

nextwave

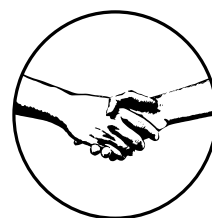
CURRENTS OF CHANGE:

NEXTWAVE PLASTICS

STORIES OF IMPACT

Engaging Stakeholders & Building Buy-in

CASE STUDY 04



05.11.2022



Engaging Stakeholders & Building Buy-in

A clear rationale and dogged persistence can help catalyze success when addressing obstacles to using ocean-bound plastic.

Early on in his work as an engineer, an employer sent Nick Abbatiello to a training course—in sales. Why would a company take a new hire out of engineering school and then teach them sales, he wondered?

As his career progressed, it became clear. “You’re always selling your ideas,” says Abbatiello, who today is a distinguished engineer for sustainability and circular materials at Dell Technologies. “If you get brushed off one time, that just means your story wasn’t right. You need to hone your message a little better and try it again.”

Abbatiello and his team are constantly coming up with use cases—and stories—for using ocean-bound plastic in products for Dell, a founding member of the NextWave Plastics consortium. “We work across our internal teams to sell-in not only the environmental benefits, but the business benefits of using ocean-bound plastic. We also partner closely with our suppliers to reinforce the opportunities ocean-bound plastics present.”

“YOU NEED TO SET THE EXPECTATION OF SOME OF THE CHALLENGES AND FRUSTRATIONS THAT MIGHT HAPPEN.”

—JANE ABERNETHY, CHIEF SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER AT HUMANSCALE

COMMUNICATING THE “WHY”

Sharing problems and solutions via NextWave Plastics has helped Dell and other consortium members anticipate many hurdles that can shake confidence in trying a new material. But even more importantly, NextWave’s members are always ready for failures and going back to the drawing board.

Humanscale, a founding member of NextWave that uses reclaimed fishing nets in its Smart Ocean, Liberty Ocean, and Path task chairs, holds a kickoff meeting for each new project that will use ocean-bound plastic. The meeting sets context for the plastic waste problem and how Humanscale can have an impact. But it’s also the beginning of conversations about what’s ahead in terms of sourcing and working with ocean-bound plastic, says Jane Abernethy, Humanscale’s chief sustainability officer.

“It’s not like just sourcing a regular material where you can buy it from anyone. Instead of having many, many options, you’ll have one option. And you’ve got to work through every challenge to make it happen,” Abernethy says. “You need to set the expectation of some of the challenges and frustrations that might happen.”

Many of the changemakers at NextWave companies are used to hearing some form of “no.” For Ellen Jackowski, chief impact officer and head of sustainable impact at HP, it was a supplier telling her they were two years into a five-year contract with a source for recycled plastic. How about circling back to the idea of ocean-bound plastic in three years? She convinced the supplier to start right away with a very modest trial instead.





"There was this incredible opportunity. We just needed to have the right people understand what that opportunity could be," Jackowski says. "It's fine if we start small."

The effort to incorporate ocean-bound plastic into HP products has since scaled to encompass over 300 HP products.

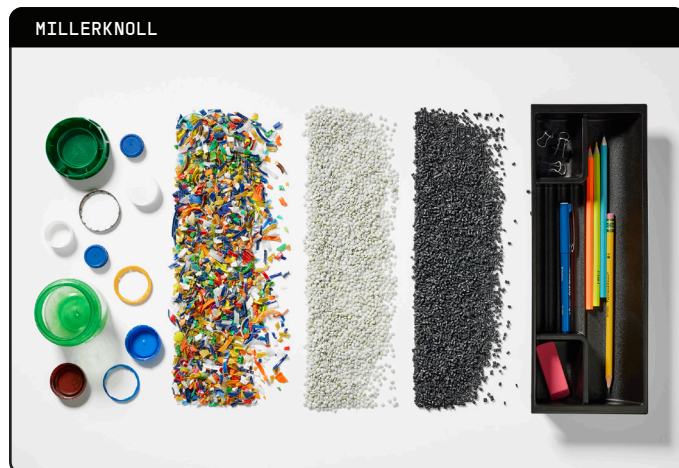
APPEALING TO VALUES AND EMOTIONS

The argument for keeping plastic out of the ocean is easy to make for anyone who cares about the planet. Oliver Campbell, distinguished engineer at Dell, likes to ask people to talk to their kids and see what they think, since they are the ones who are going to inherit the world from us.

"That sounds simplistic, but you'd be amazed at the number of times that has changed people's perspective," Campbell says.

Beyond personal commitments, it helps to map efforts on ocean-bound plastics to a company's values and goals. Founding NextWave member MillerKnoll, a collective of design brands, worked for four years before launching five products made from ocean-bound plastic in 2021, including the Herman Miller brand's classic Aeron office chair.

MillerKnoll's Gabe Wing, director of sustainability, advises: "Figure out what you care about as an organization, and then find the intersection with what your customers care about. If you work in the overlap of those two, you're going to be successful."



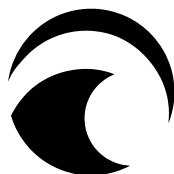
"IF YOU GET BRUSHED OFF ONE TIME, THAT JUST MEANS YOUR STORY WASN'T RIGHT. YOU NEED TO HONE YOUR MESSAGE A LITTLE BETTER AND TRY IT AGAIN."

- NICK ABBATIELLO, ENGINEER FOR SUSTAINABILITY AND CIRCULAR MATERIALS AT DELL TECHNOLOGIES

ENGAGE YOUR STAKEHOLDERS

- Articulate a strong and a personal sense of "why"
- Set expectations to learn and evolve - snags are likely, and that's OK
- Appeal to values, both personal and organizational
- Create a culture of inclusivity with open lines of communication
- Be relentlessly committed to your goal

Visit nextwaveplastics.org to learn more.



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