



Rainbow, cly2, Flickr, 22nd February 2014, Creative commons license: ShareAlike 2.0 Generic

Hangers clothes, Anthony Easton, 23rd January 2005, Flickr, Creative commons license: 2.0 Generic

Braiform

Each year 15 billion clothes hangers are used by the garment industry across the world. Plastic is often used as a hanger material as it is durable, easily produced and cheaper than most alternatives. However, some hangers produced for clothes industries are used for as little as three months before they are discarded, sometimes as soon as they reach the checkout. The short lifespan of these hangers means that more need to be produced to meet the demands of those clothes manufacturers and retailers who need them to distribute and to sell their products.

For decades companies have continued to produce, use and dispose of hangers in this traditional fashion. The waste stream of these products is therefore very inefficient, with more raw materials being required for new hangers, more plastic going to landfill, and more harmful emissions entering the atmosphere both during production and transportation. The manufacture of some plastics such as those used for packaging and common household items are known to have adverse effects on wildlife, habitats and even on human health.

To help tackle the environmental impact one company has recognised an opportunity to close the loop of this system, lower costs, and benefit everyone. Braiform have decided to prioritise hanger re-use rather than hanger production. They have become a global leader in garment hanger reuse with over 50 years' experience working with major brands and retailers around the world. They have achieved this by working closely with companies and partners to help them recognise re-useable hangers as valuable and cost-effective resource, and by connecting them with a network of re-use and re-distribution centres around the world. This not only drives down their costs but helps them become more sustainable and reach their own green targets.

This is how it works;

1. Braiform initially produces hangers using highly quality recyclable materials made from polymers that are known to be pure and easily recycled.
2. Garment manufacturers then buy these hangers online and they are used to distribute clothes to retailers.
3. Customers buy the clothes in stores and the checkout operator places the hangers in Braiform boxes which are normally stored below the checkout.
4. These boxes are later collected and taken to one of a number of Braiform re-use facilities around the world.
5. At the re-use facilities the hangers are cleaned, packed and re-distributed through one of their many re-distribution centres in garment producing regions to manufacturers or retailers who need them
6. This processes repeats until the end of the natural life-span of the hangers which are then returned to Braiform factories where they are shredded, the raw materials are gathered, and new hangers are made from the recycled materials.

In 2017 Braiform's Re-Use program is said to have saved around 1 billion garment hangers and accessories from being sent to landfill. They are now considered one of the largest garment hanger suppliers in the world. In the past, the company was a key player in the initial manufacture of these products, but fifteen years ago the decision was made to sell off all production facilities and commit to a dedicated re-use supply chain.

Last year, 30 million hangers were made from the company's own waste stream. Their hanger re-use system has been recognised as the first ever closed-loop hanger service.

Learning from Nature Principles supported by Braiform

- Nature is adaptive – Braiform recognise that there is room for improvement. By identifying new ways of making their products green they are adapting to changing legislation and continue to progress towards zero waste solutions. They are constantly innovating and thinking of new ways to improve their advanced systems.
- In nature diversity gives multiple benefits – their business model not only helps reduce the environmental impacts of the manufacturing industry but lower material costs, shields them from fluctuating oil and gas prices, and provides many jobs, just over 500 people.
- In nature diversity gives strength

What Makes Braiform's Services and products Green/Circular?

- Global footprint – Braiform utilises local contact points in garment manufacturing regions. This keeps transport low and therefore reduces emissions associated with travel.
- Pollution – they are reducing the pollution generated from traditional manufacturing of these products by 70%. The carbon footprint of plastic is about 6 kg CO₂ per kg of plastic and around 6% of the world-wide oil consumption is used for the production of plastic.
- Recycling – those hangers that have come to the end of their usable life, either broken, dirty or obsolete are not put back into the waste stream to end up in landfill. Plastics from landfill can sometimes end up in our rivers, lakes and oceans. They can contain thousands of chemicals, some of which have harmful effects to plants and animals. Microplastics in particular are having a huge effect on biodiversity.
- Circular business model - Braiform have moved from a "take-make-depose" system to the inner loops of the technical cycle.

Microplastics

Marine scientists estimate that around half of the marine creatures living at depths of more than 2000m in the North Atlantic could be eating microplastic material. Microplastics are small pieces of plastic which are small enough to be ingested by marine organisms. They naturally float and are therefore visible and attractive and look like food. Eventually these plastics end up through various food chains passing on harmful chemicals which can kill throughout habitats and adversely affecting local ecosystem.

Today Braiform supplies in excess of 2.5 billion hangers, re-uses 1 billion and recycles 250 million each year. Just like many of the companies who are pioneers in circular business, Braiform are continuing to commit to ways of improving their business even further to. Most hangers being produced and in circulation today are made from polystyrene which can take thousands of years to decompose. Braiform are now investigating bioplastics as an alternative, however they are currently around 75% more expensive. They have committed to a mission which aims change the global retail industry for good.

Useful websites;

<https://braiform.com/> <https://vimeo.com/241677094>

Hanging around a lot longer in the supply chain- <https://www.mrw.co.uk/hanging-around-a-lot-longer-in-the-retail-supply-chain/8665940.article>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/environment/why-recycle-plastic-rubbish-oceans-8-million-tonnes-pollution-microplastics-a7541476.html>

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/12/11/how-green-are-plastic-and-wire-coat-hangers.html>

