



Upcycling – eco-friendly capitalism

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Upcycling is the process of converting waste materials or useless products into new materials or products of better quality or a higher environmental value. It reduces the consumption of new raw materials when creating new products, and is contrary to *downcycling*, which is the other half of the recycling process which involves converting materials and products into new materials of lesser quality.

The UK-based company **Worn Again**, voted ‘number one eco brand’ by *The Independent* in 2008, uses the combination of aesthetic and environmental capital by upcycling corporate waste materials into new, design-led products.

Worn Again has, for example, turned the raincoats, jackets and train seat antimacassars of high-speed train service company Eurostar into bespoke train managers’ bags for Eurostar staff (see image), taking decommissioned textiles and returning them to the company as new products.

A percentage of Worn Again’s income goes to Anti-Apathy, a registered charity which promotes and supports people who take creative and innovative approaches to social and environmental issues.

But why bother? According to a UK report on **Maximising the Reuse & Recycling of UK Clothing & Textiles**, 98% of corporatewear garments in the UK currently end up in landfill, equivalent to 10,000 tonnes per annum, every tonne of discarded textiles reused saves 20 tonnes of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere, and Reuse & Recycling outperform best in terms of energy and resource use compared to other forms of Waste Management.

But there is also a business side to it. Like Worn Again other companies have created their own niche markets by making consumer products from post-consumer materials. Like **Relevé Design** which sells upcycled lighting, **reMade USA** which produces upcycled leather bags, or **TerraCycle** which, among other things, makes children’s backpacks from used Capri-Sun drink pouches and produces insulated lunch boxes made from candy wrappers.

If you know of any other corporate upcycling examples, feel free to share your examples here!

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