



**Product
Stewardship
Centre of
Excellence**

**CASE
STUDY**



Repeat Audio

This case study examines Repeat Audio, a Dutch electronics company that provides a sustainable alternative to traditional headphones through a circular business model. Formerly known as Gerrard Street, Repeat Audio designs high-quality, modular headphones that can be leased on a subscription basis or purchased with a lifetime warranty. The case study explores how product stewardship is embedded across Repeat Audio's business model and their goal of reducing e-waste, while also enabling the business to reach new customer bases.

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Product Stewardship in Action with

REPEAT

INTRODUCTION

Repeat Audio (formerly Gerrard Street) was founded in 2015 by Tom Leenders and Dorus Galama with the aim of providing a more sustainable alternative to conventional headphones available on the market. In an industry where many products are challenging, if not impossible, to repair, Repeat Audio stands out by offering well-designed, modular headphones that can be leased on a subscription basis or purchased with a lifetime warranty making them an excellent illustration of the potential of circular business models within the electronics industry.

LISTENING TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Circular business models are based on the principles of a circular economy, which is a regenerative system that seeks to optimise the use of resources and minimise waste and emissions. Circular business models are designed to keep products, components, and materials in use for as long as possible, by using methods such as recycling, refurbishing, and sharing. Product stewardship is essential to the implementation of circular economy principles across the product lifecycle.

The primary driver behind Repeat Audio's adoption of a circular business model was the founder's mission to reduce electronic waste.¹ The electronics industry globally produces over 50 million tonnes of waste annually.² In response, Repeat Audio's approach to design

¹ Leenders, T. (2020). Founder Gerrard Street: 'Our headphones are sustainable'. Dutch Cowboys. Retrieved from: <https://www.dutchcowboys.nl/entertainment/founder-gerrard-street-onze-koptelefoons-zijn-duurzaam>

² Statista. (2023). Electronic waste worldwide - statistics & facts. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/topics/3409/electronic-waste-worldwide/>

³ Green Zebra. (n.d.). Circular Economy case study: Gerrard Street Headphones. Retrieved from <https://greenzebra.io/circular/circular-case-study/>

and product development reduces the need for customers to replace their headphones entirely and helps to extend the lifespan of the product.³ When asked why leasing headphones wasn't adopted sooner, the co-founders of Repeat Audio point to the growing prominence of headphones in our daily lives.⁴

DESIGNING FOR CIRCULARITY

Repeat Audio's approach to product stewardship focuses on embracing a circular business model through producing modular, high-quality headphones with a focus on designing for repair and reuse. Repeat Audio headphones are designed to be small and compact while still allowing for easy disassembly and replacement of individual parts. This helps to reduce the amount of electronic waste generated while also promoting reuse of existing materials.⁵ Repeat Audio headphones are also 100% modular, allowing damaged parts to be replaced independently. Currently, 6492 headphones have been sold and 2,142 parts have been re-used.⁶

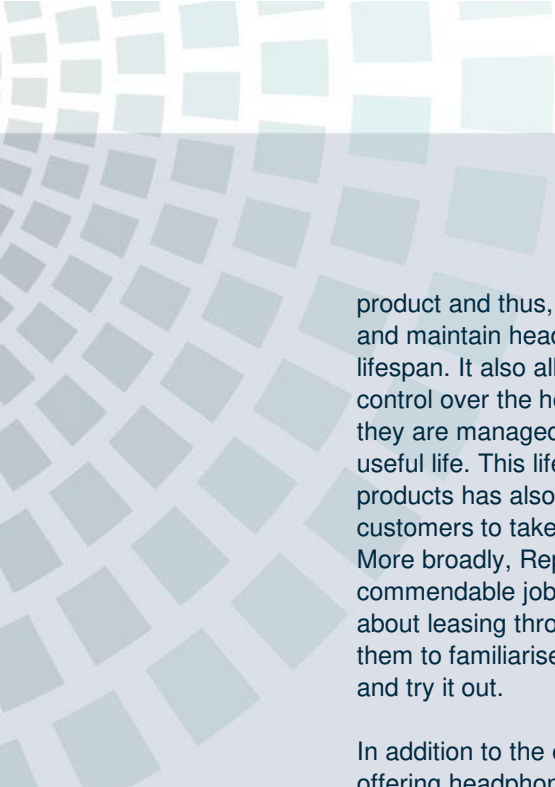
LEASING HEADPHONES

In addition to selling headphones, Repeat Audio also offers a monthly subscription leasing program. The service provides customers with the flexibility to change or return headphones at any time, while enabling the Repeat Audio to retain ownership of the

