

# Unravelling eco-friendly buzzwords: A guide for ethical beauty entrepreneurs

In today's beauty industry, the allure of eco-friendly products and sustainable practices is more enticing than ever. However, behind the glitzy packaging and catchy buzzwords lies a disconcerting truth: greenwashing and false advertising are rampant, leaving well-intentioned entrepreneurs in the dark about the true impact of their products.

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It's time to shed light on this critical issue. I could go on for days, as the list doesn't stop here, but four key buzzwords that are running riot around our industry are as follows;

Biodegradable

Eco-friendly

Organic

Refillable

At *Selfnamed*, we thought it might be handy for the UK's budding skincare, beauty and cosmetics entrepreneurs to see the change we are fighting for in this, a truly diverse and exciting industry when you look under the skin (sorry).

## The dilemma of misleading buzzwords

Entrepreneurs who value sustainability and ethical practices often find themselves grappling with the ambiguity surrounding buzzwords like “eco-friendly” and “organic.” Sadly, there are numerous pitfalls of relying solely on these terms, they come without proper regulations so it is down to you and I, the community, to be able to make these judgments ourselves when sourcing products.

## Biodegradable: More than meets the eye

The term “biodegradable” has become synonymous with environmental consciousness, but not all biodegradable products are created equal. Biodegradability is complex – we are led to believe that if something is biodegradable, we can throw it in the AT HOME compost bin, we have been led astray. Straight away, there is a huge difference between actually being biodegradable at home (think vegetable offcuts and coffee grind that goes in the bin) and industrial biodegradability. For most products that are claiming to be biodegradable, they require some fairly extreme conditions. For instance, according to EN 13432, at least 90% of the organic material must have been converted into CO<sub>2</sub> after 6 months under industrial compost conditions (at temperatures of 60 – 70 °C) (*The Sustainable People*). Other conditions to get the ball rolling include o actually start the process, there is the aforementioned temperature requirements and/or the addition the presence of microorganisms, nutrients, oxygen and moisture (De Wilde et al., 2013; van den Oever et al., 2017 – *EEA Europa*).

With poor labelling and consumer-education by suppliers, we, the consumer are led to believe that we are doing the world a favour by sending our packaging to landfill, leaving something to rest in the elements is fine, it'll biodegrade naturally in a matter of weeks... How wrong we are.

Currently, only about one percent of plastics and plastic products on the global market are considered bio-based, compostable and/or biodegradable. (*European Bioplastics e.V., 2020b*)

# Eco-Friendly: Decoding the green claims

With the growing concern for the planet, products boasting eco-friendliness have flooded the market. However the lack of standardised criteria for eco-friendly claims has allowed greenwashing to thrive. The time is now for us to push harder for standardised certifications and credible labels that substantiate environmental claims. Selfnamed for instance takes the Ecocert COSMOS frameworks and we strive to go beyond them, all our primary packaging is recyclable and all our electricity is solar or hydro powered (a combination of the two really). Instead of the two percent limit set by Ecocert COSMOS frameworks for synthetic preservatives in cosmetics that can still be called bio, we are averaging far beneath that guide, and constantly looking to reduce it further. Sadly however there are a few things that simply cannot be sourced naturally for the skincare products the world craves, but the industry can certainly do better.

## Organic: Unraveling the natural myth

The allure of “organic” cosmetics can be irresistible, but the absence of stringent regulations opens the door for deceptive marketing. But budding entrepreneurs that actually care can, if they are willing to research deeply, be guided by certain certifications and wordings that cannot be circumnavigated by clever branding or brown paper packaging... Some that are highly recommended from our side include;

COSMOS Organic group (under this group: ECOCERT Natural and Organic, BDIH, COSMEBIO, ICEA, SOIL ASSOCIATION) NATRUE Organic

USDA 100% Organic

USDA Organic

BioGro

## Refillable: A step towards sustainable consumption

Refillable products are hailed as a sustainable alternative, but their impact depends on the entire product life cycle. Often it is far better to make sure that plastics are truly recyclable, all our packaging for instance is the same ready-to-recycle plastic, nearly 10 percent is PCR (made from recycled plastic) right

now too. Provided the cultural shift to recycling continues, we can be certain that they end up back in the system and properly recycled – a more sustainable cycle.

Looking at the wider product and packaging industries, it might feel good to be refilling the same container at home, but we can't ignore that for this system to work, one has to receive the product at home meaning it has been put into a second, produced, material container... Two containers have been made at this point instead of one. Of course, there is a growing trend of shops offering refills for household products – these are mostly positive, the end product is shipped at higher volume in packaging that itself can get sent back to the distributor, cleaned and put back into circulation.

The pattern here is that, you guessed it, it is down to the ethical entrepreneur to double-check how the supplier means refillable? Do they offer the extra cosmetics in plastic? or is it in a larger container? How is it refillable?

Or, is the brand selling more products at a cheaper price because the product itself is made cheaply and unethically?

So to cover it, brands have started to market the products as refillable, selling two often-not-recyclable bottles/containers where they could have produced one, recyclable quality bottle. It allows the at-home bottle to be shinier, fancier, more upmarket feeling – convincing the consumer they are doing good with “reuse not recycle” ideologies (a good thing when done properly), instead of battling the problem on the manufacture/supply side properly by striving for quality, recyclable products that in the long-run do less harm. Naturally this would cost more per unit...

## Time for ethical entrepreneurship

As the co-founder of Selfnamed, our mission is to create print-on-demand, sustainable, and ethics-first cosmetics/skincare/beauty products. We aim to allow anyone to become a sustainable skincare brand owner from the comfort of their own home. Simple really ☐

I truly believe that it is time for businesses to prioritise conscious consumption, and we are keen to help drive this movement forwards:

With the beauty and cosmetics industry generating staggering amounts of non-recyclable waste each year, the need for responsible entrepreneurship has never been more urgent. Is it time to draw a line in the sand? Lets collectively request MORE not less regulation when it comes to the treacherous waters of misleading buzzwords! Whether in our industry, construction, banking or insurance, there is a future where ethics, sustainability, and transparency reign

supreme. Through education, regulation, and a collective commitment to do good, the UK beauty industry can pave the way for a greener and more conscious world.

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