system of refilling rather than consumer repeatedly buy a new bottle of product. The company currently holds five hundred refill stations across the globe, ultimately bringing back their return, recycle, repeat scheme.

Currently, the refill scheme allows customers to go into a participating store and pick up a refillable aluminum bottle to fill with your desired haircare, shower gel, or hand wash. After using the product to the end, you can bring it back to fill it again rather than buying a new bottle of product. Some may wonder how this refill method is helpful to the planet. This ultimately cancels out the need to produce copious amounts of bottles and packaging that may or may not be recycled properly. Furthermore, this closes a loop of making more waste as we use one bottle to replace multiple and reduces the amount of wasteful packaging.

### **Socio-economic and cultural context**

There are people trying to make a change through daily practices to reduce pollution. Zero-waste and sustainable living has been rising as report of the current status of climate change and global warming. The concept of sustainability can be rooted back to the three pillars: environmental, economic, and social. This is also known as the Triple Bottom Line model, in which it focuses on 3 dimensions of performance. These dimensions are known as people, planet, and profit. “This differs from traditional reporting frameworks as it includes ecological (or environmental) and social measures that can be difficult to assign appropriate means of measurement” (Slaper, 2011).

The use of this model helps those entities maintain a focus on social and environmental concerns as they do on profits. This will also result in the improvement on people’s lives and well-being of the planet. The 3 Ps, being profit, people, and planet, each hold a definition of their own. Profit is the traditional measure of corporate profit. People, measures the initiations social responsibility throughout its history. Lastly, planet is how the business or non-profit is environmentally responsible. “...some businesses began to realize the connection among environmental health, social well-being and the organization’s financial success and resilience”

(University of Wisconsin, 2022). If all business, non-profit, and government entities ignore the people and profit of the model, the full cost of doing business cannot be accounted. Finally, leading them to short term success rather than long term.

In addition to the Triple Bottom Line model, consumer is seeking for sustainable beauty brands as they make this lifestyle change. The Harvard Business School speaks on a study done in 2019 by NielsenIQ, “A 2019 study found that 73 percent of global consumers are willing to change their consumption habits to lessen their negative impact on the environment, and sustainable product sales have grown by nearly 20 percent since 2014.” (Chladek, 2019).

In terms of cultural context, in recent years the younger generation have been shocked with the news of climate change potentially threatening their life and generations to come. Currently, Gen Z is being recognized as the advocates for sustainability, being called the age of sustainability. The generation is actively looking for ways to become more environmentally friendly and help the planet. Many have already started to live a sustainable lifestyle, but it is still not widely practiced by companies. Delaying the progress in fulfilling the practice and lifestyle as such.

### **Impact and alternative solutions**

In the eyes of the company, being a sustainable beauty brand is a part of their identity. The impact the make for consumer group is significant. Consumers are struggling to find proper brands that embrace sustainability to complete the régime. To The Body Shop, it is a normal day of doing their work since they revolve around being a model sustainable beauty brand. Whereas the beauty industry is trying to become more comfortable with sustainable beauty. Although there are still room for improvement, when it comes to packaging in the industry “there’s the plastic wrappings, paper inserts, cardboard sleeves, foam, mirrored glass and more, sometimes

all present in one purchase.” (March, 2018). There are positive impacts being made but the accessibility to achieve these sustainable standards are still scarce.

The change from easily accessible and common materials to more sustainable materials could have been considered more costly and less accessible. In many cases companies cannot embrace sustainability completely due to having requirements to fulfill. For example, packaging, shipping, and carbon emissions. The Body Shop has proven to do everything in their capabilities to be a sustainable brand given the times. They have standards such as getting ingredients ethically, fighting for the minority, growing partnerships to better the earth, and advocating sustainability.

The company is continuously striving to be the most sustainable possible. As a B Corp certified company, they are always up to high standards in zero waste and practices alike. They focus on using the least amount of plastic possible and even when utilizing plastic, it is recycled or plant-based plastic. In addition, they are working to gradually make their packaging 100 percent recyclable. There are no alternative solutions the company deliberately avoids but cannot help but wait to make better solutions.

There is gradual effort in closing this gap by many upcoming brands including older brands. Many brands and consumers alike still hesitate to make this change. In terms of modernity, this is the new way of life for a growing population. To conclude Anita Roddick has said, “Beauty is an outward expression of everything you like about yourself.” She has shown her beauty over her dedication and work of making sustainable beauty possible through The Body Shop.



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