



Packaging waste: The new uncompromising attitude of the "Young and Wild"

"If we succeed in thinking outside the box on the topic of '100 per cent plastic-free' and finding solutions, then large corporations should be able to do it too. It's just a question of will and willingness to invest," says Natalie Richter, CEO of the Hamburg-based natural cosmetics start-up terrorists of beauty, taking the industry to task. "Zero waste is an approach that should be promoted by the legislator in all aspects in order to eliminate or at least minimise packaging waste, some of which is completely unnecessary," on the other hand, Zeno Kakuschke, CEO and co-founder of Apinima GmbH, the company behind the social start-up NICAMA, demands from politicians. Young brands are shaking up the cosmetics industry with their unwillingness to compromise and also see a lot of potential for improvement in the area of natural cosmetics. We talked to the "Young and Wild" about the plastic problem and the trendy topic of zero waste.

Before the corona pandemic, Shia Su and her partner's waste fit into a 1.5-litre reusable jar - a whole year's worth of residual and plastic waste, mind you. Thanks in particular to Corona tests and disposable masks, it should now probably be about six jars. The sustainability blogger's experiment shows what is possible. In comparison, the figures from the Federal Statistical Office show what is necessary: In 2019, the average citizen generates 302 kilograms of household waste in the sense of residual waste and recyclable waste such as paper, plastic packaging and glass.¹ "Excellent Zero Waste products have long been available as an alternative to classic items and a modern zero waste shop offers everything to live a happy life. Zero Waste and "Unverpackt" are scalable - if consumers want it," says Gregor Witt, board member of Unverpackt e.V.

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¹ Source :

https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2020/12/PD20_511_321.html;jsessionid=DD2F5C1193F803B0F208A234AFA8E9EA.internet8741



Danila Brunner, Director BIOFACH and VIVANESS: "Unpackaged and Zero Waste are booming! What started as a niche topic has become increasingly important over the last few years. In the market, and as a reflection of the market also at VIVANESS and BIOFACH, i.e. in the cosmetics sector as well as in food. We are noticing this, for example, through more and more exhibitors with a corresponding range of products. For BIOFACH 2022, we will bundle this for the first time together with our partner Unverpackt e.V. in a separate trade fair area. At both the world's leading trade fair for organic food and the international trade fair for natural cosmetics, VIVANESS, there will once again be a lot to discover about unpackaged and zero waste in 2022, not only from the manufacturers themselves, including at the new products stand, but also at the congress.

Dr Melanie Kröger also believes that the strong citizens' will to change has an influence: "About 30 years ago, the topic of waste avoidance was already very big. Politicians reacted at that time with a packaging ordinance, which in turn led to our dual system known as 'Der Grüne Punkt' among other things. Since 2014, the topic - also driven by the first zero waste shops that emerged at that time and were not really taken seriously at first - has been given a fresh impetus and a new social relevance." Melanie Kröger is a research assistant at the Department of Sustainable Business Management in the Agricultural and Food Industry at the Eberswalde University of Applied Sciences and has studied the idea of the packaging-free supermarket as part of a three-and-a-half-year research project, as well as publishing the anthology "Einfach weglassen?" with articles on the topic of reducing plastic packaging in the food trade at the end of 2020 with the Oekom publishing house. Today, there are around 400 zero waste shops in Germany and many supermarkets are also experimenting with corresponding departments. "Zero waste shops are only the tip of the iceberg. The topic of packaging reduction now appeals to much broader sections of the population, supermarket chains have corresponding strategies being implemented and there is also a lot happening in the reusable sector," says Kröger. However, she raises awareness for the complexity of the processes in the background, but also for their relevance. About half of the packaging volume is invisible to consumers, i.e. it accumulates during the life cycle of the products and not in their own homes. Innovations and changes are also necessary. What do



young natural cosmetics brands have to say about plastic waste and zero waste, and what solutions do they propose or demand from the industry and politicians?

Plastic? No thanks!

"We implement 'plastic-free' without compromise," explains Natalie Richter and adds a little fighting: "As terrorists of beauty, we see ourselves as challengers to the beauty industry and want to show that it is possible to successfully market plastic-free products!" The Hamburg-based start-up has no items in its range that contain even a hint of plastic. The solid soaps are sold in minimalist cardboard packaging. The accessories are plastic-free made from concrete or organic cotton and all retail packaging works with natural plastic-free coatings or grease barriers. "But it is a challenge to work and think plastic-free! Currently we are working on new liquid products. What a challenge," says Natalie Richter. Of course, a glass bottle is easy to find, but developing a closure system that is 100 per cent plastic-free is more difficult. Even a hidden plastic inlay in the lid of a metal screw cap would be out of the question for the terrorists of beauty.

