



PPAI[®]

Waste Less, Win More:
A Practical Guide to Circular Thinking in Promo

Waste is the industry's biggest blind spot—and biggest opportunity.

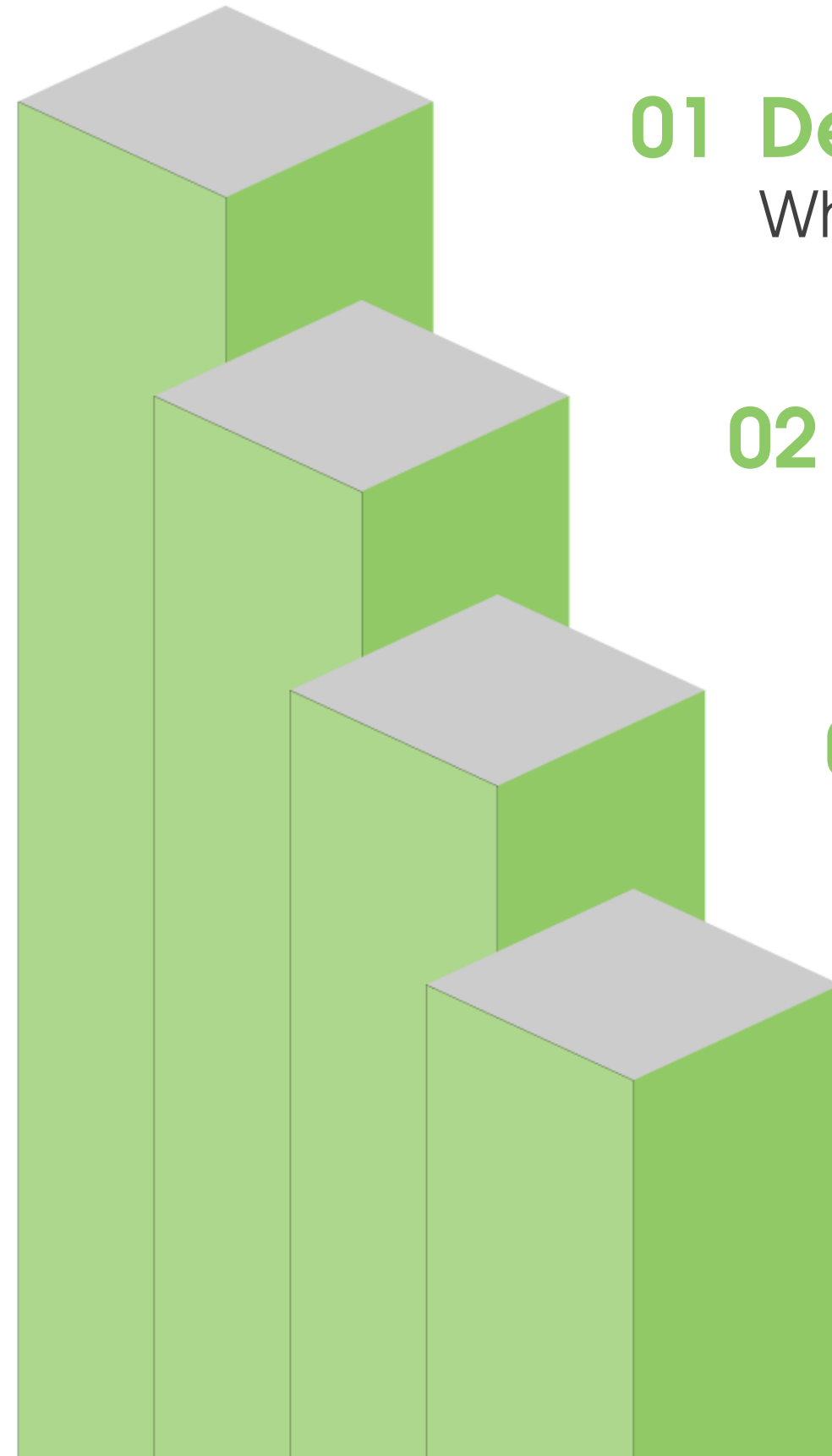
We've spent years talking about materials, certifications, and claims. But when you look at the data—and what's showing up in real business decisions—the bigger issue is simpler: **Waste.**

- Overproduction that never gets used
- Products designed for moments, not longevity
- Materials that can't realistically be recovered
- Increasing regulatory pressure tied to what happens after use

Circular thinking isn't about perfection or closed loops. It's about keeping more value in play, for longer—and reducing what gets thrown away in the process. This isn't a guide to "being circular." It's a guide to making better decisions that reduce waste—starting now.



