

Chapter 7: Marketing (refill)

Chapter Expectations

1. Value proposition
2. Communications and promotions
3. Packaging design
4. Campaigns
5. Price point

Introduction to Refill Marketing

Marketing refill systems requires a unique approach that goes beyond traditional product marketing. You're not just selling a product – you're promoting a behavior change, a new way of shopping, and a sustainable lifestyle choice. Success depends on effectively communicating the triple benefit: environmental impact, cost savings, and convenience.

The most successful refill initiatives have demonstrated that marketing must address both practical concerns (hygiene, quality, and convenience) and emotional drivers (environmental responsibility and community belonging). This chapter offers practical strategies and proven approaches for effectively marketing your refill system.

Raising awareness with customers

Purpose

When designing a reuse or refill system, it's essential to remember that people buy products not just for functional purposes, but also for emotional, financial, and lifestyle-related reasons. Therefore, to ensure wide acceptance and engagement, the system must deliver a mix of convenience, affordability, product variety, and desirability - not just environmental impact.

Refill systems must help customers feel like they are winning, not just compromising.

The Three Pillars of Refill Value

Your value proposition should address three key areas:

1. Economic Value

Refill models can fight the “poverty tax” — where people with less money end up paying more per unit because they can't afford bulk packaging or access low-cost retailers.

- "Save 15-35% on every refill compared to packaged products"
- "Pay only for what you need – no waste, no excess"

2. Environmental Value

- "Each refill prevents [X] plastic containers from entering the waste stream"
- "Join thousands reducing plastic waste in [your community]"

3. Convenience Value

- "Refill in seconds with our easy-to-use dispensers"
- "Buy exactly the amount you need"
- "Available at your neighborhood store"

Crafting Your Unique Value Proposition

Template: "We help [target customer] to [achieve desired outcome] by [unique method] while [additional benefit]."

Example Value Propositions:

For price-conscious consumers:

"Save money on daily essentials while reducing plastic waste – refill your containers and pay up to 30% less than packaged alternatives"

Why it works: It leads with the most compelling reason - saving money - and adds sustainability as a bonus, not the main pitch.

For eco-conscious consumers:

"Make a real impact on plastic pollution – each refill at our station prevents another plastic bottle from entering our oceans"

Why it works: Sustainability is the hook, but cost-savings is added to broaden appeal.

For convenience seekers:

"Get exactly what you need, when you need it – no more storing bulk purchases or running out unexpectedly"

Why it works: Convenience is emphasized, but framed in the context of everyday practicality and cost-effectiveness.

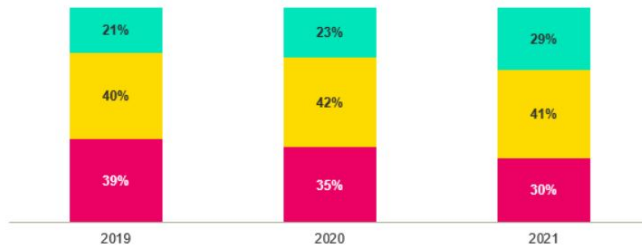
Algramo Insight

"Price is the top motivator. Sustainability and convenience support the decision but rarely drive it alone. Reuse models must show people how they'll save money first."

Eco Actives continue to grow

More shoppers are taking action than ever before. Eco Actives now represent 29% of the GB population and are worth £37bn to the GB grocery market.

Household Population share



Source: Kantar - Who Cares, Who Does 2021



Eco Actives

Shoppers who are **highly concerned about the environment**, and are **taking many actions** to reduce their impact. They feel an intrinsic responsibility to be more sustainable, follow the topic more actively and have a greater awareness.



Eco Considerers

Shoppers who are **worried about the environment** and are **taking some actions** to reduce their impact, but not as many as the Eco Actives. Their biggest barriers are convenience and price.



