

Vast Opportunities To “Circulate” Plastic as a Resource

Creating a perfect circular economy world is an enormous challenge, but the benefits of resource recovery are a key factor in an improving quality of life.

SYDNEY, NSW, AUSTRALIA, October 23, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Globally, across media channels and in every boardroom, ‘disruptive’ business models and technology dominate strategic and economic discussions. Like other populist waves, most business media and corporates have focused on short-term successes of the moment at the expense of investigating and investing in the future. The resulting short-termism has, among many things, shunned one of the most pressing issues facing humanity, and therefore business, which is in relation to the waste we create, and in particular, that of plastic.



Resources Laying Idle on a Beach in Hong Kong

In the 1960s we embraced plastic, and it became the amazing material that has revolutionized so many aspects of our lives. From its simple origins (replacing elephant’s tusks and tortoise’s shell to make combs) to medical wonders, plastic has become essential and incredibly valuable as a material with traits that so many of our products need.

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*Doug Woodring - Founder,
Plasticity Forum*

Somewhere in the past 50 years however, while rapidly consuming plastic and enjoying its benefits, we learned to equate plastic’s low dollar cost with dispensability. This low cost for many products, has turned out to be a high cost for the environment and the communities that these products and packaging serve. Creating a perfect world of circulating resources is an enormous challenge, but the benefits of being able to succeed with resource recovery and reuse are both exciting and imperative if our global community is to function

with an improving quality of life.

Plastic is an amazing material, with so many good uses, but when not recovered to enter the circular economy, which roughly 90 percent of which is not, the pollution it creates is one of the most vexing issues of our time. Plastic has a half-life which far exceeds that of carbon, it is highly durable, complex in its make-up, widely diverse in its types, light weight, and hard to recover economically at scale.

These traits create daunting challenges for scaled recovery. As the world's population grows, with an increasing consumption of goods that are made of, or packed within, plastic, the burden on our communities continues to increase. The quest for reduced carbon use in transportation, production and packaging has exploited many of the “low hanging fruit” opportunities that plastic and light-weighting have provided, but have now left us with tough questions of where to go next, and how to recover this permanent material which we use in a plethora of non-permanent ways.

The recovery and circulation of plastic waste, however, also poses some large disruptive opportunities for the engaged leaders in business, innovation and policy who see this blight in our environment and waters continuing to grow. Economies like Australia are currently in flux as to how to keep their resource export “machine” running, but they are also a close neighbor to South East Asia, and could be leading the charge with technologies and innovation that can help recover some of our waste resources. This important discussion will be taking place next week at [Plasticity Sydney](#), as examples of new solutions that need to scale, and will be coupled with topics on logjams that need to be disrupted. Those who lead the market with the use of bring-back programs, “enlightened procurement” for recycled content, and optimization of reverse supply-chains and home “recovery/collection” programs to complement deliveries, will be well suited to inspire, recruit and engage communities who want to become part of these new opportunities for disruptive solutions. Collectively, we need to encourage thought leaders, innovators and social-change experts to collaborate with the “Elon Musks” of the world, companies who can run (and benefit from) the programs, and the policy makers who can facilitate laws and regulations which make material recovery a priority. These improvements can and should be considered regardless of the size of the company, or whether they operate in villages, towns, municipalities or nations.



Plastic Soup from a Hong Kong Beach

Whether or not the ocean and our waters upstream are drivers for needed improvements in plastic pollution reduction, the health of our communities, and the customers we all need, should be incentive enough to demand and encourage management to truly focus on being an active participant in the circular economy. Plastic pollution is now on the top of many environmental agendas, as it directly impacts the abilities of cities to be resilient, and “smart.” Governments can facilitate circularity and waste avoidance, but it is the private sector which will thrive on it once some good case studies are promoted, scaled and replicated.

Although the world is now more aware of our plastic pollution challenges, easy and scalable examples have yet to be showcased at the level needed for substantial change. Waste is a localized issue, and access to feedstock (material) for recycling or energy creation is dependent upon collection and recovery systems which typically do not exist yet in efficient forms, including even developed cities. There is no silver bullet for plastic pollution, and slowing the creation of waste from our consumption habits will require creative, engaging, community-embracing programs that can scale in volume, but which can also incentivize and reward companies, governments and the communities to participate over the long term. This requires the minds, visions and acceptance by producers that they have a responsibility to the communities they serve, by taking care of the materials they disperse, even at the

end of their initial life. This is where the discussion at Plasticity Sydney comes into play, which brings together experts across the plastic spectrum to speak about innovations and solutions, for a world without the waste footprint.

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