



# Conscious

# 6

## Making Sustainability Practical in Retail Consumables

Conscious is the sixth pillar in the 7 Cs of Retail Consumables because sustainability is not a standalone initiative. It is the outcome of better management where retailers are able to take a more conscious approach to consumables by reducing waste, avoiding unnecessary purchasing and using data to support more responsible decision-making.

**acopia**<sup>®</sup>

Empowering organisations globally  
to achieve more with less

# Conscious

## Making Sustainability Practical in Retail Consumables

Conscious is the sixth pillar in the 7 Cs of Retail Consumables because sustainability is not a standalone initiative. It is the outcome of better management where retailers are able to take a more conscious approach to consumables by reducing waste, avoiding unnecessary purchasing and using data to support more responsible decision-making.

### Introduction

Retailers face growing pressure to operate more sustainably. Customers expect it, regulators demand it and internal teams increasingly recognise it as a business imperative rather than a 'nice to have'. Yet when it comes to operational consumables and GNFR, sustainability often fails to translate into day-to-day operational decisions, remaining a strategic ambition rather something embedded into daily operations.



## Why consumables are central to sustainable retail

Consumables are purchased frequently, used quickly and often managed locally. Decisions are made under time pressure with limited visibility of usage, waste or environmental impact. As a result, even well-intentioned sustainability strategies can struggle to gain traction at an operational level.

Operational consumables may not attract the same attention as packaging or products for resale, but their cumulative impact is significant. From cleaning materials, carrier bags, till rolls, POS, and other back-of-house essentials: inefficiencies and lost sustainability opportunities are repeated across hundreds of stores.

At scale, even small inefficiencies in consumables can translate into significant environmental and financial impact.

Common sustainability challenges could include:

- Limited input on supplier selection
- Lack of due diligence on product accreditations
- Products being disposed of unused or expired
- Inconsistent product selection across locations
- Limited visibility into usage patterns
- Difficulty evidencing progress against sustainability goals

The UK Government's Resources and Waste Strategy for England <sup>1</sup> highlights the importance of reducing waste through better resource efficiency and improved purchasing practices. Without visibility and control, however, it becomes difficult for retailers to turn policy intent into practical action.



## What ‘Conscious’ really means in retail

Being conscious is not about intention. It is about control, visibility and consistency in how consumables are purchased and used.

In a retail consumables context, Conscious management means:

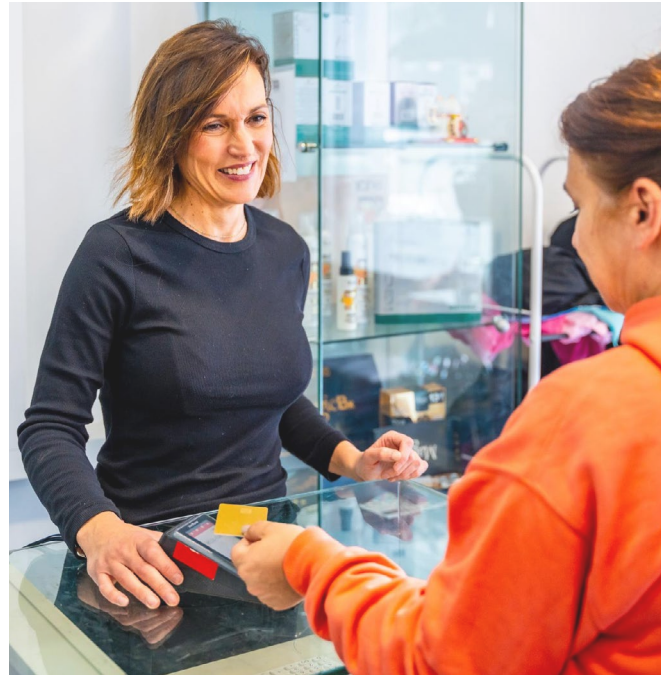
- Ordering based on what is needed, not assumption
- Selecting products that are fit for purpose
- Reducing duplication to lower both material use and environmental impact
- Using data to actively identify and eliminate waste
- Embedding sustainability into everyday processes including procurement and operational workflows

What conscious management is not:

- A one-off sustainability initiative
- A compliance exercise driven solely by reporting
- A trade-off between efficiency and responsibility

**True sustainability in consumables comes from improving the systems and behaviours that drive purchasing and usage.**

In this context, sustainability is not only about reducing waste, but about using time, materials and operational resources more efficiently across the retail estate.



### The hidden link between waste and poor visibility

Waste in retail consumables is rarely intentional. More often, it is the by-product of uncertainty.

When teams lack clarity over what has been ordered, what is in stock or what is being used, they tend to order defensively. This leads to excess inventory, duplication and products expiring before they are used.

In practice, waste in consumables is not only an environmental issue, but a direct cost to the business.

Organisations such as WRAP <sup>2</sup> consistently highlight that over-ordering and poor visibility are key contributors to waste across retail and supply chains, reinforcing the need for better data and more structured purchasing practices.

# Enabling Conscious consumables management

A conscious approach requires systems that support better decisions at scale. Procurement platforms such as MyAcopia enable this by embedding visibility, control and consistency into everyday purchasing.

This includes not only reducing physical waste, but also minimising the time and effort spent managing inefficient processes, which are often overlooked contributors to overall resource use.