Eco Dismissers

Shoppers who have **little or no interest in the environment** and **taking no steps** to reduce their impact. They lack awareness of environmental concerns and do not believe they can make a difference..

Explaining Refill to customers - onboarding refill customers

Few people understand the concept of price per weight and are therefore unable to compare pre-packaged goods with refill products accurately. There is a need to educate customers on “price-per-weight” literacy so the value comparison does not stop them from selecting refill options as they are perceived as a higher cost. Simply sharing the price per 1L and comparing to the single-use alternative is a very straightforward approach to highlight the cost benefit of refill models.

Localize messaging at the Point of Sale (PoS)

Use **local languages**, familiar expressions, and cultural references to make refill messaging more relatable. For example, refer to traditional buying practices from local markets when explaining refill by weight.

Work closely with PoS partners (retailers, shop owners) to:

- Co-develop signage, labels, and talking points in local dialects
- Integrate refill messaging into in-store staff pitches
- Leverage local influencers or respected community members to endorse the model

How to explain refill to customers (how use dispenser) ie: retailers outsource, shops do on own
Segment-Specific Guidance

B2C – End Customers

For consumers, education must be **visual, emotional, and simple**. This includes instructions on how to use the system and why it's a good choice.

Key Focus Areas:

- **Price-per-weight literacy:** Show clear side-by-side comparisons of cost per unit (e.g., “¢22,000 per L” vs. “¢30,000 pre-packaged”).
- **Environmental impact:** Visual counters for “bottles saved” or “plastic avoided” help make impact tangible.
- **Ease of use:** Remove fear or uncertainty about using the dispenser.

The Three-Step Explanation

Make it simple with the "**Bring-Fill-Save**" method:

Step 1: **BRING** "Bring your clean container or buy one from us"

- Show acceptable container types
- Demonstrate cleaning requirements
- Offer starter containers

Step 2: **FILL** "Fill with exactly what you need"

- Demonstrate dispenser operation
- Show measurement process
- Explain product selection

Step 3: **SAVE** "Save money and the environment"

- Show price comparison
- Display plastic saved counter
- Celebrate their contribution

B2B – Retailers & Refill Station Operators

Retailers need a slightly different onboarding approach. They may be managing operations independently or through a refill-as-a-service (RaaS) provider. The goal here is to make it easy for **retail staff to explain and advocate for the system**.

Tip: What B2B Users Need:

- **Training materials for staff** (visual and verbal scripts)
- **Simple SOPs** for maintenance and container hygiene checks
- **Templates for in-store signage and promotions**
- **Clear business benefit messages:**
 - “More foot traffic and loyalty”
 - “Differentiation in the market”
 - “Lower packaging costs and waste”

Establishing customer incentives and loyalty

- **Higher retention / better acquisition:** We feel this is an important positive proof point that the reuse community is underplaying, particularly for early adopters. It is something we observed in our D2C and was the primary driver for the reuse range we supplied Abel & Cole (Club Zero), which improved their retention figures by more than 2 percentage points, saving them hundreds of thousands of pounds every year of operation in customer acquisition costs. Why haven't more retailers considered that there is strong latent demand for helping their customers reduce their packaging footprint through reuse and, therefore, a prize for early adopters? We think this is so important to the reuse space and it's not something that's getting traction inside the big retailers or brands. We think it will definitely be true for those higher-end grocers (or higher-end propositions) that can make the economics work at smaller volumes. They have the chance to offer strategic value to the rest of the business without much margin dilution; some big net gains.

Call out box from Dizzy learnings after they closed?

Point of Sale communication

Refill models are still new for many consumers, so strong and clear in-store communication is essential. Successful PoS communication not only educates but also builds trust, triggers trial, and encourages repeat use.

Use a multi-layered approach that blends visuals, interactivity, and digital tools to engage customers before, during, and after their visit.

1. Educational Displays

Help customers understand the **“why”** and **“how”** behind refilling.

