

# Waste not: Droyman turns trash to cash

Businessman wants to make the world a greener place

Nicola Jenvey

**J**EREMY Droyman sees his animal caricature as a chameleon because then everyone around him would hopefully turn green.

Given he is MD of waste minimisation company Don't Waste, his choice could hardly be more appropriate, since his goal is to stop any waste from ending up in landfills.

Waste minimisation differs substantially from recycling in that the aim is not to generate waste in the first place, but rather find ways of tackling the refuse generated.

In the 17 years since Droyman and his brother-in-law Claude Nish established Don't Waste at the back of The Pavilion regional shopping centre development in Durban, the company has prevented the equivalent of 800 Olympic-sized swimming pools worth of waste from being dumped in landfills.

Operating behind the scenes at 160 shopping centres, hundreds of hotels, office blocks, factories, blue-chip companies as well as the OR Tambo and Cape Town international airports, Don't Waste staff separate and recycle waste on society's behalf.

In the basement of Sandton City, the Monte Casino, Gateway, Menlyn Park and Canal Walk, employees sort through literally thousands of tons of rubbish each year.

They separate the waste by hand into different grades and materials, applying the only business model Droyman believes works for recycling – source separation.

The methodology depends on waste being separated into different grades and materials as close to where it was created as possible, since as soon as waste is compacted or contaminated (mixed with wet food, beverages, oil or inks), it becomes more difficult to recover, if at all.

Essentially, separating the wet and dry waste at source leaves the client "90 percent of the way down the road to recycling".

Once employees have sorted the waste, Don't Waste arranges for its collection by one of the 200 recycling merchants and sells the recyclables on the clients' behalf.

The balance is collected by a waste company and sent to landfills.

The company retains careful records throughout the process so




Don't Waste chief executive Jeremy Droyman is the entrepreneur of the week.

PHOTOS: TERRY HAYWOOD



Jeremy Droyman's waste-minimisation company has won various awards and boasts the ISO full house. It aims for zero waste-to-landfill by 2022.

Brought to you by  
  
**Investec**

waste can be disposed of in an environmentally soundly way.

The less waste enters a landfill, the happier Droyman becomes.

Droyman says that this year the company will recycle around 40 000 tons and save 137 000 trees, compared to the City of Joburg that will recycle 91 899 tons (according to information released on its website [www.joburg.org.za](http://www.joburg.org.za) on August 18).

But key to the success is training and Don't Waste spends a significant amount of time and energy on educating employees into the intricacies of waste management and recycling.

It has established the Sector Education and Training Authority-accredited Green Learning Institute that trains both in-house and clients, thus leveraging off the capacity Don't Waste has from educating its own staff.

When Droyman walked out of Natal Technikon with a management diploma in the early 1990s, Nish proposed they establish a recycling company and approach The Pavilion with their concept.

Ever since, Don't Waste has never

stopped innovating the ways in which it conducts its business, manages its customers' performances and contributes to reducing South Africa's carbon dioxide emissions.

"We need to avoid our water and soil becoming polluted, because we need soil and water to grow food and for drinking.

  
**DURBAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY**  
EST. 1884

"Landfills are unstable, so cannot be built on in the future and no matter how well they are designed, are potential toxic bombs lurking under the soil," Droyman says.

Consequently, the benefit from recycling far outweighs the costs, and he applauds Pick n Pay for leading

the way in focusing on sustainable, responsible business practices.

The retailer has added recycling stations to many of its stores in a move that boosts consumer recycling habits, and nationally Pick n Pay averages a recycling rate of over 65 percent.

Droyman says there has also been a push from the government. The newly effective Consumer Protection Act (CPA) forces retailers to accept the return of goods they supply, including the packaging, remnants and components, without cost to the consumer.

Several Don't Waste clients, including the Liberty Midlands Mall in Pietermaritzburg and several Pick n Pay stores, now recycle around 90 percent of their waste.

Droyman is confident they will reach maximum through a combination of source sorting, worm farms (the compost feeds the gardens around the shopping centre or hotel), biogas extractors, macerators and anaerobic digesters.

Most clients now question "how" not "why", as was the case when Don't Waste opened its doors.

The Polokwane Declaration also brought into official thinking – even if not legislation – the aim for zero waste-to-landfill by 2022.

The interim step is halving the waste-to-landfill by next year.

Droyman estimates 95 percent of the company's clients are already beyond that halfway mark.

Municipalities have programmes for handling domestic recycling, but

there are no incentives for households to change their waste-disposal policies, as the financial benefits are not passed on to them.

Essentially, households that recycle, and thus reduce their weekly waste collected by the municipalities, are no better off financially than households that throw everything into the black plastic bags on collection day.

The legitimate question then is: How can recycling become sustainable in South Africa when consumers do not see its benefits?

One of the answers lies in boosting awareness of recycling in

households, because the more people recycle, the more swiftly the problem of managing and disposing of that waste is handled.

Consequently, Don't Waste places recycle bins in public places where it can guarantee waste is recycled.

"Defining that this is the starting point, the waste – at least once it has been created – is separated as soon as possible, which avoids transport and landfill at all costs."

In theory, another solution may be to tackle the municipalities on their policies.

Droyman says the hardest lesson learnt in growing a company from

zero to its current success has been learning to control people, since virtually every employee is out of sight.

Solving that dilemma has meant putting in place non-negotiable systems and using the latest available technology and communications.

Inherent in that is surrounding yourself with good, trustworthy people and having sound local knowledge, because "Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town may as well be three different countries".

However, among his greatest rewards is the knowledge he has created a business that is doing good.

It is "a very satisfying feeling". The next step is to persuade manufacturers to change to processes that prevent waste being generated in the first place.

Droyman says over past years a major challenge has been to change people's attitudes to becoming green.

In recent years the challenge has diminished, as environmental awareness has grown and clients have become increasingly green in their business outlook.

The company has won the eThekwin Mayor's Award for Wealth and Job Creation, several clients' awards for good service and an Acsa Feather Award for services performed at the Cape Town International Airport.

Don't Waste is also among a handful of companies that boast the ISO full house – it holds the ISO 9001 certification for quality, the ISO 14001 for environment, and the ISO 18001 for health and safety among employees.

In short, the company has fully integrated systems. Yet, on reflection, Droyman knows his decisions to follow this career path were driven by more than business.

In looking at his family – wife Tracy and five-year-old daughter Leah – he knows his actions are contributing to the lives of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, essentially generations who have not even been considered, let alone conceived.

Beyond his passion for work, Droyman has a passion for technology. His business decisions are partially driven by the innovations he sees from this sphere.

His philosophy is based on constantly reinventing himself and the business. Don't Waste invests a significant percentage of its annual turnover in research and development.

"The bottom line is, in making the world a better place, people have to realise the right choices are not necessarily the convenient ones.

"It is no longer acceptable to say you do not care."