**FUTURECRAFT.LOOP Phase 2: how we’re finding away**

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Away. Think about that small word. It's something we talk about all the time. Going away. Being away. Putting away. As if away is some mythical wonderland with the power to make everything different. To make everything OK. But the reality is that away simply means somewhere else. Another place.

And when it comes to dealing with plastic waste, just moving to another place is the problem not the solution. At adidas we wanted to find the solution. Which is why we started the FUTURECRAFT.LOOP journey – [our quest to develop a circular product](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__www.adidas.com_futurecraft&d=DwMGaQ&c=5oszCido4egZ9x-32Pvn-g&r=fPmrVaNB0eFjocvNeltpsjuf0jIJYncPKRbXqOQL30g&m=oxGG3k0mVIGyfbsKDWq4KRy6Np1vkehBrDXLNW4tjCY&s=FpsDBaVxFGBD3rBOHvyowkQc3kv1HaghHP_FcPfnltI&e=).

It’s a huge challenge. But it’s a challenge we’re embracing with open arms. Following close to a decade’s development work, the first fruits of our labours came in April this year with [the launch of FUTURECRAFT.LOOP](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__news.adidas.com_futurecraft_adidas-2Dunlocks-2Da-2Dcircular-2Dfuture-2Dfor-2Dsports-2Dwith-2Dfuturecraft.loop-2D-2Da-2Dperformance-2Drunning-2Dshoe-2Dmade-2Dt_s_c2c22316-2D0c3e-2D4e7b-2D8c32-2D408ad3178865&d=DwMGaQ&c=5oszCido4egZ9x-32Pvn-g&r=fPmrVaNB0eFjocvNeltpsjuf0jIJYncPKRbXqOQL30g&m=oxGG3k0mVIGyfbsKDWq4KRy6Np1vkehBrDXLNW4tjCY&s=J3b43hrAUW1EnL7fSZ8ml1OGFuiTSckOKFOfPfocGz4&e=), our first 100% recyclable performance running shoe. Now, as we move on to the next chapter of the story, we wanted to share some of the highlights – and lowlights – of the project so far. As many have said before, the road to success is often paved with failure.

Let’s start at the beginning. It’s a fact that just 9% of plastic waste has ever been recycled. What happens to your shoes after you’ve worn them out? You throw them away – except there is no away. The wonderland we referenced earlier doesn’t exist. As a result, we’re facing a grave environmental threat in the form of plastic, which is increasingly clogging landfills and oceans.

But imagine a product that lived forever. Where the raw material of one product is never thrown away; it just becomes another product. And then another one. And another one. A product made to be remade. That is the journey we’re on. Following launch in April, we’ve now moved into Phase 2 – we’ve taken the first FUTURECRAFT.LOOP shoes back and recycled them to create components for an entirely new shoe. It feels like a major landmark on our journey to a circular product.

**Pushing boundaries**

So, how did we get here? Well, we’ve never done this before so you’re starting with a blank piece of paper. We work hand-in-hand with the R&D team, which is where our ideas start. We also work closely with our Design team, to create a vision for the what the product of tomorrow could look like.

The first thing we realised though, was that job descriptions were redundant – there was no precedent for many of the challenges we faced, so working in isolation and coming together every so often was not the way forward. **This is about mindset. And it’s about pushing boundaries. We are acting as explorers or pioneers – we’re trying something new.** For this type of work, you need the mindset of: we’re going to learn and we’re going to take what we learn and apply that into a setting where the ultimate goal is that it becomes a commercial reality.

All our development work came to a head earlier this year when we took the product out of the lab and put it into the hands of consumers. Our April launch saw us distribute 200 pairs of FUTURECRAFT.LOOP to adidas creators; our athletes, musicians, artists and select media partners in London, Paris, New York, LA, Shanghai and Tokyo, plus selected adidas employees through an internal wear programme. We said to them: here are the shoes, go away, do what you want to do with them and then give them back to us. Yes, give them back. As you might expect, the last part was our biggest challenge! The reality was that some people didn’t give them back or were slow to – which was a huge learning for us and initially slowed us down. Every piece of material counts and there’s a certain amount of material that gets fed through the machine when it is first powered up.

