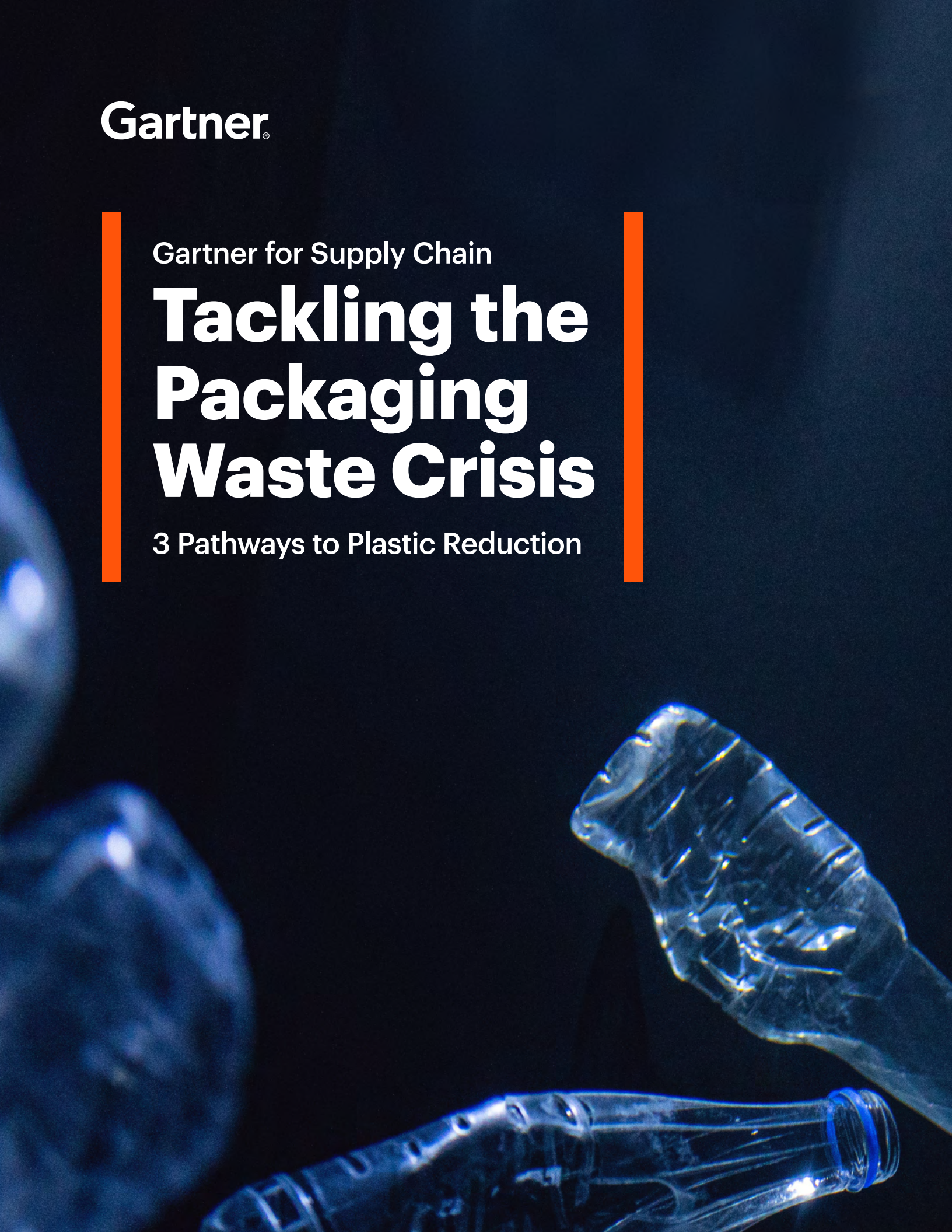


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# Tackling the Packaging Waste Crisis

3 Pathways to Plastic Reduction



The plastic challenge is stark: More than 8 million tons of plastic lands in the ocean each year, which means there will be more plastics in the ocean than fish by weight come 2050. The publication of such information has increased consumer concern about the environmental harm from single-use plastic consumption.

### **How is your supply chain function responding to the single-use plastics packaging waste crisis?**

Gartner research has found that many companies, while recognizing the need to act, lack clarity on how to proceed. This trends report describes three clear pathways that supply chain leaders can take to develop sustainable packaging strategies that achieve plastic reduction.

## **1. Reduce plastics usage**

The first step you need to take as a supply chain leader is to assess the magnitude of your company's plastics usage. Quantify the types of plastics that are consumed and the typical mechanisms for disposal in the markets where your products are sold. To capture the type and quantity of plastics used, you will need to collaborate with packaging suppliers and developers and procurement personnel.

Once plastics usage data is collected, join with brand, manufacturing and logistics to develop organizational plastic-reduction targets. These targets need to balance the costs of changing production processes to accommodate alternative packaging versus the environmental and consumer benefits from sustainable packaging.

Once plastic-reduction targets are established, pursue changes in packaging, e.g., reduce or eliminate plastic components and extra packaging materials. Consider the end-of-life recycling options in each market where products are sold to select the most appropriate packaging solution. Have suppliers, logistic providers and consumers assess new packaging for suitability and appeal.

## **2. Use alternative materials**

Current technological limitations and economic hurdles have created plastics that are both desirable and undesirable from a recycling and aftermarket perspective. Look to eliminate undesirable plastics such as polystyrene (Styrofoam) wherever possible, and incorporate plastics that are easier to recycle.

Although recycling adds a marginal cost to the manufacturing of packaging, many organizations are, nevertheless, increasing the amount of recycled content to address consumer concerns. Yet some consumers are rejecting all plastic products due to confusion over which plastics can actually be recycled. As a supply chain leader, in collaboration with business development leaders, you can reach these environmentally conscious consumers with redesigned or new plastic-free product releases. A best practice is to substitute plastic packaging with renewable sources, such as natural fibers. Rigorous testing should be undertaken to ensure that the substituted materials have the same performance.

The approach companies take to packaging directly reflects their brand and values. When you provide alternative plastic-free products or treat packaging as a service, you demonstrate your commitment to reducing packaging waste and, thereby, tap into environmentally conscious consumers.

## **3. Engage consumers**

Data from the Grocery Manufacturers Association (GMA) shows that 74% of American consumers are concerned about their environment, with 75% having changed their behavior to recycle and purchase more sustainable products. Only 44% of the group, however, was able to identify the universal recycling symbol, and only 6% could identify the glass recycling symbol.

Manufacturers have a role to play in promoting consumer behaviors that enable alternative packaging choices and increase awareness of material recycling options.

In your role as a supply chain leader, collaborate with brand managers to influence consumer preferences for alternatives to single-use plastic. For example, devise point-of-purchase behavioral incentives and create clear messaging on methods for recycling.

## Supply chain sustainability: How Gartner can help

Supply chain sustainability delivers business value, but too few supply chain leaders today have well-developed supply chain sustainability initiatives. Common obstacles to supply chain sustainability include limited resources, conflicting priorities, lack of understanding of sustainability concepts and low visibility on early wins. Turn to Gartner for the support to overcome these obstacles: We work with hundreds of supply chain leaders who have successfully reduced waste in operations, improved energy consumption, and managed supplier relationships for responsible sourcing, and we deliver back to our clients effective insights and tools. We will assess where you are with supply chain sustainability and guide you in prioritizing the right supply chain sustainability investments, from smarter packaging to responsible sourcing to strategic materials usage. [Visit gartner.com](https://www.gartner.com) to learn more.



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