- **“Why Refill?” infographic** – Clearly lay out the environmental and financial benefits
- **Savings calculator** – Let customers compare costs with single-use products
- **Product information cards** – Include ingredients, origin, refill pricing
- **FAQ stand or signage** – Address common concerns and how-to tips

2. Promotional Materials

Create excitement and drive action with regular promotions and storytelling.

- **Today’s special offers** – Highlight discounts for refills
- **New product announcements** – Especially refill-only items
- **Customer success stories** – Share testimonials with photos
- **Monthly impact reports** – Quantify plastic saved, carbon avoided

3. Interactive Elements

Encourage engagement with tools that guide and reward.

- **QR codes** – Link to video tutorials or refill instructions
- **Feedback forms** – Let customers share ideas or report issues
- **Social media check-in points** – Promote tagging and sharing
- **Photo opportunities** – “Refill Hero” wall or branded backdrop

4. Customer App

Integrate digital tools for consistent reminders and tracking.

- **Push notifications** – Remind users when it’s time to restock
- **Discounts & promotions** – Personalized based on refill history
- **Carbon footprint tracking** – Show cumulative refill impact
- **App integration** – If the retailer already has an app, add refill functionality

Additionally, make use of the customer database and existing loyalty programs. Collaborate with in-house marketing teams to:

- Send newsletters about the new refill system
- Offer early access or extra points for loyalty members who try refills
- Promote refill-related rewards within the existing loyalty scheme

Example: Algramo partnered with Lidl’s loyalty club to increase both awareness and retention, demonstrating how refill adoption can be supported by tapping into already established customer relationships.

Customer education - From Hesitation to Adoption

Customer education is critical to overcoming key barriers and driving both consumer behavior change and retailer buy-in. Different messages are needed for two key groups: shoppers and retailers.

Onboarding customers

Educating customers on how to use refill systems will be a key to your success. Do they need to download an app or pre-measure a container they brought themselves? What are the steps they need to follow to ensure a successful and enjoyable experience?

Despite the benefits of refills, adoption is often hindered by consumer concerns regarding cleanliness, effort, and unfamiliarity. Education must directly address these with proactive communication and visible reassurances.

Key Barriers & Communication Tips:

Barrier	Communication Tip
Hygiene concerns	“Our refill stations follow food-grade hygiene standards” + show staff sanitizing & certification signage
Uncertainty on how to use	Providing clear communication on dispenser instructions and use is key. This could be through a visual display, video (ie: via a QR code, etc. In addition, having someone to help

	customers get used to engaging with the dispenser during the first months can be very useful to drive adoption.
Time/inconvenience	Highlight speed: “Refill in under 60 seconds!” via short videos or real-time demonstrations
Value doubt	Side-by-side cost comparison: "Refill: 20% cheaper than packaged" printed at POS & digital ads
Authenticity of brand	Use oficial logos and brand to show customers what product is being distributed. When possible, include the batch production, producer info on the packaging.

Collaborations and partnerships to support your communications efforts

How to partner for better adoption

Partnering with local and international NGOs can accelerate awareness, trust-building, and user adoption of refill systems, particularly in communities with low familiarity or hesitation around reuse. NGOs often have deep networks, credibility in local communities, and existing education or waste-reduction campaigns that can align well with refill models.

1. Co-branded Educational Campaigns

Collaborate with NGOs on joint awareness campaigns—like "Plastic Free July" or "Green Consumer Day"—to promote refill as a key action point.

Example:

Algramo partnered with **Greenpeace Chile** to educate citizens on the environmental cost of single-use plastics and promote refill via events and social media.

2. Access to Underserved Communities Organizations

Leverage NGOs with experience in low-income or informal settlements to introduce refill kiosks in underserved areas. NGOs can help identify trusted local champions, organize training for kiosk operators, and design inclusive outreach materials.

Tip: Draft MOUs that clarify roles in awareness-raising, co-hosting events, or even incentive distribution (e.g. NGO-sponsored refill vouchers for first-time users).

