

Milk waste – a bottle-free cafe trade?

More cafes are turning away from the plastic bottle

More milk is wasted than anything else in the café trade – it has been suggested that one litre in twelve of the milk that cafes buy ends up going down the drain... and a project with a major chain even put the figure at one in ten. One way to reduce the wastage may be to apply better technique to dosing. As well as this, we may now be on the way to a café trade in which the standard milk bottle has no place.

The question of milk waste has been highlighted by the appearance of the Milkit system devised by Assaf Blank. This is a milk-dispense system which typically sits under the counter on which the espresso machine is sited; it is programmed to dispense exactly the right amount of milk to be steamed, and draws the milk up from 'pergals', each of which effectively replaces six or seven two-litre plastic milk bottles.

What is the estimated wastage of milk in the coffee catering sector?

"We have a statistic," says Angus McKenzie of the Brew-It group, which distributes the new system. "Milkit reckon that over-pouring, which is just chucking some milk into the jug and then being left with unused milk in it, accounts for 8 per cent of the milk that cafes buy. In trials with Starbucks, it was thought that the figure was ten per cent. This is because staff are not applying any science to measuring – in the higher craft coffee shops, they measure precisely, and they still experience wastage; in most cafes, they just don't.

"More milk is wasted in cafes than anything else, largely because when the staff can see there's milk in the fridge, they don't question how much they're going through. Some big cafes have told me it's a 'huge' problem; I have heard one department store chain referring to thousands of pounds wasted in milk."

It is not an unknown problem. Café owners who have identified the problem have complained that one reason staff cannot be trained properly is because "most baristas don't see the numbers" – they don't see the amount that their business pays on milk. Some cafes have insisted on a 'one drink per jug' system, or decanting milk from a measuring jug into the steaming jug, to stop



The Milkit in place



Two brands launch eco-capsules

Two brands have introduced their compostable Nespresso-compatible coffee capsules.

Lost Sheep Coffee has launched a decaffeinated Nespresso-compatible coffee in a capsule which is made from wood bark and said to remain fully air-tight for freshness for over a year. It is, they tell us, 'the first and only air-tight Nespresso-compatible coffee capsule in the world'.

The company says: "Until recently, compostable capsules would have a very short freshness life as the coffee inside would be exposed to oxygen causing the coffee to go stale."

And so has Lavazza, with its Eco Caps, which are in two versions, Nespresso-compatible and for its own A Modo Mio machines. The brand will replace its entire range of at-home capsules with compostables by the end of the year.

The Eco Caps are made with a compostable biopolymer that can biodegrade in 180 days, to become compost. Lavazza says its 'aroma safe' technology creates a barrier against oxygen to keep coffee fresh for its entire 18-month shelf life with no need for other external packaging.

...continued from page 1

staff simply pouring more and more milk into big jugs and wasting it. Others have devised measuring lines inside the jug rim. One café owner has reported a novel piece of training: "wastage doesn't come from a lack of care or interest, but simply because we had never standardised our portion control. A good way to demonstrate the waste is to make staff pour out all the unused steamed milk into a bucket – at the end of the day, the amount in the bucket gets the idea across."

There are few figures on the amount of milk used by the coffee trade. The dairy industry bodies tell us they don't have a clue, and what little reference exists include such vague suggestions as that the average Starbucks site uses 16-20 gallons (70-90 litres!) a day.

"In my experience, a busy café gets through 50 litres a day, and a really busy café does a hundred litres," says Angus McKenzie. "And the vast majority of cafes still buy two-litre bottles, so you can imagine how much time they spend reaching for a new bottle."

And this is one of the features of the Milkit system. This process was invented by Assaf Blank, who ran cafes and a restaurant group in Tel Aviv. Although he was the business owner, he worked shifts on the espresso machine to keep close to the customers, and it has been said that when one day a fellow-barista dropped and shattered a milk bottle, the concept of waste-control occurred to him.

The resulting system seeks to both reduce the amount of plastic containers used by a café, and to reduce milk waste by dispensing into the frothing jug only the right amount for the drink involved.

The milk is supplied in 'pergals' holding maybe 14 litres. Because of the way these are made, they require a quarter of the plastic used per litre in conventional bottles.

"In the theory of 'reduce, re-use, recycle', this comes under 'reduce'," says Angus McKenzie. "The pergals are not generally reclaimed by the dairy; they generally go into your recycling waste, and for a café, refuse collection charges are not inconsiderable."

An even more desirable Milkit option uses the old-fashioned milk churn.

"This is a very interesting new development. It is just like the old traditional churn, although the modern version is stainless steel. This now gives us real plastic-free milk delivery, and in a closed-loop system where the churns are returned to the dairy, they can be re-used indefinitely. There is already a working model of this in cafes; the payback is in improved workflow, in the saving of waste from over-dispense and spillage, and the reduced cost of rubbish collection."

In the Milkit system, the milk container is sited beneath the counter. Tubes bring the milk directly upwards from the pergal to the dispense point; the system reverses any 'in-tube' milk back into the sealed pergal, so there is never 'ambient milk' lingering in the tubes.

On the counter, the dispense tap is programmeable according to the amount of milk staff are to use in different sizes of jug. Typically, there would be a 'small jug' and 'large jug' option, and a free-pour option for when it might be needed.

