



30 Ideas
to kickstart your
circular business

**ZERO
WASTE
SCOTLAND**

About this tool

This is a tool to aid businesses (large and small) to design, develop and evaluate the business models of the future.

Thirty 'what if' questions challenge the status quo and inspire new solutions to today's problems. Each card showcases a successful business profiting by moving towards a circular economy.

Zero Waste Scotland have developed this updated toolkit, based on [the Knowledge Transfer Networks](#) (Innovate UK's network partner) original resource.

Zero Waste Scotland exists to lead Scotland to use products and resources responsibly, focusing on where we can have the greatest impact on climate change.



The Linear Economy

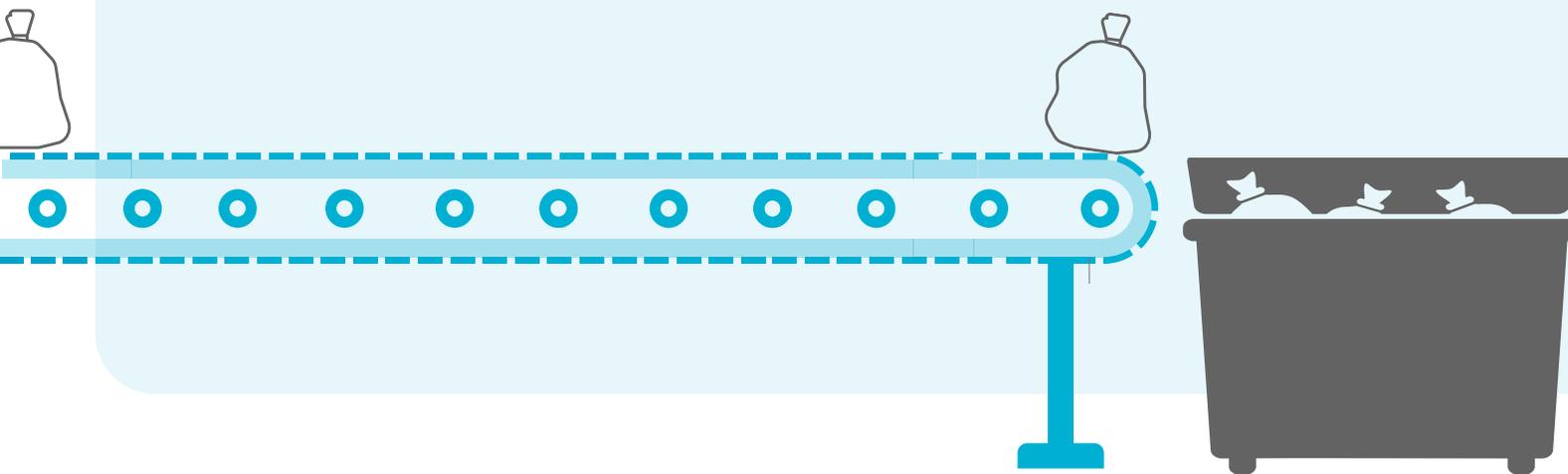
Our current economy is a one way flow of materials, from extraction, manufacturing, use and ultimately disposal. This model relies on **cheap flows of energy and materials**.