When we did start getting the shoes back, everything started to feel very real. It was our first “wow” moment – hearing the responses and the excitement from our employees, who were the first people to return the shoes. This was when we started to understand how creators and ultimately consumers might feel about this change of mindset. Right at the heart of what we are doing is this question: **Are people really willing to let go of a cultural norm when it comes to product purchase and behaviour?** Will they actually give the shoes back? We know that it will not be easy to translate the circular mindset to consumers, but we want to bring both employees and our Creators on this journey so we can understand behaviours and what matters most to them, as we continue to build this out.

It’s a very big question, a global question and something beyond adidas: how do we manage end-of-life of product? It’s never been done before and our whole approach is a beta test, so it’s fascinating to be part of the journey. Our job is really about finding solutions - and this is an industry-wide problem that really needs a response. We have a lot of respect for our planet and for nature and really believe in the human capacity to innovate and find solutions.

**Remaking the used shoes**

Picture the scene: you’ve got 200 pairs of shoes piled up in a huge mound. They started as white running shoes, but they come back completely transformed in colour, maybe green or pink depending on the surface they’ve been exposed to or covered in scribbles where people have customised them. Cleaning these shoes from all over the world was a big moment. Again, the scale really struck us – all these industrial cleaning machines in a massive laundry room, with five or six metal bins filled to the brim with shoes.

As soon as we’d received the Generation 1 shoes, we were able to start Phase 2. We collected the shoes, recycled them, kept them in our supply chain and ultimately remade the recycled material into new running shoe components. The material is melted and developed into new pellets, which are heated to form new components including the eyelets and outsole. Virgin TPU material is used to create the remaining components of the midsole and upper. The remade and new materials are fused together to create Generation 2: a running shoe in a blue colourway, that remains one material and is still 100% recyclable for the next generation. So, this is where we are today: launching the next generation of FUTURECRAFT.LOOP and one step closer to a consumer reality – all in the space of just eight months. A first for adidas.

**Getting comfortable with being uncomfortable**

When reflecting on the journey so far, we remind ourselves that the best approach is to be prepared for the unexpected and whatever comes your way. We never lost sight of our goal and as a team we tried to find a way to tackle the challenges head on.

**You need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable – not everybody is able to do that. It’s a comfort with vulnerability, a comfort with “I don’t know”.**It’s not easy because if it was, it would already exist, but we are convinced that this is the right path. We may take a few wrong turns, but the direction is very clear.

What is the point where we say: we’ve finally found a way to manage product end-of-life?  We’re definitely a long way from that but we have made immense strides towards it – strides that we hope will inspire even better solutions in the future. We’re a catalyst in the conversation but we need to go further – we need to look beyond adidas and look at the planet, governance and share what we’ve learnt across our industry, to really understand what a redefinition of end-of-life of product could look like.

As adidas we are a legitimate voice to ask the question, but we can’t find the answer on our own – it’s the whole value chain and it starts with the consumer. adidas Infinite Play is a step in this direction – launched in the UK, it’s a new service that lets you trade old adidas gear in, so it doesn’t end being thrown away. One of the important details we learnt from our beta programme was to make it easy for our consumers to give back and to give people a sense of the potential and inherent value of used product and its material. We will continue taking learnings from this – particularly with an eye on the commercial release of FUTURECRAFT.LOOP in Spring Summer 2021. We need consumers to be with us on the journey.

If you think about waste, it’s a landscape full of challenges. We believe a fully recyclable product is the right path to go down to tackle this. This is the first time we’re going to release a product which is remade using the material of another product. We’ve taken a shoe, ground it up and put it into a new shoe. There’s still a long road ahead but we can’t wait to see what’s around the next corner.

**-ENDS-**

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* FUTURECRAFT.LOOP GEN 1 launched in April 2019 to 200 Creator beta testers, who returned the shoes in May for adidas to start the recycling and development process. Less than eight months later, GEN 1 shoes were remade into components for GEN 2

* FUTURECRAFT.LOOP GEN 2 is a 100% recyclable performance running shoe made using a mix of raw material and recycled components from GEN 1

* GEN 2 has a “faded blue” upper which demonstrates some of the flexibility in the LOOP CREATION PROCESS
* The FUTURECRAFT.LOOP GEN 2 running shoes will be released in November and will go back to the 200 Creator beta testers who returned their GEN 1 shoes

* This latest release is a milestone in the experimental phase and a continuation of adidas’ journey in learning about recycling footwear before launch targeted for Spring Summer 2021

* In September 2019, adidas launched “[adidas Infinite Play](https://www.adidas.co.uk/infiniteplay)” in the UK, a bring-back service powered by Stuffstr, that aims to prevent old adidas gear going to landfills or ending up in our oceans