

## **Case Study - Maxie Coffee Mug Library**

Maxie Coffee is in the heart of Kingston's main street. Not only do they brew excellent coffee, but they're all about fostering a tight-knit community.

Located near stunning Kingston Beach, Maxie Coffee are on a mission to champion reusable habits. From their mug library, to offering discounts for bringing your own cup, they're leading the charge in sustainability.

We sat down with owner Sam Whang-Randall, to talk about these initiatives, and how the community has embraced them.

### ***Who is Maxie Coffee?***

“I opened Maxie Coffee nearly five years ago with the vision of providing a safe and welcoming space to the community. Anyone can come here and feel welcome and connect over a great coffee. People come in and out, and there’s always great conversation going as they get to know each other.

When I opened Maxie, there was a need in Kingston for a specialty coffee shop, as well as a place where people could gather. We find that around one in three of our customers know each other, and there is a strong community vibe here. I’m so glad Maxie is part of strengthening that community spirit.”

### ***Tell us about your reusable initiatives.***

“At Maxie, we accept clean BYO reusable cups and clearly signpost that, as well as offering a discount to people who bring their own cups.

We also have a mug library. I've been doing a mug library since I had a market stall, before I opened Maxie. At the time, we had almost three crates of mugs. People would order a coffee, sit down on the lawn for half-an-hour and bring the cups straight back – it was a perfect system. Before I started it, I did a search for other mug library examples and one popped up at Bondi Beach, so I adapted the idea to our context and trialled it. It was a great initiative and everyone loved it, especially amongst people who came to the market and already had the mindset of supporting farm-to-plate initiatives.

At Maxie, we waited until after Covid to set up our mug library. We introduced it two and a half years ago, and people are still using it. I like to offer it as an option for our customers. It's not for everyone, but it's there.

We've also been working with our suppliers to have some of our produce provided in reusable containers. We wash them and give them back to the supplier when they come with our next order. That way we don't have to waste disposable cake trays – we hate to see waste in landfill. Now, around 95% of our suppliers bring their products to us in containers and we rotate them. It's quite a simple change, just a matter of buying a few containers and bringing those in instead.”



Reusable cups at Maxie Coffee

### ***How does your mug library work?***

“We have a stock of cups which customers can choose from. The customer selects one, and we fill them with coffee. The customer then takes them away and returns them when they come back next time.

Our library started with 36 cups, which were gifted to us. I did a bit of research and found that some businesses charge a small deposit for the cups, around 20c to \$1, but we decided to trial it first on an honesty system.”

### ***What are the challenges?***

“We found it can be easy for customers to forget to return the cups. We started with 36, but we soon found we had none left. So we did a social media post asking for people with spare cups they no longer needed to bring them to us on their next visit, and we had good participation with about 15 cups being donated all up. However, they have been so popular they are all gone again! We will continue ticking along like this, doing callouts to our community when we need to restock, and visiting tip shops to pick some up ourselves.

Challenges we’ve faced, besides the missing cups, is the hygiene issue with BYO reusable cups. We find that customers sometimes bring in used BYO cups, which creates an additional job for our staff who need to clean them. It’s a minor thing, and we’ve found ways to address it, like putting up a sign at the entry to our store asking for people to bring clean BYO cups. A small cafe like us is able to be more flexible and work with our community.”

### ***What did you do to overcome the challenges?***

“We are considering making library cards for our mug library, where customers can check-out cups. But we are a small space and are already very busy, so we’d really prefer to continue using an honesty system. The lesson we’ve learnt is we’ll just need to

keep track of our stock and top-up when needed. We have reusable cups available for purchase if customers would prefer to BYO.

We have a policy that when people bring a used cup, we will offer to wash it for them, and then we politely ask them to please bring a clean cup next time. People want to do the right thing, and they embrace this approach.”



Mug Library at Maxie Coffee

***What surprised you the most with implementing your mug library?***

“People were incredibly positive about the mug library. The number of customers participating was much higher than I expected. In general, most of our community takes part in creating a reusable culture in some way, whether that be using the mug library, bringing their own reusable cup or dining in. Our customers know there is a mug library there, so when they forget their cups, they will use it.”

***What would you say to other businesses who are considering launching a mug library?***

“If you’re a small business like us, it can feel like you don’t have enough time to cater for the demand. It can feel painful when you have to train staff and create new systems. However, if we all chip-in and do our small part, we’ll create big change. Cafes are a great place for this, we already serve hundreds of people a day. So if you can influence some customers, you have a bigger impact than you realise.

Embracing reusables creates a sustainable vibe that your customers will pick up on, and you’ll attract customers with the same mindset. Your customers appreciate what you do, and you’ll want to keep going. I feel great, our customers feel great, if we can reduce single use, why not?”