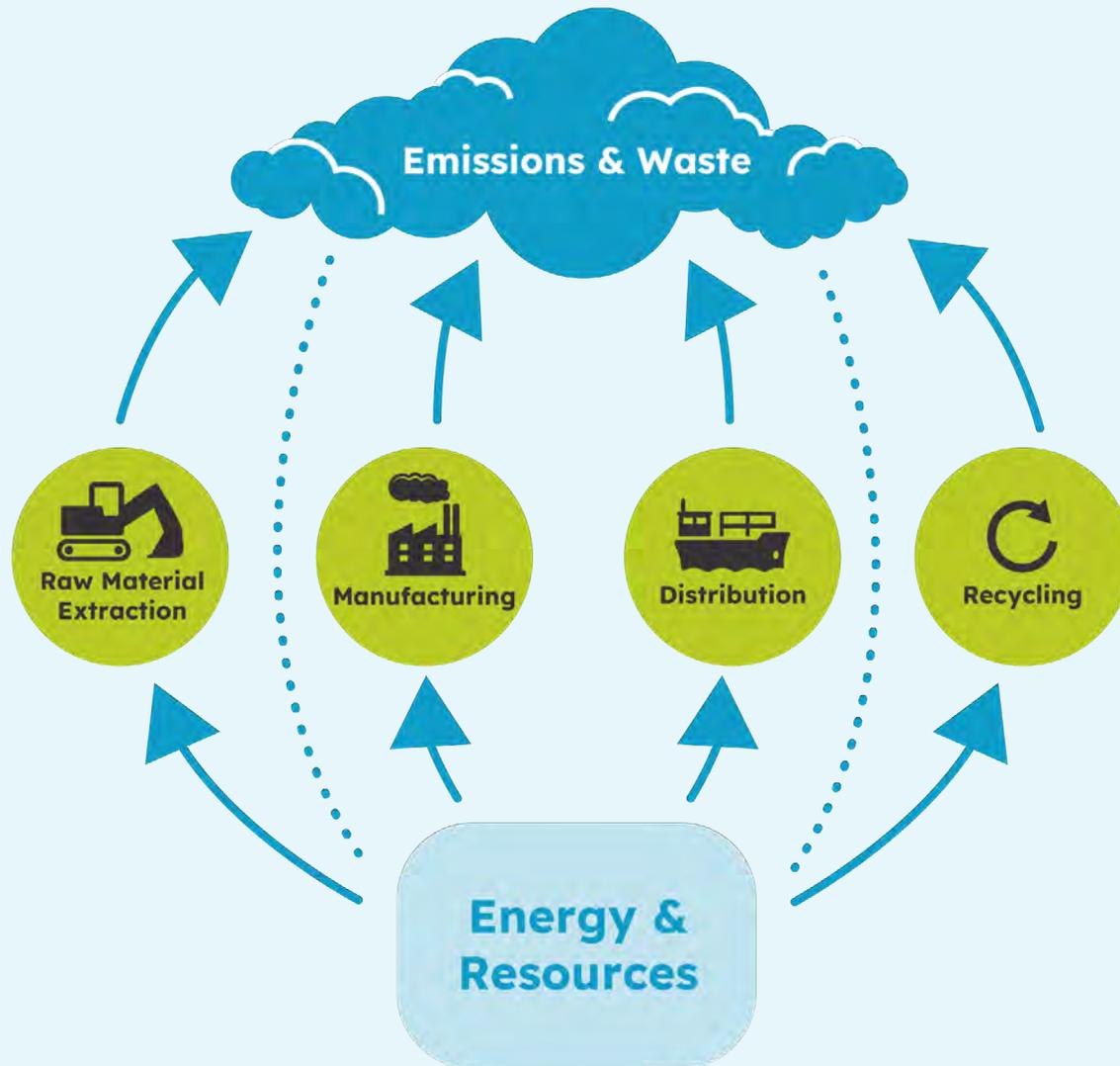
The linear economy has been extraordinarily successful at bringing affordable products and material prosperity to billions of people.

Whilst there is space for this model to grow and find efficiencies, it is **impossible to have infinite growth on a finite planet**.

The global middle class will double by 2030, with 3 billion more consumers creating an unprecedented demand for resources. Huge increases in resource demand, with limited supplies, creates huge price volatility for business.

Using less, recycling more and being more efficient will **not solve the problem**. A **fundamental rethink** of business structures, finance models and government policy is necessary to find an economy that can work in the long term.





Around four fifths (80%) of Scotland's carbon footprint comes from all the goods, materials and services which we produce, use and often throw out after just one use. This is the single greatest cause of the climate crisis.

As a society we are over-using our planet's resources. The average Scot consumes 18.4 tonnes of materials every year. Academics agree that a sustainable level of material use, is about 8 tonnes per person per year.

Our linear economic model leaks endless value through the poor management of products and resources. We have an opportunity to create a stronger and more resilient economic system, whilst saving the planet.

The Circular Economy

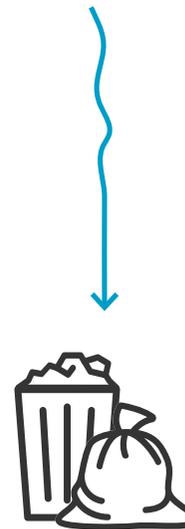
The circular economy is a practical framework for creating an economy which is sustainable by design. It aims to keep products, components and materials at their highest quality and value at all times. Crucially, **growth is decoupled from scarce resource use**.

Material use is of two types: biological (renewable) materials, designed for reuse and ultimate return to the earth; and technical (non-renewable) materials, designed to move back and forth between production and consumption with **minimal loss in quality or value**.

New business models question the ownership of products, with services offering access to better products, at lower price points. Businesses retain ownership of valuable products, materials and components, increasing profitability and resilience. These new **priorities design out product obsolescence**.

