

Circular Economy Spotlight: Smarter Sorting Helps the Goods of Today Become the Resources of Tomorrow

by Scott Mackey | Jul 1, 2019



This article is the first of a “Circularity Spotlight” series examining how Smarter Sorting fits into the burgeoning circular economy movement, both now and in the future. During this first post, we’ll briefly review the “waste equals food” circularity principle.

William McDonough, known to many as a “father of the circular economy” and co-creator of “[Cradle to Cradle](#)” design, was the first to coin this iconic phrase: “waste equals food.” The phrase is a simple yet powerful cornerstone of the modern circular economy movement.

To understand what it means, we need a quick snapshot of our current economic system, which is based on a linear “take-make-waste” model. Simply put: we extract materials (take),

manufacture these materials into goods (make), and finally discard these goods (waste).

To understand the circular economy, consider this imagery: the linear economic model—a straight line—is “bent” into a circle and connected at its ends so that “take” and “waste” are intertwined, and dependent on each other. The “take” in a circular model derives from the “waste” (instead of virgin resources). Waste becomes food for the next cycle, which repeats perpetually. The goods of today become the resources of tomorrow. Hence, waste equals food.

Are you dizzy yet?

Smarter Sorting is tackling this fundamental circularity concept in a very tangible way when it helps retailers track and divert unsaleable items—previously considered “waste”—into pathways of reuse and recycling.

The [Smarter Sorting platform](#) allows retailers to monitor unsaleable items inventories in transparent, intuitive ways. Machine learning technology provides valuable data that helps retailers make better decisions regarding the most sustainable pathways forward for these materials—instead of just shipping them off to an incinerator or landfill. Smarter data means smarter decisions.

What does this look like in practice? If you can donate inventory previously classified as “waste” to a local nonprofit (for a tax write-off, by the way!), salvage or reuse the material (perhaps for an in-store project), the Smarter Sorting platform prompts your

back-of-store employees to do so. We take the guesswork out of answering the question, “What’s next?”

Items previously considered “waste” become valuable assets. Waste equals food.

Okay, I think you get it.

Do you want to learn more about what the circular economy is, and why this model of doing business is revolutionary? Then visit [The Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#) for more information.

Explore Smarter Sorting's platform

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