It's a similar story at the social start-up NICAMA: "At NICAMA, consistently plastic-free means that we do not use any plastic at all - both in terms of ingredients and product and shipping packaging," explains Zeno Kakuschke, managing director and co-founder of Apinima GmbH, the company behind NICAMA. With their actions, the Dresden-based company not only wants to draw attention to the global plastic crisis, but is also developing plastic-free everyday products as alternatives. In this way, they try to help consumers minimise their individual plastic consumption. At the same time, they transparently finance the salvage of plastic waste in coastal regions per product purchase. Zeno Kakuschke sees the greatest difficulties with regard to global plastic consumption on the one hand in the development of plastic-free alternatives in the area of packaging, since high requirements would have to be met, especially in the food and cosmetics industries. On the other hand, the handling of plastic waste at the end of the cycle urgently needs to be clarified with regard to waste management and recycling. His demand to politicians: "I am in favour of a plastic tax, especially for single-use plastic and so-called virgin plastic, i.e. 'new plastic' that has not been produced by recycling! This can effectively reduce plastic use in critical areas such as packaging, disposables or new products through regulation. I also consider



the expansion of deposit systems to be urgently needed. I don't understand why, for example, the German deposit bottle system is not implemented at European level."

Zero Waste? At least Circular Economy!

Zeno Kakuschke sees a consistent zero-waste concept as unrealistic under the current regulations, since currently valid packaging protection, packaging regulations and labelling obligations cannot be met in many cases. He therefore considers the topic of circular economy to be even more important, which in the context of packaging could help to ensure that packaging waste is at least not senselessly incinerated or ends up in landfills. But he also has ideas for other packaging problems: Easily accessible digital product databases could help customers to inform themselves about relevant product properties and ingredients. Incentivising consumers to use their own reusable transport packaging is also an option (e.g. discount for bringing their own coffee mug or shopping bags) and the development towards consumption-based waste disposal costs per household is effective.

"The general throwaway culture in the beauty industry is a huge problem, and this still applies to the natural cosmetics segment," complains Natalie Richter. She says it is really bad when packaging is made of compounds - that is, composite packaging made of different materials that cannot be recycled as a result. "What good does it do me if, for example, I have a proportion of wood in the packaging, but this material has been inseparably mixed or glued with a polymer? In the end, this packaging can only be incinerated," says Natalie Richter. Many brands use sustainable packaging elements to suggest to their customers that this is a sustainable packaging solution. For this to be the case, however, packaging must be made of uniform materials and correctly labelled so that it can be recycled again. This applies to bottles just as much as to paper packaging. In the long run, the goal must be to have no more disposable elements in the products and to move towards a circular economy. "We are currently working on another product where we want to go exactly this way: Instead of disposing of packaging elements, customers should use them several times. When they no longer need the item at some point, we as a company take responsibility for our packaging, take it back and recycle it in our own production cycle and it becomes new packaging again," Natalie Richter announces.



So what will (or must) happen next?

For packaging expert Carolina E. Schweig, owner of C.E.Schweig Verpackung Material Engineering, zero waste is "nice to have". In her opinion, bigger wheels need to be turned to bring about real change: "Against the backdrop of raw material shortages, the climate crisis and the waste problem, the industry needs to ask itself the questions in terms of packaging: Where do we get our packaging raw materials from, how are they processed and what happens to them after the use phase?" She calls for much more intensive thinking about the various processes and the material peculiarities that go hand in hand with the production and recycling of packaging. "The companies that are now just looking for cheap ways to meet recycling targets instead of really investing in meaningful new ways are forgetting that this is about the raw material with which they want and need to produce new packaging in the future. However, this will come back to them directly via the boomerang of resource scarcity and price increases and will hit them where it hurts them the most - in their operating results," Carolina E. Schweig is certain.

However, packaging experts, scientists and young entrepreneurs seem to agree on one point: pseudo reusable, pseudo unpackaged, pseudo plastic-free and pseudo recycling or other forms of greenwashing must be avoided. If you're going to do something, do it right. Natalie Richter sums up this "right" quite aptly with an appeal to the industry: "All this is of course a cost factor. As long as economic profit takes precedence over social benefit, wrong decisions will therefore continue to be made here."

VIVANESS 2022 - the International Trade Fair for Natural Cosmetics - will take place from 15 - 18 February 2022 in the Exhibition Centre Nuremberg: www.vivaness.de