

How to Shop Responsibly

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Consumer decision-making is a process with deep roots. Much of [brand loyalty](#) is linked to what a consumer's family or friends purchased while growing up. However, purchasing power must go beyond nostalgia to become recognized for the authority it beholds.

With climate change looming in our presence, it is important to direct money toward products and services which support regenerative practices that are not destructive to the earth, humans, and animals.

Breaking Destructive Habits

When embracing the role of sustainable consumer, it is important to begin by asking questions. How far did this head of lettuce travel before it made it to your plate? How much packaging was used for a shirt you bought online? Is your coffee [fair trade](#)?

Questions like these allow for examination of habits, and reveal which ones may require change. This goes beyond what is popular in the media, such as the statewide bag and straw bans. Though these are great strides in the right direction, it is important to dig deeper.

For example, Starbucks now offers a straw-free lid for customers. Though this eliminates the additional waste produced by straws, the lids are still made of plastic. A way to break this habit is to instead use a reusable mug that is made sustainably.

Supply Chain

A [supply chain](#) is the structure that exists between a company and its suppliers and works to create and deliver a product to the buyer. This crucial aspect of consuming is one that is generally not in plain sight. In other words, companies may not want consumers to view the often wasteful cycle a product endures before reaching the buyer.

For example, if you end up purchasing a reusable coffee mug made of plastic and purchased from a company you know nothing about, the supply chain may be unsustainable, even though waste is eliminated from the disposable coffee mug.

Additionally, consider if the material of your purchases is safe for *you* and your family. Generally, non-plastic containers are best, such as stainless steel or glass. When it comes to fibers, organic materials that are sustainably produced are safest for both humans and the environment.

How to Choose Responsible Shops

Shops that are sustainable are often not shy about their efforts. This is because CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility, is a selling point for companies that appeal to the responsible consumer. [CSR](#) is a structure upheld by companies that thoughtfully consider social, environmental, and economic factors within company operations. The first place to look for this is online. For example, start with an online search for "sustainable travel mug."

Rather than simply purchasing the first item that pops up in the search, research the company of origin, their practices, who they hire, their wages, etc. Be sure to conduct thorough research by checking multiple sources. Additionally, the price will likely be higher than it would be from an unsustainable source. Quality and thoughtfulness are more expensive.

Ultimately, the primary consideration in purchasing is the environment itself. A product life cycle begins long before the end result reaches the customer, and lasts for long after. The resources that come from the earth will eventually return to the earth. Therefore, careful consideration of this product's effects is imperative in purchasing decisions.

When the workers are paid living wages, the cost will be higher. When the fabric is organic and used as raw material for a handmade item, the cost will be higher. When shopping responsibly, higher prices are understandably a difficult hurdle to overcome, but your dollars support meaningful change instead of continuing destructive production cycles.

The Value of Responsibility

Corporate responsibility often requires a higher initial investment. However, responsibility often reflects the price of the product's lasting value, and the extensive thought and consideration that went into production. Sustainable substitutes exist for most items on the market. It may be best to

start by replacing simple household products with ones you [make yourself](#).

Examine your nonessential purchases as well, such as makeup, additional clothing and shoes, treats, and even your participation in unsustainable events, such as certain fairs and festivals. These frivolous purchases can often be the most destructive. Take the time to learn about the supply chain of these items, as well as your own stance on the company's practices.

Would you want to align yourself with a company that is contributing to [deforestation](#)? Likely, your answer is no. However, this knowledge is not made known to you when you choose a jar of peanut butter, or purchase a bar of soap. This information exists to be found, but it must be sought out.

Sustainable producers often fight an uphill battle against unsustainable practices, which hold precedence in many marketplaces. The solution is to lift up responsible companies and their practices. The more exposure and customers, the more competitors, and eventually, the lower the prices.

Word of Mouth Marketing

Another element of responsible shopping is sharing information through [word of mouth marketing](#). This already occurs naturally via face-to-face interaction, social media, forums, and other outlets. When it comes to sustainability, these interactions can be more intentional.

When using your reusable mug, for example, share with others where it came from, its cost, the value you have experienced from it, and how it is a more sustainable choice. As you slowly replace habits, products, and purchasing decisions, you will recognize the tendency to hold onto things longer and dispose of them responsibly.

For example, [Pela](#) is a brand that makes compostable phone cases. They detail their product on their website, and are outspoken about their conservation work and commitment to the environment. Additionally, their phone cases arrive to customer doorsteps virtually package free (except for the outer shipping box). The entire product life cycle is designed with the environment in mind.

Pela encourages customers to share about their case online by using a hashtag, which generates meaningful conversations about practical solutions for waste and other environmental crises.

With many people spending exponential amounts of time on their phones, this is a product that is also easy to mention in face-to-face conversations. It can spark a dialogue about the importance of sustainability, and other products that are entering the market with a true sustainable mission.

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