Scotland now has the world's third greenest grid. Renewable energy production will not solve the climate crisis alone, but provides strong foundations to build a sustainable circular economy, allowing us to collectively meet the Scottish Government pledge to end Scotland's contribution to the climate crisis by 2045.

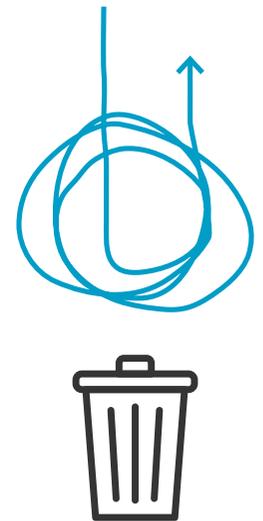
Linear Economy



Recycling Economy

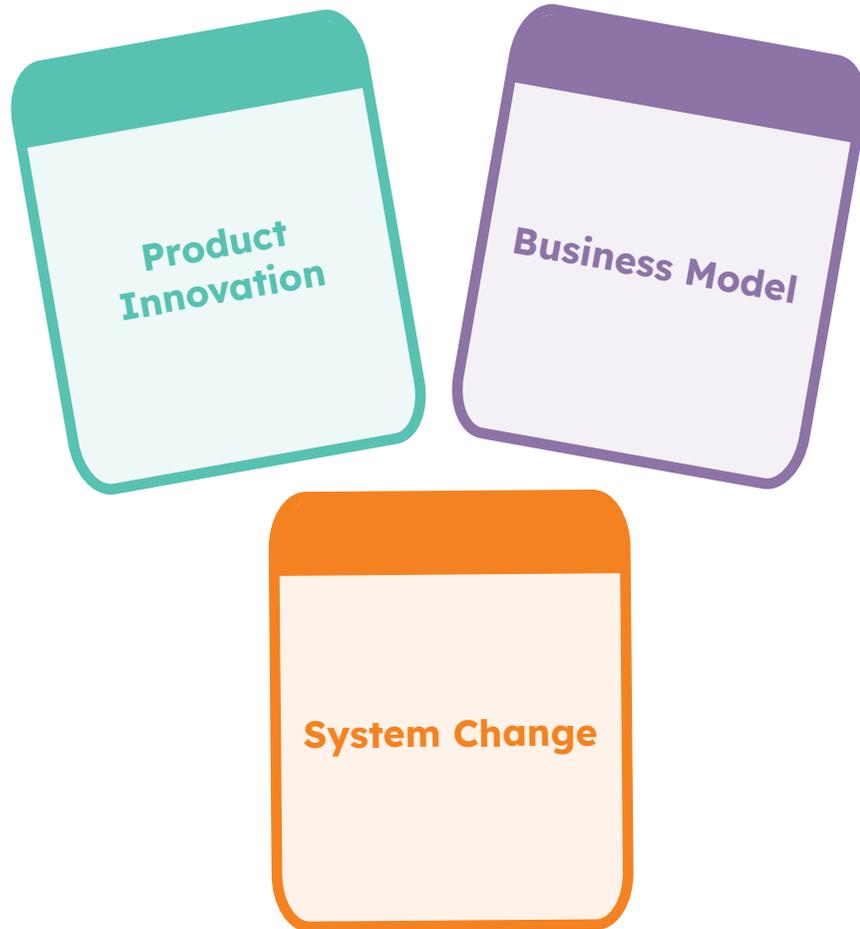


Circular Economy



Instructions

The ideas are divided into three categories to help you navigate the deck and to stimulate ideas:



As you look at the ideas, **consider how these concepts could be used to make your business more circular, or generate new business opportunities.** Keep in mind that circular economy isn't just about changing individual business models, how could these concepts be used to create more sustainable supply chains or influence change across sectors and geographical areas.

Pick out any ideas that present an opportunity to your business, have a think about how you could implement a similar model. What are the main opportunities and challenges?



Brainstorming Rules

No Judgement

Make everyone feel like they can say the idea that's on their mind.

No negativity at the idea generation stage.



Think extraordinary thoughts

No idea is too crazy. Think beyond material or technical constraints.



Use each other's ideas

Re-interpretations are crucial to get to ideas that you couldn't reach on your own.



Keep focused on the task

Try to keep the discussion on target, and in scope.



Think quick

The best way to have a good idea is to have lots.



Keep to time

Keep an eye on the clock. Make sure everyone gets a chance to share ideas.