The Framework: Four Practical Pillars



01 Design for What Happens Next

What Happens to this product after it's used?

02 Smarter Material Choices

Not perfect materials — just fewer that create unnecessary waste.

03 Keep it in Use Longer

The longer something is used, the less waste it creates.

04 Plan for Disposal

Products will reach an end-of-life stage. The goal is to reduce impact, not eliminate it entirely

Progression (Not Perfection)

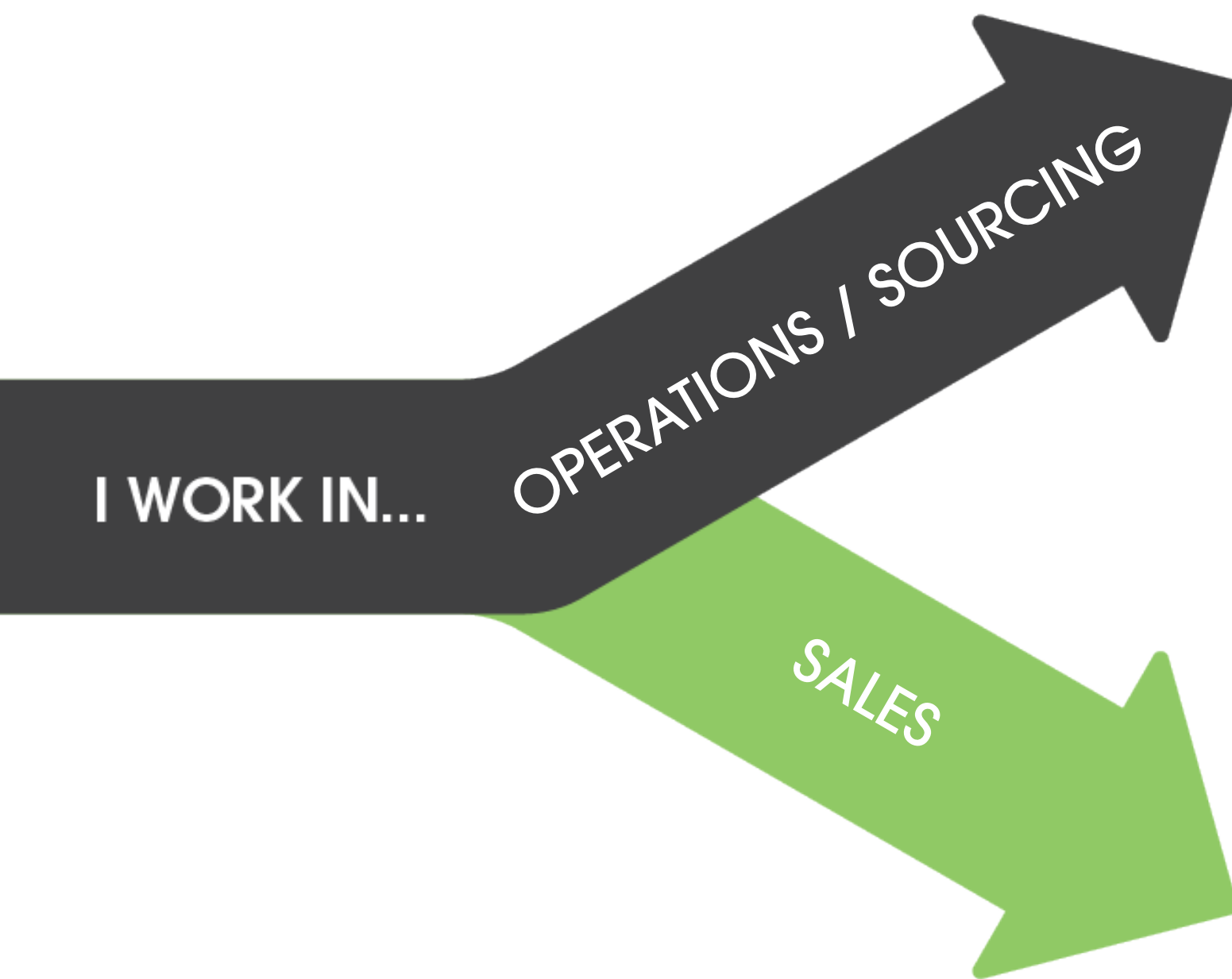


Most companies will sit somewhere in the middle - what's important is continual progress.

