

# Study outlines how to succeed with refillable packaging

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Reusable and recyclable packaging are shooting up the news, public, and political agenda, and increasingly can offer a cutting edge to the growing number of environmentally-conscious consumers. But what makes a refillable product successful, and why do so many fail to hit the mark? A new study publishing today in *Packaging Technology & Science* examines what consumers want from refillable packaging and how manufacturers can make a success of their green initiatives.

The study's key finding was that pricing is essential; consumers believe that refills must be cheaper than fully packaged options, but that quality must not be sacrificed for cheapness. Most consumers surveyed said that their reasons for using, or wanting to use, refillable packaging was because of environmental issues. Perhaps surprisingly, this was also the main driver for businesses, who felt that it could show them as responsible whilst also attaining some cost-savings.

To get a complete overview of the issues surrounding refillable packaging, the researchers completed a thorough review of all literature in this area, surveyed consumers, and held workshops with business stakeholders in the UK.

Of the consumers surveyed (89 returned questionnaires) the researchers found some interesting figures, including:

- Only 26% had used self-dispense style refills (such as refilling

toiletries)

- 55% had positive experiences where the original packaging was swapped for a new product (such as milk bottles and ink cartridges)
- Less than a quarter had used a deposit system where empty packaging is returned for a financial incentive, compared to Finland where 98% of all soft drink and beer packaging is refillable, 90% in Denmark and 80% in the Netherlands

"There are a wide range of business and sustainability advantages to engaging with refills. If refillable packaging is designed carefully and applied to appropriate products it has a great opportunity to reduce household waste, and also reduce the amount of natural resources needed to package and deliver goods to the consumer," said lead researcher Dr. Vicky Lofthouse of the Department of Design & Technology at Loughborough University. "I believe that the findings from this study have dramatically increased levels of understanding about the potential of refillable packaging and how it might be successfully utilised by business."

For consumers, the main requirements for convenient and useable refillable packaging were: something quick and easy to use; lighter and easily transported; creates less waste and is less bulky; delivered in a convenient way; and is specifically suited to the purpose and nature of the product. For businesses, refills can generate high levels of customer loyalty, as they can tie the customer to the system if designed correctly. The researchers also found that as long as there is a clear reason as to why a refill approach is better and the refill is delivered well, people do not mind whether or not they are given a choice to participate.

"One of the key factors with refillable packaging is that if it doesn't

work, or consumers don't buy in to it, it can lead to more waste or more cost to the business. For example, if [consumers](#) treat it like a non-refill product and throw all of the packaging away each time, it could lead to more waste than a traditional product as the benefits envisioned by the designer are not being fulfilled," warned Lofthouse. "There are other issues such as extra shelf space and storage issues, which businesses have to consider, so it is important that the benefits are worth it."

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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