**What if you sold outcomes,
rather than products?**

**Does a customer want lightbulbs
or the light that they provide?**

**Could you be better meeting
needs by delivering a service
rather than selling a product?**

**Would this change the design of
products?**

Case Study

EGG Lighting

EGG Lighting operate under a model that lighting should last as long as buildings. Their lighting is provided as a service, the LED smart technology is modular built so it can be repaired easily. If parts of the lighting system need removed the materials are refurbished, keeping them in the cycle.

This 'product as a service' and circular design model allows EGG to build a strong customer base and a steady source of revenue. Customers save energy and benefit from lights that can be simply upgraded with the latest technology.



What if you charged per month for your product?

How could offering customers access to products rather than ownership create a more compelling customer experience?

Would a subscription model allow you to track a products quality and upgrade them over time?

Case Study

The Bike Club

The Bike Club aims to make kids cycling more affordable and sustainable. Its monthly subscription service allows kids bikes to be exchanged as the child grows. There's also no big upfront costs and payments are spread out into an affordable monthly subscription.

Pre-loved bikes that are exchanged come back to expert mechanics who refurbish them to leading industry standards before they are ready to be ridden and loved by a new family.



What if hiring was more desirable than buying?

Could hiring products deliver better value to your customers?

Could it allow people to access better products at a lower price?

Would customers value the flexibility and choice that comes with hiring?

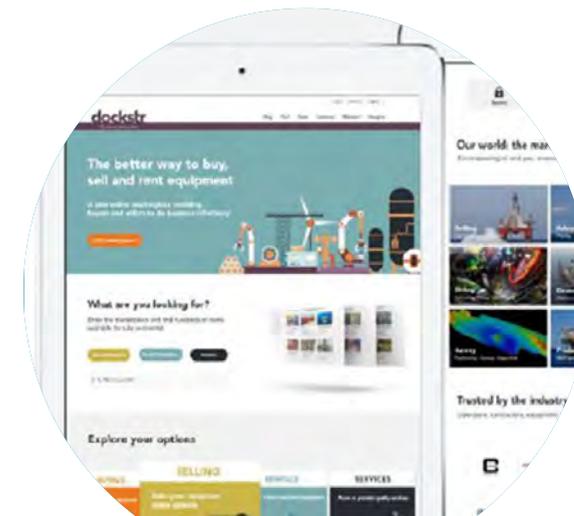
Case Study

Dockstr

Dockstr is a digital tool that allows customers to buy, sell and rent equipment and inventory within the oil and gas sector.

With one of the main barriers to reuse within the industry being visibility of available items, Dockster developed an online marketplace to enable buyers and sellers to do business effectively.

Leasing is actively encouraged in the tool and Dockstr offers transaction services to make it easier for clients to do business.



What if you charged per use of your product?

Could hiring products deliver better value to your customers?

Could it allow people to access better products at a lower price?

Would customers value the flexibility and choice that comes with hiring?

Case Study

Co Wheels Glasgow

Co Wheels was set up to provide an environmentally friendly, socially just, community-based alternative to car ownership.

The business wanted to provide its members with the opportunity to save money, reduce car ownership and create a cleaner environment by making lower emission transport options available to everyone.

Co-wheels operates pay-as-you go car clubs, pool car fleet management and franchise operations in over 60 towns and cities across the UK.



What if you shared your sustainability ambitions and journey with your customers?

Would this strengthen your brand?

Could it build trust with customers?

Could it help track and drive forward operational efficiencies?

Case Study

Rapanui Clothing

Rapanui Clothing is built on sustainable principles and is passionate about making circularity real. The business is committed to eliminating waste by taking their customers on their journey too.

Natural materials are grown organically. Products are only printed after an order is received, designing out over-production and waste. Every product is designed to come back and be remade when it is worn out. Customers are encouraged to return their used products so that new products can be created.



**What if you made money
from others' unused assets?**

**Could you maximise value by
using another businesses co-
products, by-products or unused
machinery?**

**Could someone else's waste
become your ingredients for
success?**

Case Study

Two Raccoons

The Scottish Government aims to reduce overall food waste by 33% by 2025.

Surplus fruit often ends up wasted due to its short shelf-life. Two Raccoons work with food businesses, food banks and other organisations to rescue their surplus fruit before it goes to waste and ends up in the bin.

Since 2021, the business has repurposed 6 tonnes of fruit including blackcurrants, bananas, mangoes and raspberries by turning it into delicious wine.



What if you took back your old products?

Could taking back old products lead to a higher quality material recovery?