Next Steps: Choose Your Path

Where do you sit?

START → “I want to reduce waste in my business—but not sure where to start.”



- Need to know what to change in practice
- Deal with suppliers and product decisions
- Need realistic, not theoretical

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- Need to position this with clients
- Want to win business, not slow it down
- Need something my team can actually use

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Not Sure?
Start anywhere –
both paths connect.

Operations Lens

For operations and sourcing teams, the opportunity is at the source — where product decisions are made and waste can be designed out before it begins.

Where Waste Shows Up Most

- Audit overproduction / unused inventory
- Short lifecycle products
- Mixed materials that can't be separated
- Unnecessary packaging

Low-Lift Changes to Start

- Challenge unnecessary quantity buffers
- Prioritize products with reuse potential
- Avoid hard-to-separate material combinations
- Consolidate to fewer, more aligned suppliers

Simple Decision Filters

Before approving a product:

- Can this be used more than once?
- Is it made of materials that can be separated?
- Is there a lower-waste option that meets the same need?

Where to Focus

Focus On:

- Reducing Volume
- Increasing usable life
- Simplifying materials

Avoid getting stuck in:

- Chasing perfect recyclability claims
- Overengineering solution clients won't use

Sales Leader Lens

Use these talking points early in the sales conversation - before product selection begins. The earlier you reframe, the more influence you have over the outcome

Reframe the Conversation

Instead of “sustainable products” try using:

- “reducing unused spend”
- “getting more value from the same budget”
- “avoiding products that get thrown away immediately”

Questions Your Team Can Start Asking

- What happens to this product after the event?
- Is this meant to be used once or repeatedly?
- Would fewer, better items be more effective than higher volume?

Event Giveaway Examples

Good

Durable item instead of disposable

Better

Item designed for ongoing use

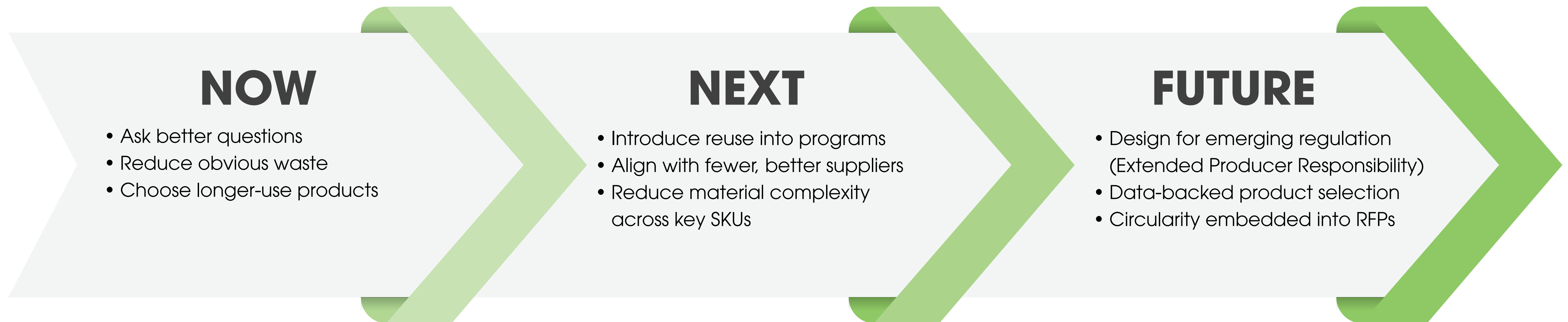
Best

Part of a reuse or refill system tied to the event

What This Unlocks

- Stronger client Trust
- Differentiation without relying on perfect claims
- More strategic conversations (beyond product selection)

What This Looks Like Over Time



This isn't a switch. It's a progression.

Waste is the problem. Circular thinking is one practical way to solve it.

You don't need a perfect system.
You need better decisions - made earlier.

 BETTER DECISIONS

 LESS WASTE

 NO PERFECTION REQUIRED

For More Information Visit: ppai.org/sustainability