⁴ Leenders, T. (2020). Founder Gerrard Street: 'Our headphones are sustainable'. Dutch Cowboys. Retrieved from: <https://www.dutchcowboys.nl/entertainment/founder-gerrard-street-onze-koptelefoons-zijn-duurzaam>

⁵ The Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). Circular Example Headphones as a service: Repeat. Retrieved from <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-examples/gerrard-street>

⁶ Repeat Audio. Two Designers Rethinking Electronics. Retrieved from: <https://repeat.audio/en/about>



product and thus, there is a driver to repair and maintain headphones to extend the lifespan. It also allows Repeat Audio to retain control over the headphones and ensure that they are managed properly at the end of their useful life. This lifetime guarantee on their products has also been found to incentivise customers to take better care of headphones.⁷ More broadly, Repeat Audio has done a commendable job of educating customers about leasing through their website, enabling them to familiarise themselves with the model and try it out.

In addition to the environmental benefits of offering headphones as a lease, there are economic benefits as well. The subscription models allows Repeat Audio to establish stronger customer connections and enables Repeat Audio to attract a customer who may not typically consider purchasing their headphones by offering a lease fee that is lower than the upfront cost of purchasing a premium product. This expands their market reach and potential customer base.⁸

All subscriptions offer free unlimited repairs for the duration of the subscription. For headphones that have been purchased, the repair service is available as either a yearly subscription, unlimited repairs (with a one-time fee) or parts can be purchased separately.⁹ Repeat Audio pays the shipping cost for the new part and return costs for broken parts. All headphones also come with a free 30-day trial.¹⁰

Finally, offering subscription model provides Repeat Audio with an additional revenue stream, which was particularly important during the pandemic. For example, when a production facility was closed due to lockdowns, the business did not have any new stock available for sale. Despite this, the

subscription model ensured monthly revenue and added resilience to the business.

LESSONS LEARNED

The case of Repeat Audio highlights three key takeaways. First, despite the growing importance of sustainability, in terms of customer expectations, Repeat has discovered that the majority of consumers continue to prioritise quality sound, design, and materials over sustainability when making purchasing or leasing decisions for headphones. As a result, Repeat Audio must lead with quality to attract consumers to the brand.

Second, there is a recent and growing public concern around e-waste, which is an opportunity that Repeat Audio can capitalise on to increase brand awareness. For example, as recent as a year ago, "sustainable headphones" or "sustainable electronics" were not popular enough search terms on Google to justify ad buys and search engine optimisation, but they are now. This further illustrates the growing importance of sustainability from the consumer point of view.

And third, design for durability and repairability, coupled with a lifetime warranty, is a key selling point. Repeat Audio knows their consumers appreciate that if their headphones break, they can easily have parts repaired or replaced. The reality that Repeat Audio is responsible for their product at the end of its life provides further incentive for the business to carefully consider design and material choices to support their products having a long life.

As a result of these factors, Repeat Audio has experienced rapid growth. For instance,

7 Green Zebra. (n.d.). Circular Economy case study: Gerrard Street Headphones. Retrieved from <https://greenzebra.io/circular/circular-case-study/>

8 The Ellen MacArthur Foundation. (n.d.). Circular Example Headphones as a service: Repeat. Retrieved from <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-examples/gerrard-street>

9 Repeat Audio (n.d.). Who Says Headphones Can't Last a Lifetime? Retrieved from <https://repeat.audio/en/#missie>

10 Ibid.



subscriptions have doubled over the last few months, attributed to growing concerns around sustainability, as well as the uncertain economic climate. The business is also expanding beyond the Netherlands to neighbouring European markets, including Germany and Belgium.

NEXT STEPS

Repeat Audio are outspoken advocates for the Right to Repair movement and regularly engage with the media and public to promote their innovative and sustainable approach to headphone design. They also are continuing to educate consumers about the benefits of engaging with headphone rental as a way to access a high quality product while reducing waste.

NOTE:

The content of this case study is information of a general nature sourced from public sources and investigations conducted by the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence. It does not represent advice, direction or endorsement from the Product Stewardship Centre of Excellence, nor does it represent the only method or practice to address the topics laid out in this document. Individuals or organisations are encouraged to conduct their own analysis and consideration of strategic options relevant to their situation before taking action in regards to the matters covered.

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