

Unit 2

1 Read the article about the circular economy and decide which two sentences summarise it best.

- a The article is about companies that make cheap disposable goods trying to find ways to produce less waste.
- b The writer is not optimistic about the circular economy because he believes that companies won't be able to recycle or refurbish goods and still make a profit.
- c The writer believes that young consumers are creating pressure to make companies come up with ways to help people shop with an environmental conscience.
- d The writer has little hope that we will be able to solve the problems of packaging and waste.

2 Read the article again and choose the best answer (a, b or c) to the questions.

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| <p>1 What is Ikea planning to do to become more environmentally friendly?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a recycle all their furniture and kitchen units b start renting out furniture and kitchen units c make better quality and more long-lasting goods <p>2 What used to be kept over a decade ago for twice as long as is done today?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a furniture b cars c clothes <p>3 What could make a company like Ikea go into liquidation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a only manufacturing strong, long-lasting products b making products from recycled materials c reusing and refurbishing goods | <p>4 According to the writer, what should throwaway containers be replaced by?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a plastic containers b glass containers c reusable containers <p>5 What is one of the disadvantages of the circular economy for the environment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Some companies will go out of business. b Some products will be over-consumed and cause more pollution. c The effort that went into producing a product will be wasted. <p>6 What is lost through recycling?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a the work and money that was put into making the product b the raw materials used to make the product c the environmental damage caused by the manufacturing of the product |
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3 Find the words in the box in the text and match them with the definitions (a-i).

Verbs: curb exacerbate lease wander **Nouns:** congestion heirloom occupancy pitfall velocity

Verbs

- a to walk slowly past sth _____
- b to allow someone to use something for a period of time in exchange for payment _____
- c to make sth worse, e.g. a problem _____
- d to control or limit sth, especially sth not wanted _____

Nouns

- e valuable object you are going to inherit _____
- f speed _____
- g the act of using or occupying a place (e.g. a house, land or method of transport) _____
- h danger or difficulty, often hidden _____
- i the state of being crowded (e.g. with lots of traffic) _____

4 What is the missing prefix in these words from the text? Which two words are related to throwing away?

_____ play (noun) _____ close (verb) _____ pose of (phrasal verb) _____ card (verb)

5 Complete the sentences using words from Exercises 3 and 4.

- 1 If you want to _____ of unwanted clothes, you can donate them to a charity provided they are in good condition.
- 2 The growing availability of cheap goods will _____ the problem of waste worldwide.
- 3 There are more advantages than _____ when it comes to buying an electric car.
- 4 It can take over an hour to drive across the city because of heavy _____ during rush hour.
- 5 Scientists have underestimated the _____ of climate change, which appears to be much faster than initially predicted.
- 6 You should try to _____ your impatience with new recruits as it won't help them learn the job any faster.

Ikea furniture does not need to fall apart

The most circular thing about Ikea, the Swedish furniture retailer, has traditionally been the path that it makes customers follow through its superstores to find the goods they have driven there to buy. As they wander along its displays, Ikea wants them to spot other decorations and take them home too.

The 'circular economy' now means something else: the reuse and repurposing of products in different ways. Ikea disclosed this week that it not only wants to recycle more furniture, but plans a trial in Switzerland this year to lease desks, chairs and perhaps kitchens. Instead of acquiring furniture cheaply and later throwing it away, customers might lease it for a while and then upgrade, with the old pieces being refurbished for other users.

No one buys Ikea furniture to pass on to the next generation – it is rarely moved from the spot where it is put together. That is not the point – like fast fashion clothing and other goods made in China, it has been cheap enough to treat as disposable rather than as an heirloom. But even Ikea shows signs of doubting whether this approach can endure.

The velocity of consumption has steadily risen, partly because companies such as Ikea make buying stuff easy. Sofas and televisions were once hefty household investments but can be bought cheaply now. About a hundred billion garments are made each year – fourteen for each person – and they are kept for only half as long as fifteen years ago, the consultancy McKinsey & Co estimates.

This causes a lot of damage. Each person in the world draws about ten tonnes of raw materials from metals to biomass annually into the economy to support consumption and production, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which advocates a circular economy. Much of it will end up as waste, given how hard it is to reuse – only 14 percent of plastic packaging is taken for recycling, and far less actually recycled.

Few companies would stay in business if they only made goods that lasted a lifetime. But plenty can do more to limit repetitive consumption. They have selfish motives to try, as Ikea and others are doing: young consumers enjoy buying things but many are environmentally conscious (at least in theory) and are repelled by waste.

Companies can start with packaging, too much of which is made from complex plastics that ends up in landfill or the world's oceans.

More containers should be refillable, like the glass bottles brought to my door by our milkman, and SodaStream®'s carbon dioxide gas canisters for bubbly water.

Packaging is only one of the excesses in the way that products are marketed and consumed. Not only are things bought and disposed of rapidly, but many are used sparingly while their owners have them – in Europe, the average car is parked 92 percent of the time and 31 percent of food is wasted, McKinsey estimates.

Consumers can learn a lesson from the way companies often lease equipment and goods, paying by usage rather than for objects themselves. That applies to photocopiers made by Kyocera and Xerox™, while the flooring company Desso leases office carpets – cleaning as well as fitting.

More things could be rented by individuals, as technology has encouraged. The internet makes it easier to share occupancy of cars and apartments through Uber and Airbnb, and people subscribe to music and other digital services rather than buying discs.

People lease cars for three or four years and there is no reason why more durable goods, including furniture, cannot be rented. Not only does it limit waste but it gives companies an incentive to make things sturdily – better materials would require fewer repairs.

The circular economy has pitfalls, notably the so-called rebound effect: the easier it is to use products, the more intensively this will happen. That is not a problem for furniture, but sharing cars can exacerbate congestion and pollution rather than curbing it.

But the reuse and refurbishment of goods has enormous benefits compared with things being sold once, used for a time and then dumped. At best, recycling involves breaking things into raw materials and, in effect, discarding all the investment and labour that went into their making and marketing.

If Ikea aspires to become circular, there is no reason why others should not follow. It will be difficult to reform the consumption habits of the past few decades but all of us – consumers and companies – can try.