



Spotlight



Highland retailer leading the weigh, saying no to single-use cups.



The Highland Weigh, in Nairn, chose not to provide single-use cups for takeaway coffee when it opened its doors in January 2022. The aim was to set a precedent with customers to show that they were a shop with a conscience.

Background

[The Highland Weigh](#), a social enterprise, is a store that offers plastic-free food, toiletries and cleaning products and, by allowing customers to buy just the quantities they needed, aims to reduce food waste too. Sustainability has always been paramount to their retail operations. So, when Highland Weigh launched their coffee takeaway service, they faced a dilemma - should they provide single-use coffee cups?

Like all single-use items, cups offer convenience for businesses and consumers. However, made to be used once and discarded, they also create a significant amount of waste. In fact 200 million single-use cups are used and discarded in Scotland each year with only 4% being recycled due to lack of infrastructure. This type of consumption contributes directly to climate change, pollution and other environmental damage.

Saying no to single-use cups from the start.

As a new business the public had no expectations from Highland Weigh. This meant they could go 'hardcore' from the beginning and said 'no disposable cups' would be provided in the store. Customers could bring their own, purchase one in-store or pick one up as part of a returnable scheme.

The decision was based on the knowledge that most disposable cups including 'compostable' go to landfill: "The public throw them into bins and they are tied up in a black bin bag".

The next step was to find an inexpensive reuseable cup to retail in store for customers who didn't have their own with them.

"The buying power of a small business is limited compared to the huge supermarkets that can purchase a million cups. Highland Weigh's cups had never really been cheap enough to satisfy customers demand for an inexpensive option."



A returnable cup scheme

This is where the [Highland Cup Movement](#) returnable cup scheme worked well for them. Buying and branding cups to retail can be expensive for both business and customer. A service provider like [Vytal](#), which provides the use of returnable cups for an ongoing fee to the business and allows customers to pick up a reusable cup (for free) and return it at their convenience, makes reuse more accessible. They did, however, experience some challenges around the time and knowledge required to use the app, particularly with those who didn't live locally.

The verdict

Losing a sale due to a lack of more convenient single-use options 'stung every time'.

However, the majority of customers were happy with the service and the Highland Weigh team could see that their hard stance on single-use was making a difference.

Many of their customers walk through the door primed with their own cups; they understand and appreciate the decisions Highland Weigh had made.



"We can hold our heads high knowing as a business we have not contributed a single disposable cup to landfill."

Learning

- Highland Weigh have reflected that refusing single-use cups may have been easier for them because they did it from the start, compared to an existing retailer removing the option once established.
- Although locals and regulars caught on, it can be difficult to cater for tourists and visitors that don't know to bring their own cups and this may result in losing some sales.
- If retailing branded reusables, it can be hard to balance cost for the business and the consumer against a cup that is functional and aesthetically appealing.
- Returnable packaging schemes make reuse more accessible and affordable for small businesses and their customers, but the new systems can take some getting used to.



Find out more:

The Highland Community Waste Partnership:

[www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/
highlandcommunitywaste](http://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/highlandcommunitywaste)

The Highland Weigh:

www.thehighlandweigh.co.uk