

Case Study: Alameda Theatre & Cineplex and Alameda Cinema Grill



BUSINESS PROFILE:

NAME:

Alameda Theatre & Cineplex
Alameda Cinema Grill

BUSINESS TYPE:

Movie theatre and restaurant

LOCATION:

Alameda, CA

ON-SITE DINING:

160 seats available for
in-theatre dining

TAKE-OUT:

Yes

WARE WASHING:

Mechanized dishwasher

EMPLOYEES:

30

The Alameda Theatre & Cineplex is a historic movie theatre built in downtown Alameda in 1932, designed by Timothy L. Pflueger, a famous SF architect known for the Castro Theatre, Paramount Theatre (Oakland), and the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Building. It is the island's only movie theatre and estimates half a million visitors per year!

The Alameda Cinema Grill is attached to the theatre and together, the Grill and the Theatre have a special food delivery system referred to as "In-Theatre Dining" where the customer can order food for delivery to their seats off a menu designed specifically to be easy to eat with little-to-no utensils like pizza, burgers, chicken wings, and tacos. These meals are prepared and delivered by the Cinema Grill. The rest of the movie theatre food and drinks (hot dogs, popcorn, sodas, etc.) can be ordered at the centrally-located concession stands.

As a result of implementing ReThink Disposable's recommendations, the Alameda Theatre & Cineplex and the Alameda Cinema Grill reduced disposable foodware items targeted for reduction or elimination by an average of 47%, earned an ongoing annual net cost savings of \$9,881 and reduced waste by 6,907 pounds!

The Alameda Theatre & Cineplex and Alameda Cinema Grill joint project is the first movie theatre business type to participate in *ReThink Disposable's* certification program to minimize and eliminate single-use disposable foodware at the source to prevent pollution and litter. The movie theatre and restaurant is a unique operation that required custom recommendations and changes to operational choreography to reduce foodware packaging and introduce reusables.



Through a successful partnership with the Downtown Alameda Business Association, the *ReThink Disposable* team was introduced personally to the owner and marketing manager and that warm lead helped us recruit the business into the program. The business owner and management team were excited at the opportunity to do their part in protecting the environment and championed introducing reusables in their operations. This was coupled with a short film "PSA" that previews before every movie to reinforce the new *ReThink Disposable* program.

Packaging practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- The Cinema Grill's "in-theatre dining" operation for moviegoers was entirely disposable, with paper plates and food boats, and plastic utensils which were assembled in the restaurant and delivered on reusable caddies to each seat
- All drinks taken into the theatre, whether purchased from the Cinema Grill or the Theatre, including alcohol, were served in three different sizes of disposable plastic cups with a lid and straw
- The theatre had three self-service stations stocked with individually wrapped packets of mustard, ketchup, salt, relish, cane sugar, Splenda, and honey
- An existing operation was already in place to return, wash, and reuse the caddies for in-theatre dining
- Close to one million pieces of packaging were consumed per year generating over 9,000 pounds of waste that cost \$4,000 a month to haul away

Recommendations Implemented

- Reusable platters eliminate the use of disposable plates for in-theatre dining
- Reusable tumblers replace and drastically reduce three sizes of disposable plastic cups for drinks
- Bulk condiment dispensers eliminate the use of individually wrapped packets for mustard, ketchup, cane sugar, and Splenda
- Three dish return collection stations have been introduced and strategically placed outside of theatres for moviegoers to return reusable items
- The Theatre shows a *ReThink Disposable* short film as a preview before every movie to reinforce the new operational changes in a fun and engaging way

BEFORE/AFTER:
All food and beverage orders from the Cinema Grill for in-theatre dining at the next-door Cineplex were replaced with a reusable platter and two sizes of reusable tumblers. Orders continue to be delivered in reusable caddies.



“There is intrinsic value to being a more sustainable business — it’s not as scary as it sounds. Now that we are using more reusable items we are saving money. It takes work but it is easier than it might look. We thought that customers would generally react negatively, but the reaction was very positive. The audience loves, loves, loves the short film too!”

Dan Hawkey, General Manager

After participating in the *ReThink Disposable* program, the Theatre and Cinema Grill reduced five and eliminated eight types of disposable foodware items totaling nine operational changes that were successfully rolled out and will be sustained into the future. All drinks are served in two different sizes of reusable plastic tumblers (eliminating one size of disposable plastic cup), but still requires a disposable lid to prevent spills, as there currently are no viable alternatives to the disposable plastic lid that is feasible in such a large operation.

While wrapping up the Theatre’s participation in the program, it was noted that there was significant product loss of the 9 ounce tumbler — most likely from customers accidentally throwing them in the trash — and salt shakers continued to disappear, so the decision was made to return to individually-wrapped salt packets and repurchase 9 ounce tumblers to accommodate the loss of product. Additionally, the Theatre and Cinema Grill replaced plastic sauce cups with paper sauce cups and significantly reduced straw usage by making them available by request only — the owner felt very strongly about reducing straw usage — and introduced a \$0.50 discount for patrons who brought in their own cups for refill.

