

How to start a mug library *(and manage)*

supporting your community
in the process



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1 getting started

COMMITTING

Firstly **let's touch on why you're reading this how-to-guide.** You're worried about the volume of single-use cups that your business is using and you're looking for solutions.

Thank you for taking this first step, it's one of the hardest.

We all know single-use cups are a massive environmental issue. While some single-use cups are less damaging to the environment than others (eg. certified compostable) none are without issues. They all require resources to be grown (using precious water), harvested/extracted (often at the expense of biodiversity), processed or refined, manufactured, assembled, packaged themselves, shipped, stored, distributed, used ONCE by the customer and then usually landfilled or hopefully industrially composted (if possible). And while reusables also have a lot of steps in their manufacturing and shipping, at the end of the day they're used over and over again. Which is where the real environmental benefits kick in.

Single-use cups are also a symbol of the broader throwaway culture that has us in this massive environmental pickle. So removing them from the equation not only helps reduce their footprint but also sends a big message regarding other products of equal or greater rubbish-ness.

Now that you're here (thank you again) the next biggest hurdle to implementing a mug library or reusable network is our attitude towards them. Once we really **choose** to implement one (wholeheartedly) they work.

This guide is designed to help you get on with the job of creating and managing your mug library. It is also full of inspiration from businesses already using them to show you what's possible (just incase you still need convincing 😊).

CHOOSING YOUR MODEL

'Mug Libraries' come in all kinds of shapes and sizes, with funding & management models equally as diverse, as diverse as each cafe in your local area.

Which means **there is a model that will suit your situation.**

Over the next few pages we outline the variety of models available to you. You might find one suits you perfectly or you could combine them all, use your imagination.

CLASSIC MUG LIBRARY

The classic mug library is an eclectic mix of fun, funny and random mugs you might find at the op shop or hidden at the back of your cupboard.

They're also the easiest to implement, because unused mugs are easy to get your hands on.



If you're after something quick and easy to implement this, then is the option for you.

1. GET YOUR MUG COLLECTION STARTED

- a. **Raid your cupboards** at home and ask your staff to do the same for unused mugs.
- b. **Post on your social media** accounts asking your followers if they would like to donate unused mugs (this not only helps build the collection but also involves your community, giving them the opportunity to participant in the initiative).
- c. **Organise an op-shop visit.** This can be a fun activity you can do with your team (Kind of like team building, where your baristas can have say in the mugs you get). You can also post about it on social media to again promote the initiative and bring people along on the journey. You don't need to spend a fortune, a small budget will suffice.

2. HOW TO DISPLAY YOUR MUG LIBRARY

- a. We recommend **displaying** on the public side of the counter, so people can choose their own mug and it doesn't clog up your workspace.
- b. **Pick a spot** in your cafe where they can be seen and used easily, there's no point hiding them in the corner. On a display shelf or in a basket works well (see pics).
- c. **Signage!** Make a sign with clear instructions for your customers. Or you can download one of [our generic signs](#) to get you started.
- d. **Mug return box/process.** You want your customers to return the mugs so they can be used again and again. A box on the counter or near your door is a great option. We'll discuss this more in the section on managing your library shortly.

#JARLIFE

Let's get real here. The jar library is what all the cool kids are doing these days. Not only can they look fun and stylish but they're great for *on-the-go* because you can pop the lid on for zero leakage.

Oh and no big deal, (except it is a big deal) they're a reuse item and recyclable at end of life.



the cool kids

1. GET YOUR JAR COLLECTION STARTED

- a. **Decide the size/volume of jar** (eg. 380g peanut butter jars are perfect for 12oz coffee or smaller & pasta sauce or pickle jars are great for cold drinks!)
- b. **Raid your cupboards** at home and ask your staff to do the same (just like the mugs.)
- c. **Post on your social media** accounts asking your followers if they would like to donate jars (this not only helps build the collection but also involves your community, giving them the opportunity to participate in the initiative).
- d. **De-labelling.** This is the least fun part of this process, not gonna lie. We encourage you to ask that donations come label free, saving you a lot of time. But if you need to de-label [click here for some handy tips](#). *(There's also a load of peanut butter brands with easily removable labels these days, because they want the jars to be reused).*