Could it enable remanufacturing of products?

Would it encourage repeat custom?

Case Study

Renewable Parts

Based in Argyll, Renewable Parts Ltd owns and operates a refurbishment centre for wind turbine components. Their services enable parts to be recycled and reused.

This provides for a steady, long-term income flow and long-term relationship with customers. The customer has access to spare parts at lower cost and with shorter lead times.

Reverse logistics is a key part of the service, making it easy for customers to return used parts.



What if you facilitated sharing of other people's products?

Could you generate revenue from helping others to share?

How could digital technologies make this possible?

Could products be better designed for sharing?

Case Study

Edinburgh Tool Library

Edinburgh Tool Library offers customers across the city the opportunity to borrow from thousands of tools, sharing skills and knowledge as they lend.

The tool library means that individuals can access a range of tools without having to purchase them, cutting down on waste and helping people to live more responsibly.

As well as building things, the tool library is about building community. The library also runs employability programmes, volunteer build projects and a residency programme for young makers.



What if your product could last 50 years?

Could products be made to be extremely durable?

Could you find new customers looking for quality and longevity?

Would this mean that income would need to be generated in different ways?

Case Study

Highland Galvanizers

Highland Galvanizers, based in Elgin, have developed a pioneering way of extending the lifespan of motorway crash barriers. Traditionally steel barriers get a protective galvanised coating of zinc alloy which lasts around 25-30 years at which point rust sets in and the steel is scrapped.

The company has developed a way of re-coating before rust sets in, meaning the barrier can last for an additional 25 years with the same strength and safety properties as a new barrier. The process creates a massive 89% reduction in CO² through recoating rather than scrapping.



What if the customer could repair your products?

Could products be designed to be easily repaired by the customer?

Would this create greater brand loyalty?

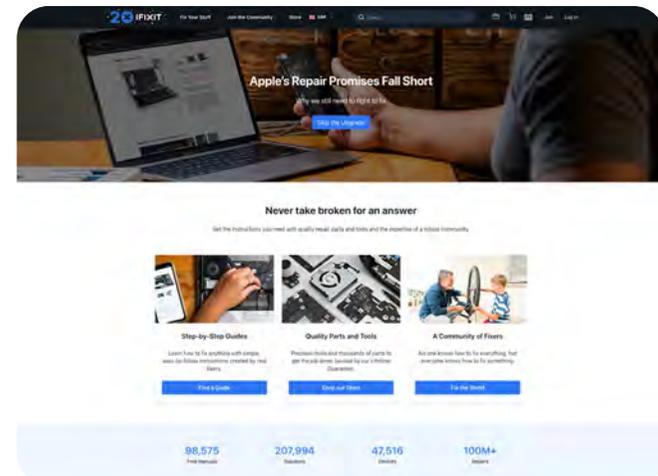
Could additional revenue be generated from selling spare parts?

Case Study

iFixit

Building the reuse and repair sector in Scotland will be essential in developing Scotland's circular economy - preventing perfectly usable items from going to landfill, benefiting the environment, and relieving pressure on scarce raw materials.

iFixit is an online repair community created to help people fix their broken products. Its service includes supplying replacement parts and tools to allow customers to fix their electronic devices and free step-by-step repair guides for thousands of products.



What if you could sell the same product again and again?

Could old products be taken back and restored to a like new state?

Could refurbished products allow a lower price point with a larger margin?

Could products be re-sold to a different market?

Case Study

Patagonia

Worn Wear is a program set up by the outdoors brand Patagonia. It aims to keep clothing and gear in action for longer by means of repair, recycling garments beyond repair, and by creating a market for second-hand Patagonia garments on their online store.

Those clothes that once sat idle in closets can make their way back into circulation and out of landfill.

What's more, if you return used Patagonia gear in good condition, they'll give you credit that can be used in Patagonia retail stores, on WornWear.com or Patagonia.com.



What if a customer could upgrade or customise your product?

Could products be designed to be modular?

How could a product adapt and change with customer needs?

Could new features or functions be added without replacing the whole product?

Case Study

Fairphone

E-waste, or waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE), is the planet's fastest-growing waste stream. Globally, 53.6 million metric tonnes were produced in 2019, up 21% in five years. Only 17.4% was collected and recycled, with much more ending up in landfill, burnt or illegally traded.

Fairphone is a B-Corp certified social enterprise. Their mission is to create phones that last. They design for longevity, easy repair and modular upgrades. One material at a time, they are working to incorporate fairer, recycled, and responsibly mined materials into phones – to increase industry and consumer awareness.



