

Case Study: British Heart Foundation

Implementing a greener retail strategy

Winners of the Greenest Charity Retailer of the Year 2019, the British Heart Foundation (BHF) share their current green initiatives and the changes they are making in their retail operations.

Overview

The BHF re-uses and recycles over 74,000 tonnes of donations a year, preventing 146,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions through re-use and recycling.

In 2019 the charity launched their 'Greenhearted' campaign and continue to carry out several initiatives, such as the phasing out of single use plastic bags, reviewing packaging and the types of products sold, zeroing in on waste and forming a strategic review into furthering their sustainable plans.

What was done

Phasing out single use plastic bags: the BHF consulted with staff and volunteers and carried out a donation bag audit and waste audit. A working group now meets regularly to assess how the charity can phase out single use plastics from its retail operations, using a systematic hierarchy of eliminating, re-using, replacing and reducing. BHF has been progressively reducing donation bag deliveries direct to households, and in 2018 withdrew them from display in shops. Shops now use less than half the number of bags compared to two years ago and the charity has made a commitment to phase out single use plastic bags. Trials are in places for alternatives to plastic for carriers, donation bags and for internal use such as storage and rotation of stock. Corporate partners are encouraged to use their own bags to avoid creating unnecessary plastic waste.

Packaging and product review: The charity carried out an initial assessment of its packaging and started a wider review of a number of their 'new goods' lines, looking at where it can reduce environmental impact. BHF recently introduced a 'pocket money toys' range – packaging up together groups of smaller donated toys that were proving hard to sell and often ended up being recycled. The bags for these are made from a clear bioplastic derived from wood pulp, which is completely compostable. Glitter on the BHF's greetings cards has also been phased out.

Zeroing in on waste: the BHF sampled nearly a tonne of waste from 30 of its shops to identify priority materials to re-use or recycle. It has introduced a lower price band on product lines which are more likely to end up as waste - including CDs and DVDs. The charity has rolled out bric-a-brac recycling to 90 per cent of shops and has introduced a combination of cardboard and plastic bag recycling in 27 stores, which rolled out to another 45 in April 2019. This will be extended if successful.

The 'Greenhearted' campaign: the BHF launched their 'Greenhearted' campaign on its intranet in January 2019, letting staff and volunteers know that the charity would be focusing on environmental improvement and sustainability and asking for individual pledges and suggestions. Most internal responses focused on plastic reduction and increased recycling, but also greener energy and transport. BHF has now signed up to the [Clean Van Commitment](#), pledging to switch to zero tailpipe emissions vans in cities by 2028 and have reduced van packs by 98 per cent.

Strategic review: BHF have consulted at senior management level on a set of sustainability principles and a process for assessing and reporting their environmental performance. They are forming a sustainability working group to take forward their strategic goals.

Questions

What has the public response been to the efforts to go green?

Customers and supporters are coming to our stores partly because they recognise the environmental value of re-use, so we're seeing a lot of enthusiasm for our new green initiatives. The vast majority of customers choose to re-use when it comes to carrier bags.

What has the response been like from staff/volunteers?

Before even a small trial of a new recycling or re-use system we'll usually speak to over 100 of our staff and volunteers. They really didn't need convincing when it came to more recycling or less single use bags, they just needed a practical approach and an opportunity to feed back before, during and after any changes.

What sort of upfront investments have been required to adopt a more environmentally-friendly approach?

Much of what we have done has been about behaviour change, so time is the main expense. We have invested in additional storage for shops where space is a real challenge – payback is usually less than a year because of the avoided waste costs. We will be buying re-useable sacks for internal stock movements, which cost three to four times as much as single use – we expect these to give us an overall cost reduction over time.