**It's the sustainable gains with Acopia that keeps us on track for our net-zero goal.**

JCC Lighting



## Avoiding over-ordering

By improving visibility of ordering history and usage, MyAcopia helps retailers move away from defensive purchasing. Teams can see what is being ordered and used, reducing the temptation to overstock “just in case”.

This not only cuts waste, but also reduces unnecessary resource consumption, lowers carbon impact and minimises the time and effort associated with managing excess stock, freeing up space and working capital. This is where sustainability and cost intersect most clearly.

## Supporting data-led sustainability

Systems like MyAcopia provide the data that enables retailers to:

- Track usage patterns
- Identify anomalies or spikes in ordering
- Support internal sustainability reporting
- Evidence progress against waste reduction goals

Industry analysts such as Gartner<sup>3</sup> consistently emphasise that organisations that use data to inform operational decisions are better positioned to achieve sustainable outcomes.



# How a Conscious approach benefits the organisation

## Retail Operations

- Less excess stock and disposal at store level
- Clearer guidance reduces inconsistent usage
- Day-to-day operations aligned with sustainability goals

## Procurement

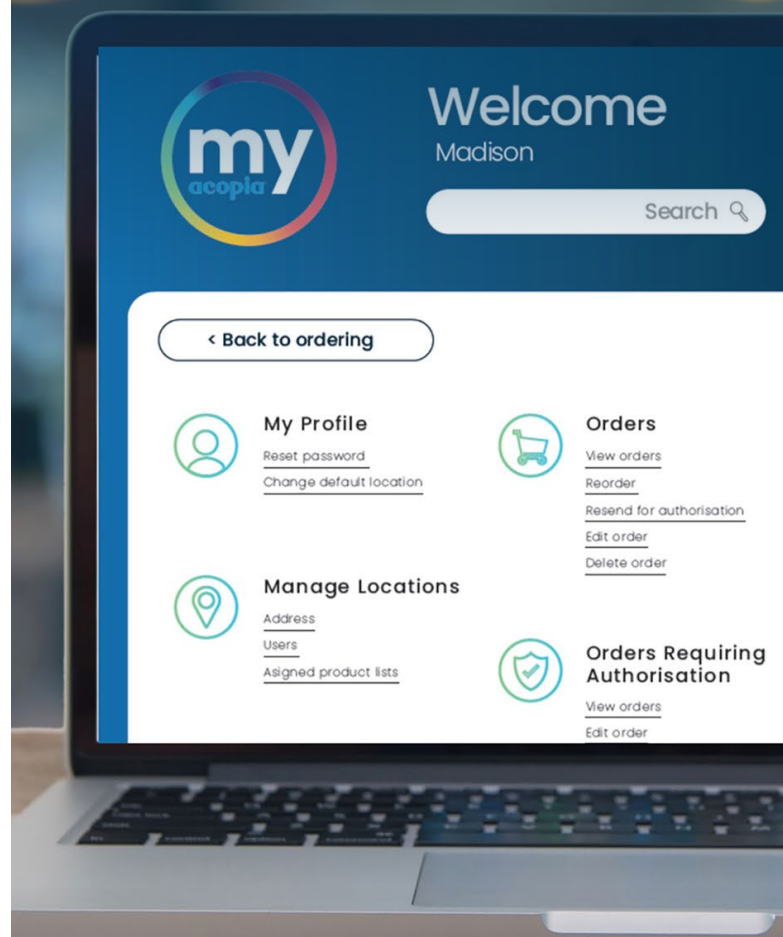
- More consistent selection of sustainable products
- Greater control over supplier standards and accreditations
- Reduced duplication across product ranges

## Finance

- Lower write-offs from expired or unused stock
- Reduced cost of waste and inefficient purchasing
- Better alignment between sustainability and financial performance

## Sustainability Teams

- Clear data to evidence progress and support reporting
- Practical levers to reduce waste across the estate
- Greater confidence that sustainability goals can be delivered operationally



A conscious approach to consumables management does not add complexity.

# **Conscious**

## The sixth step in the 7 Cs journey

Conscious builds on Control, Clarity, Centralisation, Consolidation and Cost Savings.

A Conscious approach allows Retailers to:

- Reduce waste through better decision-making
- Use consumables more efficiently
- Align operational practices with sustainability objectives
- Strengthen the link between efficiency and responsibility

Without these foundations, sustainability efforts remain fragmented and difficult to sustain and why sustainability efforts often fail when attempted in isolation.



## Conscious consumables management

Sustainability in retail consumables is not achieved through isolated initiatives. It is the result of better systems, clearer insight and more consistent behaviours embedded into everyday operations.

In this context, sustainability is not a separate initiative. It is a reflection of how well consumables are managed.

By taking a Conscious approach to consumables management, Retailers can reduce waste, improve efficiency and support wider sustainability goals, all while maintaining operational effectiveness.

A conscious approach to consumables management does not add complexity. It removes it. When visibility improves and behaviours become consistent, sustainability stops being an aspiration and becomes part of how retail operations function every day.

### References used within this document

1. UK Government Resources and Waste Strategy for England
2. WRAP Reducing Waste Through Better Resource Efficiency
3. Gartner Data and Analytics: Turning Information into Better Decisions

**acopia**<sup>®</sup>

**Empowering organisations globally  
to achieve more with less**



Global Point, Steyning Way, Bognor Regis PO22 9SB  
033 033 300 21

**acopia.co.uk**

Published 2026 by Acopia Group. AC7CS0226