What if your product was reusable rather than consumable?

Could products or their components be designed to be reusable?

Would this generate more repeat custom?

Would this enable products to be shared?

Case Study

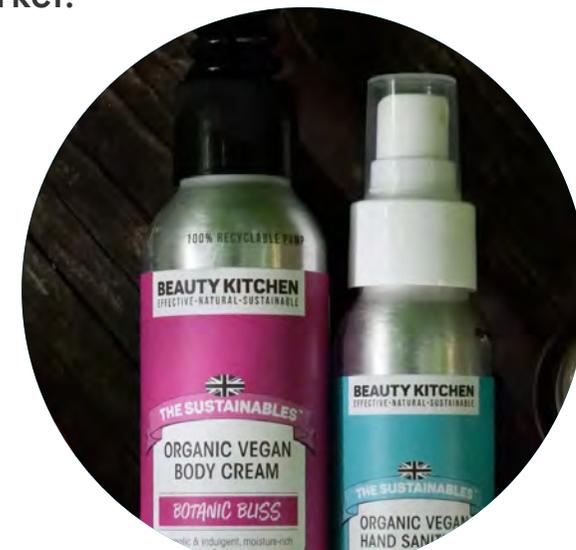
Beauty Kitchen

Beauty Kitchen create 100% natural and sustainable beauty products in Scotland.

In the UK over 95% of beauty packaging is thrown away after just one use. Beauty Kitchen are determined to change that.

They have pioneered a ground-breaking Return, Refill, Repeat programme, where customers can send back their empty packaging. Beauty kitchen then wash and reuse it - much better than recycling!

This closed loop model sets them apart from other beauty companies on the market.



What if a product was as easy to disassemble as it was to assemble?

Could your products be easily repaired?

Could you encourage your customers to replace parts instead of entire products?

Could servicing provide an additional income stream?

Case Study

Rhinowash

Rhinowash is a family run company that provides Scottish made power washers across the country, with robust quality, durability and serviceability imbedded into both product and service.

Rhinowash partner with a network of national and international SMEs and blue-chip customers to help deliver positive, innovative and sustainable change to their product, creating products that satisfy the demands of the commercial and industrial user.

Their unique quick swap modular design allows them to remove a power wash module and replace with a new one, guaranteeing a 1st time fix, every time. The modular system means there is no wait for spare parts to arrive.



What if your customers never wanted to throw your product away?

Could you be creating tomorrow's vintage products?

Could you celebrate the product's age?

Would this build a stronger relationship with the customer?

Case Study

Nudie Jeans

Every pair of Nudie Jeans comes with a promise of free repairs. No matter when or where you got them. During one year the business repaired 65,386 pairs.

One of the biggest challenges the business is facing in this area is scalability. To help achieve its circular ambitions the business has partnered with selected wholesale accounts and establishing Nudie Jeans Repair Stations in their local shops. If the customer does not live near any repair shops they can order a DIY repair kit direct from Nudie Jeans.

Through its Nudie Jeans Reuse program it has also collected 20,772 pairs of second hand jeans in their shops which are then recycled into new denim products.



What if your product was only made from renewable materials?

Could non-renewable materials be replaced with renewable alternatives?

Could using natural ingredients strengthen your product and brand?

Case Study

Seilich

Seilich grow wildflower meadows from which their botanical ingredients are sourced and carefully used to make high quality skin care products.

Seilich's ethos is to cause little or no harm to the environment to ensure it is able to continue making its products well into the future. It does this by:

- Growing 80% of its ingredients onsite and ensuring those that are bought in have an entire UK lifecycle.
- All packaging is recyclable as well as offering some reusable items.



What if you took ideas from nature?

Nature has been generating and testing ideas for 3.6 billion years, there's a wealth of solutions and no patent lawyers.

Could nature inspire new solutions for products and services?

Case Study

Xanthella

Oban based Xanthella are working to create a method for producing micro algae that can work across multiple sites and locations. Once perfected, it will make it possible for businesses with nutrient rich by-products, such as whisky distilleries, to generate revenue by growing and selling micro algae.

Micro algae is pretty special stuff, whatever you can make with fossil fuels you can make with algae, this includes bio based plastics, pigments and biofuels.

It is a great example of a company using nature-based solutions to add value to by-products and co-products.



What if your product was only made from one material?

Could the number of materials be radically reduced within products?

Would this enable products to be used for longer and in different ways?

How could a business profit from this?