3. Align with SDG or ESG Programs

Partner with NGOs focused on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This helps frame refill programs as part of broader impact goals—helpful for branding and accessing CSR funding.

4. Align with local government

Leverage the power of the local government to push the reuse concept and raise visibility. For example, before the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris there was a push to ensure reuse options were available in the city, and a website was created to showcase what people could do to reduce their own footprints. [5 Zero Plastic Eco-Gestures to Adopt Easily - City of Paris](#)

5. Extend your reach through brand collaboration

Use the power of brands (and their marketing budget) to drive reuse adoption. For example, retailers working with brands can co-promote the benefits of their refill options, refill companies can tap into brand customers to share targeted promotions. Find more examples in the go-to-market chapter for more ideas!

Behavioural change

Consumer behavior change is one of THE most complex parts of building and scaling a successful refill model. Switching to refill is more than a transaction; it's a behavioral change. Applying behavioral science principles can gently guide users toward forming new refill habits. It is also very important to understand your target audience and what drives them as you flush out your value proposition.

To address consumer behaviour, we should consider 3 levels of influence:

- a. Contextual Influences:** Factors such as price, accessibility, ease of use, time required.
- b. Social influence:** Factors such as peer behaviour, authority figures, advertising.
- c. Psychological influence:** The psychological factors at play - from intentions and trust to habits and emotional triggers.

When we apply this lens to refill, we uncover invisible barriers - and new opportunities to design for ease and impact.

A bigger toolbox

To help brands and organisations **design for behaviour more effectively**, we use a structured set of eight strategies—ranging from simplifying the action to boosting social visibility. These strategies can be applied directly to return and refill solutions to make circular behaviours easier, more rewarding and more likely to stick. For instance:

- ✓ **Inform:** Clarify economic and environmental value (e.g. display price comparisons: “Refill 500ml: £2.30 | Supermarket: £2.80”)
- ✓ **Simplify:** Make steps obvious and frictionless (e.g. clear signage near dispensers: “1. Weigh / 2. Refill / 3. Label”)
- ✓ **Stimulate:** Use prompts where behaviour starts (e.g. entry signs or newsletter reminders: “Remember your containers today?”)
- ✓ **Incentivise:** Reward repeat behaviour (e.g. stamp card or bonus after every 5–10 refills)
- ✓ **Practice:** Support first-time users (e.g. in-store guidance or “Refill Fridays” demo sessions)
- ✓ **Plan:** Help users commit to new habits (e.g. takeaway card: “My 3 Easy Refill Swaps”)
- ✓ **Socialise:** Showcase diverse refill users to normalise behaviour (e.g. in-store portraits or testimonials from different customer types)
- ✓ **Persuade:** Address concerns through hygiene reassurance (e.g. signage: “This refill zone is sanitised 3x per day”)

As we mentioned earlier, you can show the specific price point in comparison to the cost of a single-use item by showing the cost per liter / KG / relevant metric against both options. But price is not the only influencing factor. If the refill cost difference is so small, a customer might opt for the more convenient single-use option instead. You will need to play around with your marketing tactics, price-point, discounts, etc to help them change their behaviour, and develop a reuse mindset shift.

Encouraging Behavior Change: Principles and Practical Nudge Tactics:

Behavior change is essential for driving refill adoption. To design effective interventions, we need to address both motivation and habit formation by combining core behavioral science principles with practical nudges that make refill the default, attractive, and rewarding choice.

Foundational Behavior Change Strategies

1. Simplify the Action

- a. Make the refill process intuitive and visible (clear signage, easy flow, minimal steps).