As a result of implementing *ReThink Disposable’s* recommendations, the Alameda Theatre & Cineplex and the Alameda Cinema Grill reduced disposable foodware items targeted for reduction or elimination by an average of 47% and the total number of disposable foodware items prevented was 603,243 items. They earned an ongoing annual net cost savings of \$9,881 and reduced annual waste by 6,907 pounds!

Kyle Conner, the owner, spent \$1,060 to purchase the initial reusable foodware items. This setup cost was used to determine the payback period. After the payback period was met, the annual ongoing cost impacts to maintain the new operation (labor, dishwashing, and re-purchase of damaged or lost foodware) was reported as \$19,802 per year. There also was a reported annual cost savings of \$8,000 from reduced waste hauling services. These cost impacts were folded into determining the business’ annual net cost impact from implementing our recommendations. In this case, the cost savings achieved from the avoided disposable foodware purchases and reduced waste hauling services easily cover the cost of the new operation and still saves this business about \$10,000 per year.



ABOVE: Stacked reusable tumblers (two sizes) and reusable platters stand in place of their former disposable items.

BELOW: Some individually wrapped condiment packets were replaced by bulk dispensers with signage to reinforce using less packaging for moviegoers.



The Bottom Line

- \$9,881 in annual net cost savings (reflects the onetime set-up costs of \$1,060 and the annual ongoing costs of \$19,802)
- 603,243 disposable items reduced per year
- 6,907 pounds of annual waste reduction
- Reduced five and eliminated eight disposable foodware items
- The Alameda Theatre and Cineplex is an iconic business loved by many on the island. The success of this project and their participation in *ReThink Disposable* helped generate buzz and increased the program’s visibility both among other Downtown Alameda Businesses and the community at large!



Results:

| Disposable Product Replaced or Minimized | ReThink Disposable Recommendation Implemented | % Disposable Reduction | Payback Period (months) | Annual Quantity of Disposable Product Reduced (# of pieces) | Annual Net Cost Savings* (after payback period) | Annual Waste Reduction (lbs.) | |
|--|---|------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| 12 oz Cups | Replaced single-use cup with reusable 16 oz tumblers | 84% | 0.4 | 66,048 | \$3,512 | 1,462 | |
| 16 oz Cups | Replaced single-use cups with reusable 16 oz tumblers | 88% | 0.3 | 92,119 | \$5,930 | 2,411 | |
| 9 oz Cups | Replaced single-use cup with reusable 9 oz tumblers | 53% | 2.5 | 27,810 | -\$137 | 395 | |
| Straws | Eliminated straws | 100% | 0 | 234,643 | \$2,581 | 435 | |
| Unwrapped Straw | Eliminated straws | 100% | 0 | 230,400 | \$906 | 249 | |
| Paper Food Trays | Replaced paper tray with reusable platters | -227% | -2.2 | -23,638 | -\$1,381 | 539 | |
| Paper Plates | Replaced paper plates with reusable platters | 100% | 3.6 | 10,429 | \$250 | 337 | |
| White Sugar Stix | Implemented bulk dispenser | 100% | 0 | 36,000 | \$644 | 247 | |
| 2 Cup 8-22 oz Carry Tray | Eliminated (replaced with paper trays) | 100% | 0 | 23,200 | \$4,639 | 1,626 | |
| Splenda Packet | Implemented bulk dispenser | 100% | 0 | 5,000 | \$185 | 14 | |
| Tomato Ketchup | Implemented bulk dispenser | 100% | 2.2 | 15,000 | \$288 | 314 | |
| Yellow Mustard | Implemented bulk dispenser | 100% | 3.6 | 8,400 | \$84 | 93 | |
| Vistar Sweet Relish | Implemented bulk dispenser (not retained) | -11% | 0 | 933 | -\$58 | 18 | |
| Honey Packet | Implemented bulk dispenser (not retained) | 42% | 0 | 1,767 | \$197 | 36 | |
| Iodized Salt Packet | Implemented bulk dispenser (not retained) | -128% | 0 | -123,000 | \$160 | 155 | |
| Waste Hauling Savings | | | | | \$8,000 | | |
| Labor Impacts | | | | | -\$15,600 | | |
| TOTAL | | | | | 603,243 | \$9,881 | 6,907 lbs. |

*Net Cost Impact considers any upfront and ongoing costs associated with the purchase and care of reusable items and capital improvements needed to carry out ReThink Disposable's recommendations. Net cost savings are based on avoided disposable foodware purchases.

ReThink Disposable is a program of Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund conducted in partnership with local businesses and government agencies. Generous support is provided by a changing list of public and private funders. To learn more about the program, its partners, and funders, visit: www.rethinkdisposable.org.



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