



Innovation in the beauty industry - solving the ugly problem of single use plastic

The beauty industry is under growing pressure to develop packaging which not only looks good but which is also environmentally friendly too

Being glamorous and looking great is at the very core of the beauty and personal care industry. Brands are used to battling for consumers' attention with eye-catching packaging and clever design technologies, but now the beauty industry is under growing pressure to develop packaging which not only looks good but which is also environmentally friendly too.

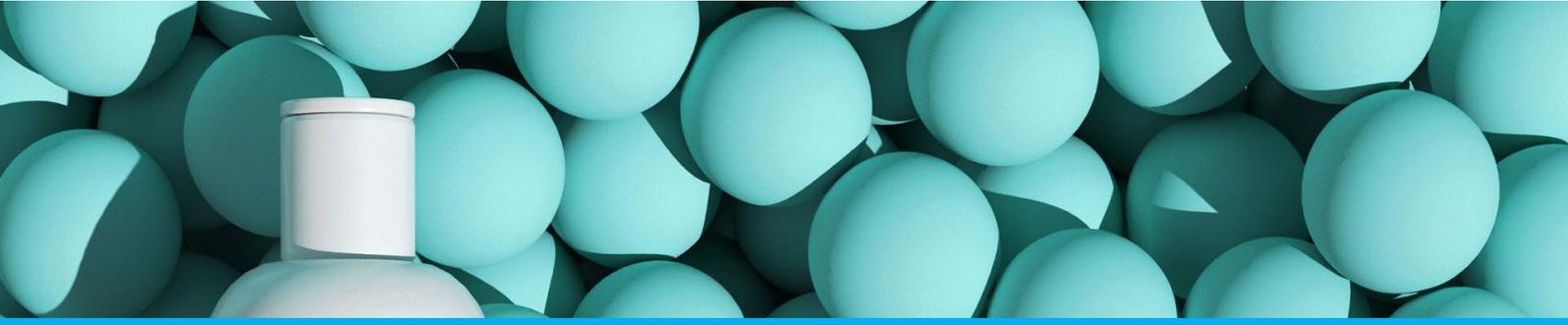
Plastic is a particular concern for beauty brands. The beauty industry found itself in the spotlight when the use of microbeads, tiny pieces of plastic in products such as body scrubs and toothpastes, were found to damage marine life. A ban on microbeads followed and the industry responded quickly with a [2016 survey by Cosmetics Europe](#) reporting an 83% reduction in the use of plastic microbeads in wash off cosmetic and personal care products between 2012 and 2015. The pressure is now on to reduce plastic in all aspects of beauty products.

This is not without its challenges however. Often the design technologies that make beauty products convenient and portable, such as pump dispensers and travel sized bottles, are difficult or impossible to recycle. Many biodegradable or compostable plastics which are currently in use in the food industry may not be suitable for packaging certain beauty products. For example, certain recycled plastics may be prone to crack meaning they aren't suitable for squeezable tubes, and although there is growing research into bioplastics packaging, there is still a challenge to utilising these materials in the beauty industry because high heat sensitivity and water permeability prevent such packaging being used for many products.

Some brands, such as Neal's Yard, have sought to address these challenges by using alternatives to the traditional plastic bottle such as glass bottles and jars when possible. Other brands are choosing to reduce their consumption of single use plastic by using post-consumer recycled PET, following the suit of other industries. Aveda, for example is now using 100% post-consumer recycled PET in 85% of its skin care and hair styling PET bottles and jars, as well as using bioplastic from sugarcane.

Being sustainable doesn't necessarily mean that the glitz and glamor has to be side-lined either. Primark is set to launch cosmetics containing Bioglitter's novel cosmetic eco-friendly glitter which is a low plastic and biodegradable alternative sourced from cellulose. Bioglitter has also submitted an application to patent a [completely plastic free glitter](#) which will be made entirely from natural materials.

Some brands such as Lush are going further still by ditching the plastic altogether with packaging-free shops. This again has its challenges. A high proportion of personal care products are liquid or cream formulations and so manufacturers are required to develop innovative new solid formulations. The beauty industry has had some success with this, with brands bringing out shampoo bars and creating new solid alternatives to traditional liquid formulations such as toothpastes and mouthwashes. By completely reformulating products it is possible to avoid the need for plastic bottles.



From an IP perspective, many of these innovations are clearly patentable. New synthetic ingredients and novel formulations are frequently the subject of patent applications, and ingenious methodologies are also worthy of patent protection. Applying technologies which are already known and established in other industries may be more difficult to protect but in scenarios where the technology has to be modified to be fit for purpose there is scope to explore whether the modification or new use could be protected. Given the beauty and personal care industry's appetite for patent filing, we are sure to see an uptick in applications for new innovative materials.

Authors & Experts: [Hazel Turner](#) and [Gillian McGuire](#)

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