- b. Reduce cognitive load by offering preset refill options (e.g., “Top Up 500ml”).
- 2. Build Trust & Familiarity**
 - a. Repetition and visual cues help customers overcome the discomfort of trying something new.
 - b. In-store demos or staff “refill champions” can model the behavior.
- 3. Create Positive Associations**
 - a. Position refill as smart, modern, and responsible—not a sacrifice.
 - b. Leverage cultural values like thriftiness, community care, or innovation.
- 4. Social Norms and Social Identity**
 - a. Use testimonials and peer stories.
 - b. Showcase refill as a growing movement customers are proud to join.

Practical Nudge Tactics

Building on these behavior change foundations, the following **low-cost nudges** can help trigger action and reinforce habits:

- 1. Commitment Device**

Ask customers to sign a “Refill Pledge” or scan a QR code that tracks their personal impact (plastic saved, money saved).
- 2. Social Proof**

Show a real-time counter:
“124,820 bottles saved this month by refillers in [City Name]”
- 3. Default Bias**

Offer pre-filled reusable containers for first-time buyers to eliminate decision fatigue.
- 4. Small Rewards**

Every 5th refill earns a free bonus (like a sachet of product or branded container label).

Reference: Behavioural Insights Team (UK) materials on environmental nudging:
<https://www.bi.team/publications/applying-behavioural-insights-to-reduce-single-use-cup-consumption/>

Take a look at the Accelerator session we ran at the World Circular Economy Forum where we dive specifically into the consumer behaviour topic (embed video or link [WCEF2025 Accelerator Session Why aren't return and refill models everywhere](#))

Localizing your Message

What are the distinct cultural & socio-economic contexts to consider

Marketing strategies adapted to local culture & economy

Localization is key for scaling reuse. A message that works in Europe might not work in Asia.

Tips to Localize Your Refill Marketing:

- **Use familiar proverbs or local idioms:**
In Indonesia: “Sedikit demi sedikit, lama-lama menjadi bukit” (“Little by little, it becomes a hill”) to reinforce the cumulative impact of reuse.
- **Reflect traditional reuse practices:**
Emphasize continuity with older habits (e.g., “Your grandma reused – so can you.”)
- **Adapt visual identity:**
Ensure posters, symbols, and characters reflect local dress, languages, and ethnic representation.
- **Flexible pricing models:**
Allow cash-based refills in areas with low digital penetration. Use mobile money or refill cards in markets like Kenya.
- **Community involvement:**
Pilot refill campaigns in collaboration with local women's groups or youth organizations to enhance credibility.

Customer retention rate

The customer retention rate (CRR) measures the percentage of customers who continue to use a service over a specified period. In the context of refill models (e.g., for staples such as rice, oil, or cleaning supplies), it reflects how successfully the model fosters repeat behavior and loyalty among users. This is especially important for refill - you will spend a lot of effort convincing customers to change their habits to reuse, let's ensure they continue to use it!

Tips to measure Customer Retention Rate - CRR:

1. **Define the time period** — ie: monthly, quarterly.
2. **Track registered refill customers** — for models implementing loyalty cards, mobile apps, refill IDs, or point-of-sale data you can easily track users. For those using non-technical models you could consider implementing physical cards to track use (ie: punch/stamp for each use).
3. **Determine the number of returning customers** — count how many customers from the beginning of the period are still actively using the refill service at the end.

4. **Subtract new customers acquired during that period** — this will help you focus on retention, not acquisition.

Call out box:

Recognition (page 14-15)

[RSVP_May25_ReuSe_Blueprint_2025.pdf](#)

Summarize and source some of the highlights from this recent report. Also calls out the role of municipalities

2. RECOGNITION

Ensuring that reusable packaging systems are clearly recognisable to consumers is crucial for widespread adoption and correct usage. This goes beyond aesthetics: recognition enables habit formation, supports behavioural change, and builds trust and confidence in the system.

When users can easily distinguish reusable packaging - and understand where and how to return it - they are more likely to participate. Conversely, poor recognition undermines return rates and system credibility.