Case Study

Hey Girls

On average, one woman will dispose of around 11,000 period products in her lifetime. It's not just the plastic applicators and packaging that are causing a problem - the single-use period products contain plastics and synthetic materials themselves.

Even worse, one pad can take as long as 500 years to breakdown.

Hey Girls provide reusable alternatives. Menstrual cups are made of medical-grade silicon and can last up to 10 years. Based on a typical period scenario, a woman would have spent £440 on single-use period products in 10 years, but only £20 on average for two menstrual cups, a total saving of £420 over that time!



What if there were no toxins in your product?

Could all toxins be removed from a product or safer materials be used?

Would this make it safer and cheaper to remanufacture or recycle?

Case Study

The Highland Soap Company

The Highland Soap Company create ethical soaps and skincare products in the Highlands of Scotland.

The soap is handmade by a centuries-old, traditional process. In this slow method of soap production, it takes us around four weeks to cure each carefully prepared batch.

They use organic and natural ingredients and sustainable packaging in a small-scale batch process.

They only buy from suppliers who are transparent, whose supply chains they can verify, and that they can trust to be kind to the environment and caring towards people.



What if your customer paid for the product but not the packaging?

Could packaging be redesigned to better fit logistics systems?

Would this make it easier to recover packaging?

Could it also mean that packaging could be used again and again?

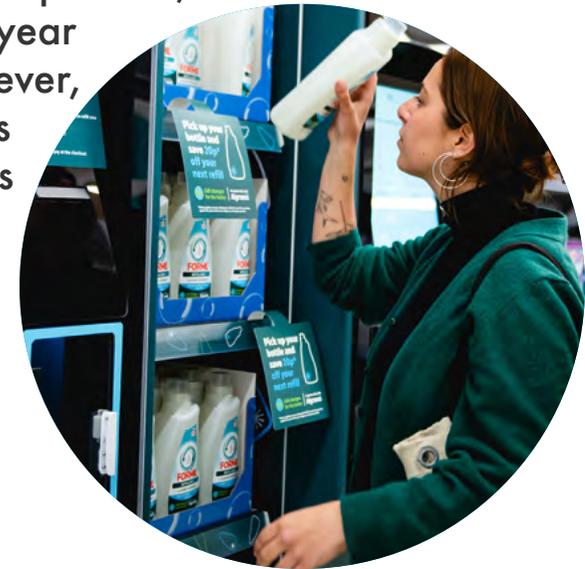
Case Study

Algramo

Algramo's aim is to transform the way customers consume. They have created a circular platform that allows you to buy your favorite products in reusable packaging. They focus on maximizing convenience while minimizing cost. They believe that sustainable should not cost more.

Algramo, a Santiago-based startup, offers affordable quantities of everyday products without single-use packaging.

The business introduced a reusable packaging system involving smart technology, dispensers, and affordable containers. During their one-year pilot in partnership with Unilever, some of Algramo's customers refilled their detergent bottles 15 times.



What if your product was designed to fit recycling systems?

Could materials be chosen that maintain their quality through the recycling system?

Could you minimise the number of materials in a product?

Case Study

ACT Blade Ltd

Edinburgh based ACT Blade Ltd are developing and testing next generation engineered textile wind turbine blades.

Their construction is 50% lighter and 30% stronger than current equivalents, which are made from fiberglass and cannot be recycled.

The blade is 100% recyclable and circularity is embedded throughout the entire manufacturing process.



What if you shifted to renewable energy?

How could investing in energy sources save money in the future?

Would powering a business with clean energy appeal to new customers?

Case Study

Glenuig Inn

The Glenuig Inn, located on the Sound of Arisaig, is a great example of a company looking at all operational aspects to improve resource use and efficiency. Since February 2015, they have operated using 100% renewable energy from biomass for heating and hot water and 100% green electricity sourced as locally as possible from hydro schemes.

Alongside 100% renewable energy use, they use no single use plastics, have reduced waste to landfill by 98.5% and no food waste leaves site nor is it composted. Their practices have also positively influenced their wider supply chain.



What if waste was illegal?

What materials in products would need to change?

Could waste be designed out through supply chains, customer use and end of life?

Could waste be used as a resource?

Case Study

Locavore

Locavore, an innovative 'super' market in Glasgow's Southside. Customers can come in and buy a huge range of items without also picking up the guilt of getting single-use packaging.

