

# Tackling takeaway litter

Do your bit. Boost your business.



# Clean up your act. Bump up your business.

**Every business has a legal responsibility to manage the waste it produces. If you sell food-on-the-go products, you also share a wider social responsibility to encourage your customers to dispose of their food packaging correctly.**

It's not just because you have to, or just because it's in your community's best interest. Tackling takeaway litter generated by your customers can boost your business, and help you do your bit to tackle Scotland's litter problem.

**"All businesses selling food-on-the-go that is dropped outdoors create litter. It is recognised that although businesses themselves do not drop litter on our streets, their customers often do. Businesses suffer from customers dropping litter. Produce and its wrappings discarded as litter degrades the perception of a business and will reduce trade. Businesses are, in part, responsible for managing this issue."**

From 'Reducing Litter Caused By  
'Food on the Go' A Voluntary Code of Practice



# It's not you, it's them. But you can help.



Though most takeaway-related litter is caused by the behaviour of customers, it is in the interest of on-the-go food businesses to tackle the litter problem. You can help prevent waste from your shop ending up on the street as litter – which has a direct impact on your reputation and bottom line.

When your packaging is seen as litter, it negatively affects public perception of your brand. One study even found that the price customers were willing to pay dropped when that product packaging had been seen as litter – and a third of customers were less likely to buy from a brand they see as litter. That's a lot of customers that you could be losing<sup>1</sup>.

## ADVICE

### What you can do



There are many ways you can encourage good habits in your staff and customers – from small nudges to direct intervention.

#### **First: why do people do it?**

Littering behaviour is context-specific: it depends on a wide range of factors. Understanding these factors will help you design effective litter-prevention initiatives, so begin with these questions:

- Where and when do problems occur?
- Who is responsible? (this may vary by time of day)
- Which types of litter are dropped the most?
- What do you already do to reduce litter?
- Are more litter bins needed? If so, where could they be placed?



# Encourage people to recycle or bin their litter

Here are four simple, effective ways to encourage people to be more mindful of their waste.



## ① Use the Tidyman symbol

Add the Tidyman symbol to your packaging. This works as a subtle reminder to dispose of the packaging 'carefully and thoughtfully'. It's an internationally recognised litter prevention sign.

## ② Provide bins and empty them regularly

A common reason given for littering is lack of places to put waste. If there isn't already a bin outside your store, provide one. Right outside your front door might not always be the best place; littering could be happening at a nearby bus stop or seating area. Get in touch with your local authority for advice on bin type and positioning.

## ③ Put up signs and posters

If you've already taken the time to find out what's being littered and where it's happening, you'll be able to focus your signage on tackling that problem. For example, if disposable coffee cups are the problem, make sure that's what's featured in your signage.

McDonald's puts litter-related communications on all of its packaging, tray liners, Drive-Thru signage and litter bins. Catching someone's eye at a litter-prone moment can make a difference.

Or take this example from Leithers Don't Litter. The message, 'It's a takeaway, not a throwaway', has a slightly cheeky tone and clever wording, which makes these signs more effective than a simple 'no littering' message.



Leithers Don't Litter.



A window sticker with a strong message can also be effective.



You can always give the 'put your waste in the bin' messaging more punch with the threat of a fine.

## ④ Tell people

A verbal prompt is a simple, effective and free approach that actually works.

When you give someone their order, or sell them one of your products, remind them to put the packaging in the recycling or litter bin when they've finished. The one-to-one interaction can be far more effective than an anonymous sign targeted at everyone. Include this idea in your staff training, and then it becomes everyone's habit.

It's a classic nudge technique, where a simple command can have dramatic impact. One study found that a simple verbal prompt from the sales personnel, at the time of purchase, may nudge people to hold on to litter until they can use a bin. They'll hear a request to bin the litter and automatically follow it, without giving it much thought. Making the prompt personal (by using the customer's name) and this will make it more powerful<sup>2</sup>.

# Clean up outside your store

When people see other litter, they're more likely to leave their own. People who litter say they would be less likely to do so in areas that are clean and tidy, and more likely to litter in areas that are run-down and dirty<sup>3</sup>. One quick way to discourage people from littering is to clean up any litter outside your shop.



McDonald's staff get behind the "Flingin's Mingin" message

That's exactly what McDonald's does. The company's daily Scottish Litter Patrols cover a minimum of a 150-metre radius around each restaurant and collect all litter, not just McDonald's packaging. Crew members across the UK cover a total of 3,000 miles each week.





# Rethink your packaging



When it comes to packaging that reduces litter, less is definitely more. Is the food going to be eaten right away? If so, it doesn't need a cover. Check that disposable cutlery is actually needed, and only give out as many napkins as a customer needs, not handfuls.

