

DESIGN FOR
PLANET

Design
Council



LOOP, BY TERRACYCLE

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Design for Planet is Design Council’s ambitious new approach to galvanise and support the UK’s 1.69 million-strong design community to address the climate crisis.

This strategic shift recognises the fundamental need to redesign our lives to save our planet, and champions the power and responsibility of designers to shape a better world.

Our Design for Planet case studies will showcase ten leaders in sustainable design from a diverse range of disciplines. They will explore the role of design as a powerful agent of change through sustainability and climate-action. We want these case studies to inspire and motivate the design community to prioritise the welfare of the planet in their own work and practises.

TERRACYCLE

Innovative recycling company TerraCycle specialises in typically hard-to-recycle products and packaging that would otherwise end up in landfill. Founded in the US in 2001 and operating across 21 countries, it is now reimagining the weekly shop with its new circular shopping system Loop.

Already operating in the US and France, Loop is set to launch in the UK shortly, in partnership with Tesco. Products from household names including Persil, Heinz and L’Oreal are provided in durable packaging that can be cleaned and refilled up to 100 times.

TerraCycle’s head of communications Stephen Clarke told us more about the company’s pioneering work at the vanguard of sustainable design.

Can you explain what TerraCycle does?

TerraCycle’s mantra is to eliminate the idea of waste. We have developed ways to recycle things that are traditionally seen as non-recyclable - cigarette butts, dirty nappies, chewing gum, ocean plastics. Our free recycling programmes are funded by brands, manufacturers, and retailers and cover everything from packaging such as crisp packets, chocolate bar wrappers, baby food and pet food pouches, through to makeup, contact lenses, pens, toothbrushes and toothpaste tubes. We provide community run recycling hubs run by members of the public who can then earn TerraCycle points to raise money for a charity of their choice. We integrate some of these recycled materials into products - such as turning ocean plastics into shampoo bottles. Our new market, Loop, is moving away from disposable plastic that you throw away after one use, to hardy durable containers that can be reused many times.

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Loop



How is Loop designed to change the way people consume?

We're a recycling company and believe recycling is still critically important, but we know that on its own it's not enough to get us out of the problem we're in as a society. We have to stop the reliance on single use disposability, which is where Loop comes in.

It brings refillable packaging to the mainstream, keeping the convenience of single use disposability in a reusable model. We've worked with brands from Heinz Ketchup to Ecover washing up liquid to help them develop durable containers. They need to be hardy enough to be cleaned to industrial standards and reused a minimum of 10 times and often anywhere from 50 to 100 times.

Currently, if you buy a bottle of shampoo you own that packaging, even though it's the shampoo you want rather than the container. With Loop you'll pay a deposit on the container and once you've finished it you return the bottle and you'll get that deposit back. So it's in the brand's interest, because they own it, to make the packaging as durable and reusable as possible. It's the 21st Century version of the milkman.

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How do you see the role of innovative design in creating a more sustainable future?

Business as usual doesn't cut the mustard anymore and the brands that don't take this on board are going to be the brands that get left behind. There is no silver bullet - there's got to be innovation from a variety of sources, from businesses like us, from brands, retailers, entrepreneurs. All have a big part to play.

Industries have to design differently, whether it be better products, better packaging, better route logistics. When we launched our initial business model, people thought we were mad to recycle stuff that makes a loss but now there's much more awareness. We all have to do things in a very different way than we used to.





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Where do TerraCycle's design ideas come from?

We test a lot of stuff out and one of the great things about TerraCycle is we have a very flat structure - we share information, everyone has access to the same reports about what's on the go. If you've got a design idea, you can take it to the senior team and if it's good they'll bring it into reality.

We're always looking for the next thing we can do. Currently we see Loop as the future but no doubt round the corner there will be other things we come up with that will make a big difference as well.

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