

What to Do When Plastic Bags are Banned.

Find out how switching to reusable bags can become an opportunity to grow your business.

Plastic bag bans are sweeping the nation.



You've probably been hearing a lot about plastic bag bans lately. California is poised to enact one of the first statewide bans.

Otherwise known as referendum **SB 270**, the ban would **eliminate the use of plastic bags in large grocery stores and pharmacies** right away, then **remove them from smaller establishments** later. Although it was initially scheduled to take effect on July 1st, the ban has been postponed until after November 2016 when the issue will appear on state ballots.

Whether SB 270 takes effect sooner rather than later, there's no doubt that the age of the disposable plastic bag is coming to an end. Right now, 150 cities and townships have enacted bans and over 49 million Americans are getting used to shopping with reusable bags. And the numbers keep climbing.

Some cities have tried to reduce plastic bag consumption a different way: instituting bag fees. In cities like Dallas, shoppers pay five cents for the thin, single-use plastic bags that proliferate in grocery and retail stores. Stores have responded by selling reusable bags at cost while customers get used to the ban.

Plastic bag bans and fees present challenges, but businesses have continued to thrive by providing their customers with alternatives. Reusable bags have tremendous marketing potential, and people enjoy using them whether the law requires them to or not. Even in regions where plastic bags are still the norm, many businesses offer their customers branded reusable bags by choice. It won't be long before those ubiquitous single-use bags are completely replaced.



Why ban plastic bags?

The chief reason for banning single-use plastic bags is that they present significant environmental concerns and increase the volume of waste. The public's growing concern about the environment has culminated in plastic bag bans—and the widespread adoption of reusable alternatives.

Plastic bags use a lot of fossil fuel.

The disposable plastic bags we know so well are made out of petroleum. It takes about 12 million gallons to make a year's worth of bags in the U.S. alone.

They're difficult to recycle.

Few recycling centers or citywide recycling programs accept plastic bags, and most people forget to take them to designated recycling sites. The upshot is that only a small fraction (1% to 3%) are recycled and the rest end up in landfills.

They're everywhere.

In the U.S., consumers throw away nearly 100 billion plastic bags annually. In regions where plastic bag bans haven't taken effect, shoppers receive several every time they go grocery shopping. That's a lot of waste!

They aren't biodegradable.

Plastic bags are very slow to break down. Worse, they release toxins into the environment as they degrade.

They create litter.

Although most end up in landfills, far too many discarded plastic bags become unsightly litter, especially on the coast. Plastic bags that are dumped in the ocean present serious hazards to marine life.

Reusable bags are good business.

Retailers and businesses in regions affected by plastic bag bans need to get a head start on complying with the new ordinances. That means finding reusable alternatives, educating customers and figuring out how to turn the ban into an opportunity for growth.

Even if your business isn't located in the affected areas or isn't explicitly required to comply with a plastic bag ban, it's wise to start thinking about incorporating reusable bags into your business model. Some retailers—especially major grocery store chains—have been encouraging their customers to purchase reusable bags for many years. Other retailers have voluntarily adopted “no plastic bag” policies to reduce waste, cut costs and appeal to environmentally conscious shoppers. A reusable bag initiative positions your business as a thought leader. You'll find that your bags quickly become popular with customers and increase brand awareness.

Reusable bags have tremendous marketing potential. Bags are the highest performing promotional products in the U.S.! They generate thousands of brand impressions and consumers tend to hold onto them for at least a year. Further, reusable bags cultivate customer loyalty.

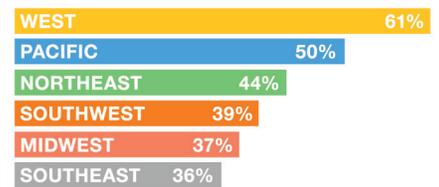
Embrace new marketing opportunities.

Phasing out plastic bags is about so much more than compliance with city and state ordinances. Reusable bag initiatives present golden opportunities for customer engagement, community outreach and increased brand awareness. Think of it this way: If your business has to comply with a plastic bag ban, you might as well use it as a marketing opportunity!



NEED TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS IN THE WEST?

61% OF CONSUMERS IN THE WEST WHO HAVE A LOGOED BAG SAY THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO DO BUSINESS WITH THE ADVERTISER.



BAGS GENERATE MORE IMPRESSIONS

IN THE U.S. THAN ANY OTHER PROMOTIONAL ITEM.



Source: The Advertising Specialty Institute®

Develop a reusable bag marketing plan.

1. Prepare for the ban by offering inexpensive reusable shopping bags.

If your business is located in an area impacted by plastic bag bans, begin addressing it immediately by offering inexpensive logoed bags to get your customers used to the idea.

2. Offer nice logoed totes for sale as soon as the ban goes into effect.

Even if your business is still exempt from the ordinance, you can begin offering durable, stylish totes for sale. Customers will use them at your store and elsewhere.

3. After a few months, try some inspired reusable bag promotions to stand out.

It won't take long for reusable bags to become the norm. By this time, nearly every retailer in your area will be experimenting with different varieties and designs. Now you'll have to get creative in order to stand out from the crowd.

Need ideas for promoting with reusable bags?

Every business is different, and there are many ways to approach reusable bag promotions. Here are some marketing ideas to inspire you.

Run a "bring your own bag" promotion.

BYOB will take on a whole new meaning! If you're just starting to offer reusable bags, it's a good idea to give your customers a little incentive. These promotions get customers coming back regularly and bringing their bags.

- Sell reusable bags and offer discounts for using them in the store.
- Boost sales by offering free bags to customers who spend a set minimum in one transaction.
- Encourage brand loyalty by giving bags to customers who participate in your rewards program.

Hold a bag design competition with online voting.

What better way to engage your community and bring traffic to your company website or social media page? Solicit design submissions, and then post the top three to ten designs online. Ask visitors to vote on their favorite, and make sure they enter their e-mail addresses when they cast their vote so you can expand your mailing list.

Partner with elementary schools to design a bag.

Here's a feel-good promotion that shows your brand's commitment to education. You can make it a competition with an online voting component or you can simply choose a winning design and award the school with a prize. This kind of strategy engages your community on several levels and creates lifelong brand advocates.

Promote with holiday-themed bags.

Who can resist a stylish seasonal design? Festive bags add a little holiday cheer to your customers' shopping experience. This is an opportunity to think about practical uses: Summer is a good time for some businesses to promote with insulated picnic totes and winter is a good time to promote with large decorative bags for carrying gifts.

Partner with a charity to create limited edition bags.

Customers love feeling like their dollars are supporting a good cause. Put charity or

cause messaging on limited edition bags to show your awareness of an issue and your commitment to doing good. Sell the bags for slightly more and donate some of the profits to the charity, either from the bags themselves or a set amount every time a customer brings a bag into your store.

Popular Reusable Bags

There are so many types and styles of reusable tote bags. Which one works best for your business?



Cotton totes are washable, natural and stylish. Give these as a high value gift or sell them to customers.



Nonwoven bags are inexpensive and recyclable. Offer a limited supply as promotional gifts to help customers get in the habit of bringing their own bags.



Laminated nonwoven totes can be wiped clean. This encourages customers to use this type of bag longer and more often.



Foldable totes are easy to store because they fold down to a "stackable" size. Your customers will love the convenience and ease of storage.

Are you ready to start promoting your brand with plastic bag alternatives? Contact your Staples Promotional Products representative to get started.

SmartPapers™

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