

Waste & Reuse

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Needfinding methodology

11

interviews

Who?

- Dumpster divers
- Eco-activists
- Waste engineers
- College students
- Regular people



... and even a molecular coffee maker!

How?

- Reddit
- Twitter
- Friends

...and where?



On Zoom...



“Tell me about a time you felt wasteful.”

“How has COVID changed things?”

“What disposable products do you use?”

“What was the last thing you bought used?”

Q's

“Where do you look to buy things?”

“How do you get rid of valuable items?”

“Where do you see waste in your life?”

“What motivates you to act sustainably?”

Nadiia

college student

“I feel like sustainability efforts are often not effective and more performative”



Andy

Atomo cofounder

“We used to ship using styrofoam... that was wasteful and didn’t align with our mission.”



Mimi

wren.co founder

“The biggest levers [of environmental change] are around consumption and your lifestyle.”



Arzy

Teen from Crimea

“Packaging. You can’t avoid it, especially during COVID. Stores prepack everything so you can’t bring your own bag.”



Dan

dumpster diver

“All the stuff I find [in the dumpster] is practically new off the shelf. There’s so much unnecessary waste.”





There's a lot to learn from the dumpster!



We know you were wondering...

Surprises

- Dan sustains himself off dumpster diving.
- Kimberly almost exclusively thrifted in college.

Tensions

- A dumpster diver buys most of his products new.
- An eco-activist uses plastic water bottles.
- An eco-startup shipped using styrofoam.

Empathy map

**I don't trust people
selling online. It's
sketchy. I could get hurt
or ripped off.**

It's so hard to find what I
need [when thrifting]. It's
always the wrong stuff.

There's a lot of food
waste in my dining
halls.

When buying clothes, I
prefer to thrift.

Say

There is effort involved
in donating [stuff].

Sometimes I make my
own granola bars to
avoid plastic waste.

In college, I was trying
to buy all my clothes
from thrift stores.

I dumpster dive to see
how hard I can go.

**Buys sustainable brands
if they are affordable.**

Sorts through piles of old
books to find the right
textbooks.

Buys clothes
exclusively from thrift
stores.

Evaluates the quality of
the food through sight and
smell.

Do

Goes through the trash
around move-out day to
see what her peers left
behind.

Refuses to obtain items
that are going to be
thrown away.

Commits a lot of time to
find clothes she really
needs.

Reuses things from year
to year in college.

Sustainability can be inconvenient and it's necessary to consider the costs.

Great goods can be found in the dumpsters on college campuses during move out periods.

I don't trust myself to thrift or scavenge for items I'm not familiar with.

I'm not sustainable for its own sake.



It's important to focus on the root of the problem and not on secondary impacts.

It doesn't make sense to make my life unnecessarily difficult for a marginal impact.

If I can help it, I'll buy from eco-friendly brands.

Dumpster diving is a choice; I could afford groceries.

Nervous about people
judging him for dumpster
diving.

**Optimistic that people
will do more good if it is
made more accessible.**

Disappointed that
people make
unintentional or
unnecessary
purchases.

Sustainability is
sometimes performative.



Feel

Frustrated that many
food delivery services
use more plastic than
necessary.

Disappointed that her
dining hall throws out a
lot of food when there
are food insecure areas
nearby.

Concerned and nervous
about carbon emissions
from transportation.

Disappointed that her
friends don't thrift with
her.

Initial insights

Insight

**People consume sustainably
when it's convenient**

Need

**Make it easier to buy used than
it is to buy new**



“I don’t want to be
[an environmental]
martyr... I’m not
going to make my
life unnecessarily
difficult.”

— Nadiia

Insight

Don't expect consumers to pay more for sustainable goods

Need

Competitive, cost-effective sustainable alternatives



“I don't think Atomo! would have succeeded if the price had been higher than the price of normal coffee.”

— Andy

Insight

Buyers often can't find the right reusables locally

Need

Better surfacing and matchmaking for reusables



“I don’t give up
when searching for
certain items...I
[sometimes] ask to
borrow from
friends.”

— Arzy

Insight

Lots of 'waste'—food or not—is actually perfectly fine for use

Need

Better visibility into items' durability and shelf life



“Most items haven’t reached their expiration date and we as humans can identify what’s good and bad.”

— Dan

Summary

- People act sustainably when it benefits them directly.
- People are uneasy about buying used, thrifting, and dumpster diving.
- When looking for something specific, sourcing locally is hard.

Q's?

All Participants

- Amelia, waste treatment engineer (expert)
- Andrew, college student
- Andy, Atomo cofounder
- Arzy, teen from Crimea
- Ash, sustainably-minded Canadian
- Dan, dumpster diver and nurse
- Kimberly, sustainability coordinator
- Melissa, UX designer
- Mimi, wren.co cofounder
- Nadia, US college student (Ukrainian)
- Jessica, high school student

Participants are American unless noted otherwise.