In short, recognition matters because it:

- 🔗 Reinforces the **social norm** that reuse is expected and accessible.
- 🔗 Enables **correct use and returns**.
- 🔗 Helps ensure **compliance** with legal requirements.
- 🔗 Encourages **consistent use across cities and systems**.

Communication campaigns

Municipalities are uniquely positioned to educate and engage citizens about reusable packaging systems. They can do that through various channels such as:

- 🔗 Local media.
- 🔗 Public infrastructure (e.g. transport, libraries, community centres).
- 🔗 Events or schools.

By doing that, they can ensure the information is relevant and widely seen. Their involvement can bridge the gap between reuse system participants and everyday users by promoting awareness, clarifying processes, and addressing barriers to participation.

However, without active local communication, even well-designed reuse systems risk failure due to lack of public understanding or buy-in.

Case studies/ best practices

for marketing reuse models in different regions

LATAM

Africa

Europe

Asia

Algramo tips for refill marketing:

I would add the relevance of having someone during the first months to onboard the users and break the ice with the dispensers, people usually don't engage with a dispenser at first because they are afraid, or they don't know how to use it. This is key!

Activities or exercises

What is needed to move on to the next chapter?

Brainstorm what types of marketing strategies might work best based off your audience and PoS.

Map out your strategy to attract customers. Who is your target audience, what are their pain points,... what avenues can you use to reach them?

Knowledge Check (Optional – best suited for education or first-time entrepreneurs)

This short quiz is intended as a refresher for key concepts introduced in this chapter. It's particularly helpful for new entrepreneurs or trainees who are just beginning to design their refill marketing strategies. For experienced users, feel free to skip this section and proceed to the strategy-building exercises.

Question 1: What are the three main pillars of a strong refill value proposition?

(Select one)

- A. Product quality, packaging design, and hygiene
- B. Cost savings, customer service, and delivery time
- C. Economic value, environmental value, and convenience value
- D. Brand loyalty, innovation, and impact

Question 2: Which of the following best describes the purpose of the “Bring-Fill-Save” method?

(Select one)

- A. A method to track monthly refill sales
- B. A marketing slogan used on product labels
- C. A customer education tool that simplifies how refill works
- D. A promotional offer used by retail chains

Question 3: Which strategy is most effective for encouraging behavior change in refill adoption?

(Select one)

- A. Emphasizing environmental guilt
- B. Using influencer partnerships to show refill in action
- C. Limiting refill access to loyal customers
- D. Only highlighting product variety

Would it be helpful to have a chart they fill out along the way, apart from the concrete exercises? At least for new entrepreneurs...

To help you move toward a complete refill business plan, this chapter includes simple exercises and a fillable strategy chart that you can build as you go.

This section is especially helpful for new entrepreneurs who are still shaping their marketing vision. As you read through the chapter, you'll reflect on:

- The refill product you offer
- The technology you plan to use
- Who your audience is
- How you will reach and engage them

Rather than waiting until the end, we recommend **filling in the chart step-by-step** as you complete each section. This gradual approach allows you to connect ideas to your specific context more effectively.

Strategy Chart: Refill Marketing Map

Use this chart to organize your thinking and begin drafting your approach to the market. We suggest filling in each part after reading the corresponding section of the chapter.

Component	Guiding Questions
Refill product	Describe in detail. Is it a brand or white label.
Technology	What dispensing tech will you offer?
Target audience	Are you B2B or B2C? Describe your target audience?
Point of Sale (PoS)	Where will you sell? At home, in store, B2B? describe
Pain Points	What might prevent your customers from refilling (e.g. hygiene fears, time, unfamiliarity)?
Behavior Tools	What behavior change nudges can you use? (Defaults, pledges, social proof, rewards, trials)
Channels & Comms	What marketing methods will you use to reach customers? (PoS signage, social media, SMS, ambassadors?)
Partnerships	Who can support or promote your refill model? (Retailers, local gov, NGOs, schools, distributors)