



“We’re of the opinion that there is already enough material out there, we need to turn off the tap, stop turning finite resources into virgin plastic. Let’s rather scale up our collection infrastructure and processing plants so that we can take dirty plastics, process it into clean plastic which we can use to make new products.”

Words and photography by Chris de Beer-Procter

Viro Solutions

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Viro Solutions is a food and beverage packaging supplier that offers small and medium-sized businesses custom-branded packaging that is recoverable, recyclable and truly sustainable. Utilising only materials that can be recycled – as in widely collected and highly valuable even post-use, Viro Solutions enacts their sustainability mandate of disrupting the post-consumer packaging to landfill pipeline.



ABOUT THE BUSINESS

Buying food or drinks is a relatively straightforward activity for most of us. Everyday, we simply enjoy our treats and discard the packaging without a thought. In our consumer-driven marketplace, the hallmarks of the take-make-waste culture seems a given. Until our assumptions are disrupted.

“When I discovered that what we throw away on a daily basis are, in fact, incredibly valuable materials, the illogical nature of our current throw-away culture of convenience dawned on me,” reflects Murray Charter, a founding director of Viro Solutions.

That was the point, says Murray, that he began to ask, “how do we redesign our packaging so that it's recoverable? How do we put products into the market with enough value that someone will want it back even after it's been used?”

The answer? Designing packaging from valuable materials that are widely collected and as easy to separate as possible. “In the recycling process,

materials need to be separated,” says Murray, “and so mixing materials drops their value significantly due to the extra cost associated. Most of the time if a product comes in with multiple layers of materials, recyclers just discard it.”

Besides focusing on adding valuable and easily recyclable products into the market, Viro Solutions is also testing the recovery of their products through programs with clients that rewards their customers for bringing products back to smart eco-bins. “It recognises the product via a barcode and the customer is rewarded for the recycle value of the product via an e-wallet,” says Murray. “The waste is collected and sent to the relevant recyclers who process and turn it into a raw material which we then use to make our products again.”

In this way, the company is trying to identify how they can shift consumer behaviour away from throw-away culture and help highlight the benefits of a more circular way of consuming.

“It's frightening how much valuable material sits in landfills, it's worth hundreds of millions. It's not just environmentally devastating, it's bad business.”



Viro Solutions believes the key is transparency. “People are more conscious these days, we know we have a waste crisis on our hands and customers want to know where their packaging comes from and where it's going,” says Murray. And so, the company puts significant effort into giving customers information about the packaging they use, by displaying the percentage of recycled content on labels and experimenting with hyperlinks that show customers how it's produced, what the product's footprint is, and where it goes if it's collected.

With their custom-branded packaging solutions, Viro Solutions helps brands express their personality, build trust and highlight sustainability efforts. As Murray notes, “it's really a massive marketing opportunity especially for brands aligning with a more sustainable outlook, which is a necessity in today's world.” And the outlook, it seems, is towards a better, more circular economy that uses what it has and takes no packaging for granted.

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

“The ultimate goal would be to collect and process more packaging than we put into the market. We'd like to have a net carbon footprint. If we can achieve that, I feel we will have achieved circularity.”



ADVICE ON CIRCULARITY FOR ENTREPRENEURS

“The beauty with circular thinking is that it gives a new perspective on existing business models.”

The best way to deepen your understanding about circularity is to identify all the existing solutions in the market and how they have shifted a linear model into a circular one. Soon you will find yourself identifying circular solutions on your own, one step closer to starting a circular business.