

Cooper King Distillery



Former scientist, Abbie Neilson, and former architect, Chris Jaume founded Yorkshire-based independent craft distillery, Cooper King Distillery, upon their return from visiting a whisky distillery in Tasmania. Determined to bring the ingenuity and determination of the distillers back home, they now have their own self-built sustainable business with an ongoing goal to reduce its environmental impact.

The challenge:

Distilleries, like other food and drinks businesses, produce a lot of waste. Cooper King's challenge was to develop a premium brand without the typical environmental issues of waste, energy usage during the production process and emissions associated with transportation of goods.

As the premium spirit market continues to boom in the UK, Cooper King Distillery set out to be a champion of sustainability and an industry leader in using a Circular Economy approach to simultaneously benefit the environment and the business.

"We built Cooper King Distillery on the basis that it was environmentally, financially and socially sustainable. We vowed to protect and promote the local environment by leading the industry in sustainability and proving that great products can be made and enjoyed by those who value the planet.

"For us, sustainability is ingrained within the company's culture. We see all too often businesses engaged in greenwashing their customers, by tacking on token sustainability measures purely to claim 'eco-friendly' credentials. While any progress a company can make is a good thing, their commitment should go further than skin deep."



The solution:

The first step for the business was to make sure that all the energy being supplied to Cooper King was from renewable sources. The switch to fully renewable energy suppliers means that the company is now fully powered by green energy and Cooper King is also contributing to the growth of the renewable energy sector through their supplier's give back scheme. Abbie and Chris then looked at ways to tackle waste with a gin bottle refill scheme. The York-based company was the first distillery to introduce this to customers who can bring empty Cooper King bottles to the distillery at Sutton-on-the-Forest on Saturdays and get 15% off their refill.

They keep supply chains local, with barley and wheat all sourced from farms no further than seven miles away. This approach extends into what they can grow and use on site. For Abbie and Chris this meant building on-site beehives and growing their own botanicals including basil and lemongrass. Spent botanicals go to the local bakery, Haxby Bakehouse, to be used in bread, and any barley left over at the end of the whisky machine process is collected by a local farmer to feed livestock.

"We scrutinise everything within the business - from the weight of our bottles to the cotton used in our branded t-shirts, to replacing sticky tape with recyclable paper packing tape and using origami cardboard boxes instead of bubble wrap. We're hooked on finding a sustainable solution to every problem." says Chris.

All Cooper King gin bottles sport the 1% For the Planet logo - the only gin in Europe with the accreditation. This means that Cooper King has pledged to donate 1% of gin sales to the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT), which gets spent on planting woodland.

Cooper King committed further to this by donating 2.5% of sales to the charity. "For every bottle of gin sold, we plant a square metre of woodland in the Yorkshire Dales. We go and do the planting with the charity during the winter planting season, so the impact is really tangible. It also makes for a fresh day out!" Chris adds.

Cooper King has saved
26,000
litres of water in 12 months



The result:

"The benefits of being a Circular Economy business have definitely scaled up. We have seen rapid growth in the business and an increase in the number of new opportunities for collaboration and partnerships due to our Circular Economy approach to doing business." says Abbie and Chris.

Introducing the gin refill scheme has been a success for the company, with a 25% increase in bottle refills compared with the previous year.

"Our glass bottles are 300g lighter than the average premium spirit bottle. They're therefore easier to transport, which means our logistics cost less and generate fewer emissions plus, at the other end, the customer is paying for the gin rather than the bottle." Abbie adds.

In addition, Cooper King has saved 26,000 litres of water this year, which has, again, doubled from the previous 12 months. The savings come from its innovative cold distillation system which uses a rotary evaporator to efficiently capture delicate flavour compounds by evaporation and uses a closed-loop system to recycle the coolant rather than continuously using fresh water for the cooling process. Thanks to the partnership with the YDMT, Cooper King Distillery has recently reached the milestone of planting 10,000 square metres of new woodland, which has offset 166,000kg of carbon.

Chris concludes: "As part of the Circular Economy we strive to stop waste, improve efficiency, and look after people and the planet. Operating sustainably is a mindset. It's about understanding the impact we have on the environment and exploring ways to mitigate this with bold, decisive action. Our sustainability story is rooted in real values close to ours and the public's hearts, and it's helped make our brand distinctive in a very competitive market."