

Sustainable Materials

Museum of Brands Self-Guided Worksheet



Over the decades, packaging has evolved as brands work to keep up with both the needs of consumers and technological advancements. The context of each period has influenced how brands design their packaging and which materials they choose. In the Victorian and Edwardian eras, brands often chose heavy, sturdy materials like ceramic for packaging to travel long distances by horse and cart without breaking. In contrast, 1970s brands chose lighter-weight packaging to be more convenient for families where adults were busy working and needed easy meals on the go.

Use this guided tour to look at how brands have used different packaging materials over time

1. Pottery

During the Victorian era, local farms and butchers produced the freshest products. Vessels made of earthenware (clay) were commonly used to hold milk and could be taken back to the dairy farm and refilled when needed, reducing packaging costs. Pottery worked as a good insulator to keep dairy products cool. Due to the distance travelled to and from the farm, producers had to choose packaging that would be sturdy and not break on the journey.

Take a look at the ceramic vessels (across from the rocking horse) and write down some positive and negatives for this type of packaging.

| Positives | Negatives |
|-----------|-----------|
| | |

2. Glass

Glass bottles have been used for thousands of years, but there was a rise in the use of glass packaging from the 1880s onwards due to the invention of glass blower machines. Glass was lighter than ceramic vessels used previously, but was still a strong material. Over time, there have been concerns that certain environmental factors (such as strong sunlight) might affect the product inside, as glass conducts heat. Increases in distribution costs has also caused other materials to be favoured over glass.

Look at the 1910s to 1930s displays and write down what brands you can find that use glass packaging. Draw a star by the ones that are still around today.

Brainstorm why some brands might choose to continue using glass today instead of changing to a different material.

3. Cans

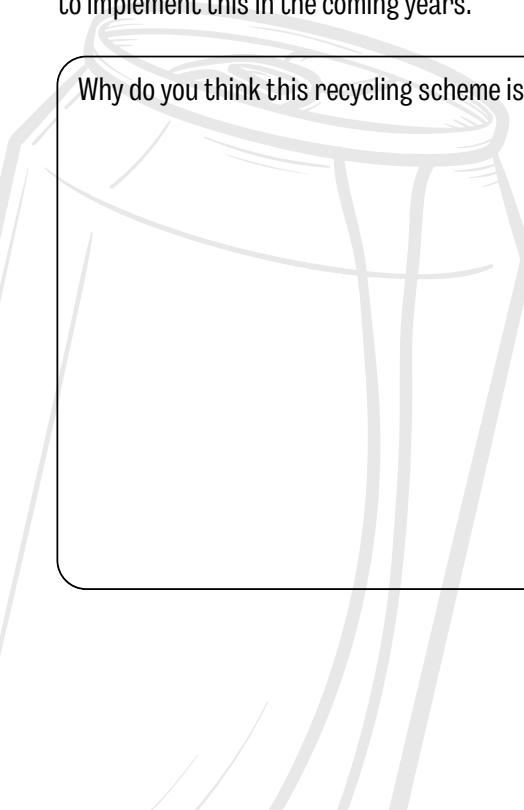
Most cans of food are made of steel, and are air-tight containers that preserve food or drink products for long periods of time. The UK began importing cans from abroad in the late 1800s. After WWII, canned products grew in popularity, becoming a staple in kitchen cupboards. The Tidyman logo is popular on cans seen today, to indicate that they can be recycled after use. The logo was first established in 1969, and can be seen on the first can in the 1970s display.

Take a look at the 1970s and 1980s displays and write down what different types of products can be found in cans. You might notice it is only food.

Why do you think household cleaning brands choose plastic or cardboard packaging instead?

Most drinks cans are made of aluminium, which can help to keep fizzy drinks or alcoholic drinks carbonated for longer periods of time. As more brands have chosen to use cans to package their products, more recycling schemes have been introduced as a sustainable waste solution, with many countries providing benefits for returning the cans to a distribution centre. The UK Government is working to implement this in the coming years.

Why do you think this recycling scheme is beneficial? What would make brands change to using cans if they don't already?



4. Plastic

Over the years, convenience has become a greater priority for many brands when designing new packaging, reflecting our fast-paced lives in the modern era. Ready-made meals grew in popularity in the 1960s, as they required little preparation at a time when many women were working full-time jobs for the first time. Instead of washing up, the packaging could be thrown away after use. Single-use plastic is durable, cheap and easy to produce, but also makes up a lot of waste in landfills and takes hundreds of years to break down. Some plastic is recyclable; however, around 40% of plastic currently produced is single-use.

Looking at the 1990s to present-day displays, write down the different types of plastic packaging you can find. Circle which ones you think can be recycled or are sustainable.

5. Reusable Materials

Throughout this worksheet, we you have seen examples of both single-use and reusable materials. In the present day, brands have started to create incentives to encourage consumers to use a reusable form of packaging, such as offering a discount on hot drinks if you bring your own reusable coffee cup. Throughout history we can find examples of reuse schemes, such as the Corona soft drinks home delivery service in the 1940s and 1950s. Vans would collect empty Corona bottles directly from customers and return them to the factory to be refilled each week. Look at the 2000s displays to see more examples of reusable and sustainable packaging.

Imagine you are working with a new company to design environmentally-friendly and reusable packaging for a product of your choosing. Which materials would you use and why? Draw and label a new design below.