Pret takes this idea one step further – reinforcing good feeling about their brand with a few words on every Pret napkin:

**This napkin is 100% recyclable (Pret's sustainability department is militant, we're making headway). If Pret staff get all serviette-ish and hand you huge bunches of napkins (which you don't need or want) please give them the evil eye. Waste not want not.'**

This encourages waste prevention at its source: if you don't need a handful of napkins, don't take them. And with the message delivered in the Pret house style, it's a chance to make a bit more of the message.

## Encourage reuse and consider compostable packaging

Encouraging customers to bring their own bags is a very simple way to reduce the potential for plastic bag litter. Take reuse further if you can: why not make your packaging reusable, and encourage customers to keep it?

Instead of using plastics and polystyrene for takeaway food and drinks, consider compostable packaging. That's exactly what Edinburgh Zoo's Penguin Café has done, along with other takeaway food outlets in the city, including Union of Genius and Pumpkin Brown.

You might want to encourage people to take your compostable packing home and stick it in their own compost bin. But even if it goes to landfill it will decompose – unlike plastics and polystyrene.



## Put a name on it

This is another piece of behavioural science that you can put into practice immediately: write your customer's name on the packaging. The idea is that people are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for something with their name on, and be less likely to drop it mindlessly on the ground<sup>4</sup>.

It's also a great way to learn your customers' names, and create a more lasting, personalised interaction with them.

### ARTWORK

## The ZWS Litter Prevention Communications Toolkit

You don't have to have special napkins and packaging printed. You can always use stickers to get the message out. You'll find free downloadable artwork you can use to create stickers in the ZWS litter prevention toolkit.

# Get creative

Stoke on Trent Council ran a local radio campaign to encourage late-night kebab eaters to enter a prize draw with a difference – by writing their name and telephone number on litter and throwing it into specially labelled bins.

The Council's education officer and a street cleansing colleague shared the slightly unusual honour of selecting the daily winners.

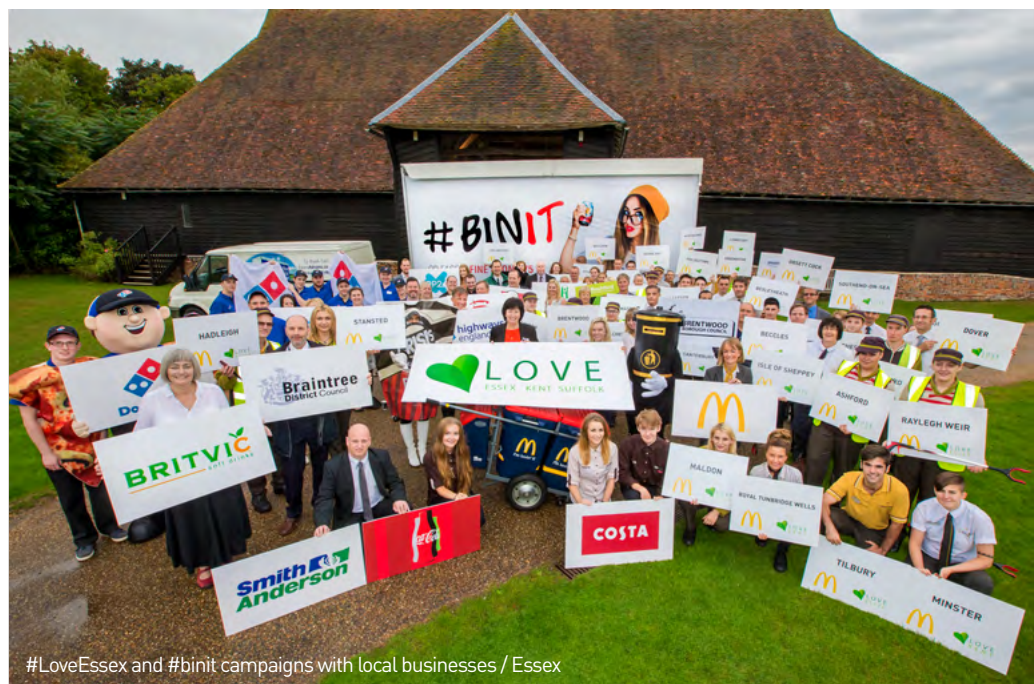
"The draw was a great success," they said. "We supplemented it with a voluntary code of practice for local businesses, who were quite receptive and agreed that action was needed. Together, the prize draw and the code achieved a 20% reduction in litter, and we plan to build on that with another initiative."





# Collaborate

Don't feel like you have to go it alone: share litter information with your local authority so they can help you and other businesses in your area coordinate your efforts. Any litter prevention initiative you put in place will be more successful if you can inspire your neighbouring businesses to join in.



#LoveEssex and #binit campaigns with local businesses / Essex



Keep Scotland BRU-TIFUL/  
Clean Up Scotland



# Conclusions: small changes, big impacts



Tackling litter isn't just good for the community: it's good for business. By making a few small – and, on the whole, inexpensive – adjustments, you can improve the look of your store and improve your local reputation, and help to change behaviour at the same time.