

# In the bathrooms of the future, shampoo comes in cans

Aluminium is infinitely recyclable – with three quarters of all aluminium ever mined still in existence today. Can we harness this property to make cosmetics greener?

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*Maddyne* spoke to Mary McLeod, cofounder of KANKAN, which is providing an alternative to single-use plastic body wash, baby wash and hand wash bottles. We discussed the rise in bathroom product subscription services; collaborating with other zero-waste founders; and the need for policy intervention to create a circular economy.

## Can you tell me about your backgrounds and the genesis of the idea behind KANKAN?

At the time of dreaming up KANKAN we were both living in Hackney, London, each with our young families. Eliza has a Hackney-based restaurant, Lardo (it's the best). I was on maternity leave from my job as a retail buyer for a department store, and had been doing a short course in sustainability in fashion. It really cemented for me the desire to be channelling work into something that could make a better impact.

The significant moment happened over a campfire when we escaped Hackney

for a weekend of nature with our families. Like so many of us at that point, we had been shocked into action by Blue Planet and were determined to make better changes for ourselves and our families. We shared some of our trials and fails and, between us, reckoned there had to be other ways of living.

*We wanted to shop plastic-free – but we didn't want to be making sacrifices in the process.*

The idea was very much mission-led, then the long road of R&D led us to KANKAN as it is today. It is exciting to see so many new brands really embracing this category in a fresh, modern way.

## Why have we not had canned shampoo forever?! And what are the barriers to a society-wide rollout of aluminium as opposed to plastic packaging?

There are so many things that make it a great packaging alternative but these can also be barriers too.

Whilst aluminium cans are long-lasting and can be recycled forever, they are also incredibly delicate. We have to be really careful in the handling of our products and there are added levels of work operationally for us.

Both of these factors translate to added business expense, so I can see how that can be a barrier for getting started.

Like all packaging, it isn't without its faults. The initial mining is intensive so it was paramount to us to have carbon offset as part of our product from the get-go. We plant one tree for every can sold.

## You're launching a subscription service

soon. What are the pros of this? Do you think it leads to a more sustainable way of doing things? I'm thinking of brands like Wild Cosmetics and Estrid.

Yes, launching a subscription service is very much in the pipeline for us. Buying your cans less frequently and in bulk has added benefits in regards to delivery emissions, but also minimises the situation we often find ourselves in – of being caught short and having to make a quick purchase of what's available. That's often where the plastic creeps in.

Signing up to a bathroom subscription service like ours ultimately means less plastic going to landfill and more trees being planted.

How come you chose a primarily B2C model? What have your encounters with stockists and potential investors been like – if indeed you've had any?

We've been very encouraged by the interest we have had and saying no is something we have had to work on!

We launched in a MVP way to test the reception to our concept and brand and that has been really great. Concentrating on B2C has provided a lot of learnings and focus for the future.

We have been self-funded to date and we will be working on raising finance as a means to develop and scale our concept further and to make wholesale a viable route for us.

Judging by the *Circular by Design* series on your blog, you're very in touch with other brands and creators working

# towards a circular economy. Could you share some of your favourites?

Yes, we love learning about others in this space; it is so inspiring.

Dabba Drop, which makes delicious plant-based curries, is one of them. It's a takeaway subscription service; you return your tiffin container as you receive your next delivery, which arrives by bike and always with a smile. Dabba Drop started hyper-local but we are super excited to see it grow into new postcodes.

*We also really admire the beauty brand Upcircle. It has demonstrated that you can use waste products to make luxurious products, and do so at scale.*

Reborn in Colour is another one. Amongst its gorgeous bed offering, it sells upcycled bed linen, which is naturally dyed and resized ahead of a new existence.

## What do you think needs to change – on a policy or investment level – to bring about a circular economy in the UK?

I think there absolutely needs to be more policy in place to reward and incentivise reuse and penalise throwaway culture.

There are things we do back-of-house to apply a circular model in our operations, for example always reusing the same containers for soap production with our manufacturers. It would be considerably easier and cheaper for us to not apply a circular model here, but of course that is not the point.

Significant change needs to occur on both a policy and an investment level, to make working in this way more viable, and to allow new ideas and businesses to be able to accelerate.

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