Locavore have been working since 2011 to develop ideas and practical solutions which can be used to deliver a better food network. Over this time they have opened a zero waste shop, developed a market garden, established a veg box scheme and got lots of people more engaged in thinking about issues around food, where it comes from, and the fairness and sustainability of mainstream supply chains.



What if your product could be tracked and located, allowing for it to be re-used?

Could asset tracking enable more circular products and business models?

Could updates keep products in use for longer?

Would preventative maintenance extend product life?

Case Study

Reath Technology

Reath are an Edinburgh based technology firm on a mission to empower more companies and organisations to embrace circular economy models. The company is committed to developing the digital infrastructure needed to help the shift to a circular economy.

Their system allows businesses to give items they want to reuse (from packaging to PPE) a unique identity – this is its “digital passport”. Every time the equipment or packaging is used, filled, refilled or cleaned; it is given another “stamp” in its passport. This creates a digital ledger that gives a complete history of that products life cycle.



What if your product was made locally?

Could your product be manufactured near to customers?

Would it enable cost effective to remanufacture?

Could it allow for more customised, on-demand manufacture?

Case Study

Britwind

Based in the UK, Britwind designs and manufactures two types of wind turbine for microgeneration.

The company is a subsidiary of Ecotricity and is focusing on making more sites viable for wind power, using low-cost, small turbines. Each small turbine can power three homes: the larger models up to 12.

All components including the tower, blades, generators and electronics are manufactured in Gloucestershire.



**What if you could use you
your neighbours waste?**

**Could someone's waste become
your raw material?**

**Could waste streams have value
if the right customer was found?**

**Could processes be changes to
add value to waste?**

Case Study

Maclean's Highland Bakery

Wasted food is a key cause of carbon emissions, with food and drink manufacturers estimated to cause a quarter of Scotland's total food waste.

Based in the Scottish Highlands, Maclean's Highland Bakery and Windswept Brewing joined forces to turn waste (draff) from the brewery into sustainable new crackers in the bakery.

Windswept Brewing is also working with local barley farmers to develop a new, locally sourced beer.



What if renewable materials could have multiple life cycles?

Could renewable materials be cascaded by using them multiple times in different uses?

Could materials be utilised by communities and businesses?

Case Study

Highland Community Composting Resource

The Highland Community Composting resource has been created for communities in the Highlands that are interested in starting or further developing community composting projects.

The resource provides a step-by-step Decision-Making Guide to help any community develop a project, as well as links to help, information on legal requirements, and examples of other projects already happening. Visit highlandcompost.scot to access.



What if you switched to using recycled and recyclable materials?

Could new recycling technologies be used to maintain material quality?

Could components be made from a single material to aid efficient recycling?

Case Study

Origin Plastics Ltd.

Origin Plastics Ltd (Origin) is helping to change the way plastic is recycled. The business has developed a low-cost, adaptable manufacturing process that can convert waste plastic into new products.

The technology enables the development of a decentralised model for recycling that will allow communities and organisations to develop circular systems for the manufacture and recycling of plastic products within the community rather than relying on the wider recycling network.



What if you grew more material than you used?

Would this protect from future price shocks?

Would it guarantee the supply of key raw materials for manufacture?

Case Study

Scrumptious Garden

Imagine if we could all buy fruit and veg, freshly picked, from market gardens on our own streets and run by our neighbours.

Scrumptious Garden, based on the shores of Loch Tay, turn vacant city plots into attractive market gardens. Because they grow among their customers, they can focus on flavour over shelf life.

Scrumptious gardens look more like cottage gardens than farms. They are open and welcoming to people and wildlife, delivering community benefits. They even help manage water and capture carbon.

As a social enterprise, all profits are reinvested to create healthy food, accessible to all.



What if you embraced digital technologies?

Could digital technologies help streamline manufacturing processes?

Could going digital allow you to re-design long standing business models?

Case Study

Vytal & Highland Cup Movement

Scotland has set a new precedent by being the first nation within the UK to ban numerous types of problematic single-use plastics.

Vytal provides a solution to this problem through its digital reusable packaging system.

Vytal reusable cups have been successfully used as part of the Highland Cup Movement - a large-scale, reusable cup scheme, piloted in the Highlands linked to the route of the iconic NC500.

More than 1,050 single-use cups were saved thanks to Cup Movement in the Highlands. To borrow a Vytal cup, all you need to do is download the Vytal app and either show your customer QR code when you order your takeaway drink or follow the steps on the Vytal app for self check-out.



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The information sourced for the 30 Ideas is available in the public domain. To find out more about each company featured, please follow the links to their websites. Images are credited to the relevant business website.

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