2. HOW TO DISPLAY YOUR JAR LIBRARY

- a. We recommend **displaying** on the customer side of the counter, so people can choose their own jar and they don't clog up your work space.
- b. **Pick a spot** in your cafe where they can be seen and used easily, there's no point hiding them in the corner. On a shelf or in a basket works well.
- c. **Signage!** Make a sign with clear instructions for your customers. Or you can download one of [our generic signs](#) to get you started.
- d. **Jar return box/process.** You want your customers to return the jars so they can be used again and again. A box on the counter or near your door is a great option.

FORMAL NETWORKS

Time to get formal. Reusable coffee cup networks are becoming increasingly accessible, with container schemes also popping up all over the country.

A reusable network is designed for uniformity across cup sizes, are stackable on top of your coffee machine and are setup with incredible ease.



Each reusable cup network provider operates in a slightly different way/model, but broadly speaking they fit into three schemes:

DEPOSIT SCHEMES

Your customer pays a small deposit to borrow the cup, which is refundable on return.

PURCHASE & SWAP SCHEMES

Your customer purchases into the scheme (the cost of the cup) and can swap it with additional stock you have on hand.

SUBSCRIPTION

You or your customer subscribe to the service (like Netflix or Spotify).

And some are a mixture of a few models. We won't go into full details here, but we recommend you visit the websites of the providers and see what might work best for you. *Click on the images above to learn more.*

You can also [read our blog post](#) on reusable networks.

Please note that Wangim Cups are an initiative of the Darebin City Council and Darebin Zero Waste Business Network. It is only available within their local gov area. However they're very happy to assist others build similar local networks.

2 librarian duties

MANAGING YOUR MUG/JAR LIBRARY

Some things to consider in your operation & management of it.

Collecting returned mugs/jars/cups & washing them

Make a station or box where your community can return used mugs. Sometimes they may come back dirty, don't fret. You'll need to be washing them before they're used again anyway, just like your dine-in cups, so work out a schedule for this with your staff.

Deposit or Trust?

Loaning cups on trust is by far the most behaviour change inducing way to operate your library. It also builds community, mutual respect & trust along the way, which our society could do with a whole lot more of. People will forget to return cups, that's a given. But gentle reminders and nudges on your social media and through clear communications will eventually see the cups returned.

We'd also recommend you consider adding a surcharge for single use cups (like the supermarkets do for bags).

Make it part of your social media strategy

Instead of wasting time on the computer ordering single-use cups, use that time to shout out to your community on social media instead. Remind them to return the mugs or jars and invite them for a coffee at the same time.

The economics of this is clear; less time + money on single-use packaging = more time reaching out to your customers & inviting them to visit. Win!

Partnership options with your local community

If jars are your jam then you have some incredible partnership options in retailing sleeves (this could provide an opportunity for a local maker or craft group partnership) jar jumpers / mug huggers / recycled neoprene (eg. Lucky Roland) / beer coolers. All of these sleeve will keep the jars super well insulated.

Or with mugs you could partner with a local op shop and sell mugs on their behalf, raising money for their charity.



@laika.coffee



@thefoodprintexperience



@simplecoffeeco



@mughuggersnz

PROMOTE IT!

Congratulations! on your new committed relationship to reusable cups/mugs/jars.

Now is the time to shout about it from the rooftops.

The first people you should be telling:

- Your staff
- Your business partner/s
- Your regulars
- Your social media followers
- Your local zero waste / plastic free groups (you can find them usually on Facebook)
- Your local media
- Your local government (most love to share stories like this through their local news)

And if you're located within one of our Plastic Free Places communities please reach out to us and let us know too. We'd love to support you via our social media channels too.



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A big thank you to everyone who gave advice and shared their experiences to make this guide possible. A special shout out to [UYO.NZ](https://www.instagram.com/UYO.NZ) for sharing their mug library guide with us to use for inspiration.

If you have any questions, [please reach out.](#)