Sustainability throughout an iPhone’s Life Cycle

Apple Corporation produces a very popular product called the iPhone. This phone is a smart phone that many people around the world utilize in their daily lives. Although this phone is seen as a necessity and provides useful capabilities, it is a very large expense when you look at this product’s sustainable life cycle.

The first step in developing a product like the iPhone is research and product development. When going through the process of R&D the Apple corporation spends a lot of money to come up with a “new product” that is “better and faster” than the previous models. In doing this, during the fiscal year of 2014, Apple spent about $6,041,000,000 to make their product “better”. To Apple this money was necessary in order for them to increase their future growth and be more competitive in the ever growing marketplace of smart phones. This amount of money was not always as great as it was in 2014. Apple has increased their amount of money spent in R&D every year since the first iPhone was released.

When creating a product as “great” as the iPhone, selling the product is at the forefront of development. The producer needs to figure out what the consumer wants and how to make them want what they make. Apple spends a lot of money and resources on making consumers feel the need to buy each new model of the iPhone. Each year Apple has increased the amount of money they spend on advertising for the iPhone. In the fiscal year of 2010, Apple spent $149.5 million on advertising. This is a minimal figure compared to the amount they spent in the fiscal
year of 2011 adding up to a whopping $307.7 million. Not only does apple spend money for advertising, but they also use many resources such as people and energy to get their product popular. One form of advertising is through commercials. Commercials use resources such as money, time, people, and equipment in order to formulate a finished product. There is a lot of work other than the actual development that goes into getting a product recognized and motivating people to purchase it.

When mass producing a product, the efficiency and materials that go into making a product are very important. In order to maximize profits, corporations tend to skimp on sustainable ways to produce products. These include the ways they obtain materials and process those materials through manufacturing. Three main materials that are used in every iPhone are aluminum, glass, and lithium ions. The ways that Apple corp. goes about obtaining these materials is not sustainable at all. These materials are taken from different places all over the world which deprives that area of the natural ecosystem it once had. By destroying these ecosystems, Apple is contributing to the world problem of living unsustainably. The transportation of these materials, since they are obtained all over the world, also destroys ecosystems through the contribution of gases from burnt fossil fuels.

The packaging is a very important aspect of any product. Apple does a great job of making a package that is eye pleasing and useful. The design of every iPhone package has used the idea of minimalism in the sense that they use every inch of space in the package that the phone comes in. This is important because they maximize the ratio of materials used to space needed in a beneficial way to make it as sustainable as possible. The only downside to the iPhone’s packaging is that it is only useful for an iPhone and it is not easily recyclable. Once the
iPhone is taken out of its package, the package is usually thrown away or stored as junk as it is not easy to repurpose the package.

Since Apple is headquartered in California, every product is sent to California to then be distributed to their stores. This is unsustainable because they have to ship all of their products from the manufacturing plants in China to California. This uses forms of transportation that requires massive amounts of fossil fuels to operate. It would be much more efficient if their products, such as the iPhone, were shipped directly from the manufacturer or factory instead of coming from the headquarters in California.

Most iPhone models are only used for about two years depending on service providers and the people using them. The reason for this short time period of device use is due to a couple different things. One major contributing factor is that many cellular service providers put two year contacts onto these devices to pay them off. Along with the contract, there are programs that offer upgrades to loyal customer. Another factor is that Apple comes out with a new iPhone model every year. This entices people to buy the newer model and forget or throw out their old “outdated” model. Apple offers “new technology” in each one of their new phones that is supposed to make our lives easier. Apple makes their phones in a way that after a certain period of time they will break. This is called planned obsolescence and Apple utilizes this to continue to raise profits on the iPhone. Along with this, people feel behind in society if they have an older version of the iPhone. This is what is known as perceived obsolescence. Both of these contribute to Apple’s marketing plan for consumer use.

Apple has a recycling program that is easy to use so that the final disposition of this product is as sustainably disposed as possible. Consumers can send in their old iPhones’ to Apple and Apple recycles the phones in a way that maximizes the recycling capabilities of their phones.
Works Cited


Fiegerman, Seth. "Here's How Much Apple Spends To Advertise The iPhone And iPad."

