Proposal:

Starbucks customers may create accounts with Starbucks. When visiting any Starbucks location or purchasing online, customers may optionally purchase re-useable cups for an initial cost. When these customers purchase re-usable Starbucks cups, they are immediately entitled to 30 (or whatever the cycle life of the cup is) discounts on in-store purchases AFTER they have returned their most recently-used re-useable cup to any Starbucks location. A buffer of one “loaned-out” cup may be provided so that customers may make online purchases before returning their used cup when picking up their drink. When each of these discounts is applied, the customer’s drink will be served in a re-useable cup which is not necessarily the same cup the customer has already purchased, and their online cup count will be decremented by one.

This system offers a direct incentive for customers to purchase the “rights” to a re-useable cup up front, and can be used to directly underwrite the manufacture of these cups. Furthermore, re-useable cups are not directly bound to specific customers, and as such may be circulated and managed on the store-side. This provides opportunities for customers to make online purchases without needing to exchange cups in person or keep their own cups in multiple stores.

Marking and indexing strategies may additionally be used to manage the cycle-life of cups being circulated throughout stores. Unique identifiers may be used to associate cups with their customers at the hand-off plane.