"The ultimate aim," says McKenzie, "is that you dispense your milk into the jug, foam your milk, pour your jugfull into the cup... and there is no unused milk left in your jug."

Roasters get very clever on packaging



Caber's tote bag

Stokes of Lincoln has created a new kind of 'environmentally responsible' coffee packaging... it's a bucket. It may sound odd, but the point of it is to avoid a vast amount of plastic packaging or plastic packing tape.

Roasted coffee is supplied in two-kilo buckets for a minimum order of six kilos; large orders are in four-kilo buckets. The tape used to seal the buckets is made from kraft paper tape which is recyclable and solvent-free.

Stokes' managing director Nick Peel says that although the move does reduce cost for the customer, his main point is to increase awareness of plastic and packaging waste. "We have been mindful to ensure that the buckets themselves are recyclable."

Just a few miles south of him, Jose Guzman of Kofra Coffee has made the same move, and tells us that he is delighted with the practicality of buckets.

Meanwhile, we are absolutely delighted to see that Caber Coffee of Aberdeen is still producing its tote bags made from used coffee bags. We had one of the early prototype designs (above) many years ago, and can testify that they are capable of bearing heavy loads, and are virtually indestructible!



The Milkit dispenses into the steaming jug

Coffee brand highlights modern-day slavery... in the UK

There is an extremely unexpected, and quite disturbing aspect to a new coffee brand from Wales.

We are now used to the coffee trade giving a hand to various kinds of people being helped back into the community, employing the disabled and ex-offenders. But Manumit from Cardiff is different – it is a coffee roastery operating as a training scheme for people rescued from modern-day slavery.

"We started from a charity which works to fight modern slavery in Wales," director Esther-Hope Gibbs told us. "We realised that even when survivors of slavery were getting their visas to stay and were allowed to work, they were either not finding jobs due to having no CV, or quitting within one week because they couldn't cope.

"We thought a cafe would be the best employment option but it was pointed out that a public space might make our survivors more vulnerable - they often have their traffickers still looking for them.

"But a friend who roasted for a small café caught our vision, let us share his roaster, and taught us how to roast. The Scottish Barista Academy helped us to hone the skills and since then we have visited countless roasters to get advice. We are now training our survivors in a safe space, and we see that coffee is an amazing community – there will always be employment for them and a community that is ready to support them."

Does modern slavery really exist? In Wales?

Esther-Hope recently told Tearfund that there are hundreds of survivors of slavery living in Cardiff alone, and Manumit makes people aware that it still goes on, she told the BSA Bulletin. "There are more slaves today than there were involved in the transatlantic slave trade... can you believe that?"

"We have employed people who were people who were trafficked to the UK at 13 years old and made to work in the drugs industry; women who were tricked into taking jobs as 'nannies' in the UK but then forced to work in brothels; men who were trafficked to the UK and forced to work in normal factories, but who never actually saw any of the legitimate money they were earning and were instead locked in basements and abused."

How does she find her trainee roasters?

"We get referrals from organisations involved in the aftercare of survivors of human trafficking. They come from backgrounds of sex trafficking, domestic servitude and labour exploitation of all forms. They are from all continents and backgrounds, some were tricked into coming to the UK with promises of work, and others were kidnapped and brought here against their will."

Manumit now has clients within the café and catering trades. "Our main blend is The Global Justice blend, a mix of Indian, Brazilian and Congolese coffee; we also have an amazing single-origin coffee from Uganda, which is great as guest espresso or filter. It's delicious coffee with a great story and message behind it."

A BSA spokesman commented: "the old days of poor 'cause' coffee have long gone – it used to be said that customers could show their solidarity with the suffering of charity causes by suffering each time they drank their coffee! Today, many of those who use coffee for good causes have taken the time to learn, train, and be professional about it... and a lot of the coffee is certainly very good."

A quite remarkable job advert has appeared on a local TV station in Boston, USA. Researchers are being sought to go and drink coffee in independent cafes, for a fee of a thousand dollars.

So far as we can find out, the people behind it are a research organisation in Salt Lake City, who say they are 'a community of small-business enthusiasts who connect small- to mid-size businesses with in-depth research and expert recommendations'.

The ideal candidate is described as someone who regularly visits Starbucks, but who will now commit for a full month to buying instead from independent cafes, record their experiences, and share their findings. They have to visit at least eight locally-owned coffee shops over the course of a month, take a photo of the coffee they are served at each shop, write a report on it, and 'log the key metrics necessary for our team to gain insight into your experience going local', whatever that may mean.

The backers promise to pay a quarter of the fee in advance. We can't wait for a British version...

Sweet Revolution, the brand created by nutritionist Jane Nicholls after experimenting in the kitchen to create healthy treats for her children, has launched a range of 'superblend lattes', formulated to be added to steamed milk, both dairy and non-dairy, and certified organic and vegan. Most are gluten-free and caffeine-free. The flavours are beetroot with ginger, chicory with lion's mane, chocolate and raw cacao, matcha and vanilla, chai with reishi, and turmeric with black pepper.

Jane Nicholls told us: "The continued interest in plant-based alternatives alongside the growing awareness of allergies and intolerances makes it ever more complex for caterers to offer food and drink everyone can enjoy. We aim to simplify this for everyone who is working in a foodservice environment."



Manumit - the brand name means 'free from slavery'