NRF National Retail Federation | Deloitte.

Retail Circularity:
An Action Guide For Retailers

CENTER FOR RETAIL SUSTAINABILITY



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Introduction | *Retail Circularity: An Action Guide For Retailers*

This action guide is developed for **retail executives and teams** across segments as they explore and implement circular business models. This resource is prepared as a tool to **highlight circular retail opportunities,** establish a value framework for **articulating the business opportunity,** and identify the **critical capabilities** needed for success – **illustrated by case studies** in practice across the industry.

WHAT THIS IS…

- An introduction to circularity across the retail industry
- A value framework to serve as a tool when developing business cases
- Fundamentals on prioritized models, including resale, repair, and recycle
- A sample of illustrative case studies to showcase leading practices across the industry
- A pragmatic guide for operational teams, applicable to retailers across segments and company sizes

WHAT THIS IS NOT…

- An exhaustive, step-by-step playbook for designing and implementing circular business models
- A comprehensive guide for all circularity opportunities, including product design, packaging, waste optimization, etc.
- A tailored roadmap for an individual retailer
- A detailed business case for circularity in retail

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About Us & ***Acknowledgements***

NRF & DELOITTE

To help advance the circular economy, Deloitte and NRF are working together to drive a system of circularity across the retail sector. Through engaging with retailers and other sustainability stakeholders, we aim to provide insights across key issues.

By bringing together Deloitte's capabilities and experience, with NRF's experience acting as an advocate for people, brands, and ideas of the retail sector, the two organizations are well-positioned to help drive positive outcomes in moving the industry forward.

> ***"With deep experience in the retail sector, retail supply chains and sustainability, Deloitte can help drive positive outcomes in supporting our industry move forward."***
>
> *- Deloitte & Touche LLP Sustainability Partner James Cascone*

THE NRF CENTER FOR RETAIL SUSTAINABILITY

The NRF Center for Retail Sustainability supports retailer efforts to create economic value while generating environmental, social, and community benefits.

Launched in December 2023, the Center's initial focus areas include improving traceability in retail industry supply chains, growing the circular economy, and leveraging customer insights on sustainability practices.

> ***"The NRF Center for Retail Sustainability will augment industry sustainability efforts and resources across the retail sector, centralizing engagement across the full retail value chain."***
>
> *- NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay*

ADDITIONAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the many retailers, and individuals that represented them, for sharing their time with us – their insightful responses and industry perspectives grounded the development of this action guide. The conversations provided important context into the challenges that retail companies face in their circularity efforts, and they allowed us to address the current landscape with informed models and targeted next steps.

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Stakeholder ***Engagement***

This action guide recommends steps to advance circularity efforts and address the hurdles associated with implementing circular business models. This resource will provide practical suggestions to move from theory to action based on a circularity workshop at NRF 2024: Retail's Big Show, a targeted survey to retailers, and follow-up consultation meetings with select companies.

OUR PROCESS

1. Launched the NRF Center for Retail Sustainability and **facilitated a circularity workshop** with retailers at NRF 2024: Retail's Big Show
2. NRF shared a **13-question circularity survey** to begin retail mobilization and data-collection efforts
3. **Analyzed responses** and captured **key takeaways** by industry and company size
4. **Held one-on-one conversations with 16 retailers** to help shape the roadmap and socialize its development

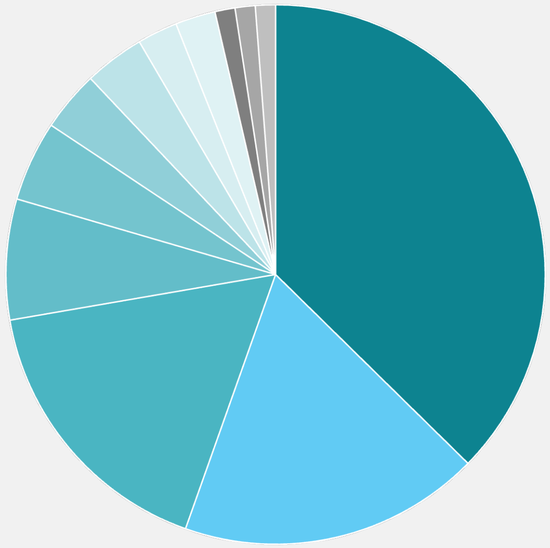
SURVEY BREAKDOWN

100 Individual survey responses

83 Unique Company Responses

54% Of respondents were from "Fashion & Apparel" or "Mass Retailers"

37%	Fashion & Apparel	4%	Home & Garden
18%	Food & Beverages	3%	Entertainment
17%	Mass Retailers	2%	Logistics
7%	Electronics	1%	Toys & Games
5%	Health & Beauty	1%	Books & Stationary
4%	Sports & Outdoors	1%	Other



INTERVIEWED STAKEHOLDERS

4 Designer Stores

3 Big Box Stores

3 Resale Organizations

3 Specialty/Discount Stores

1 Department Store

2 NGOs

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction to ***Circularity in Retail***

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Today, only 7.2% of all material inputs into the global economy are cycled back after the end of their useful life – however, ***the landscape is shifting***[1]

KEY MARKET SIGNALS

Customer preferences are shifting toward resell and reuse of products, especially among millennials & Gen Z.

- 30% of all customers check whether a product is made from recycled material or is biodegradable before making a purchase[1]
- People who have experienced extreme weather are 1.4x more likely to buy sustainably (53% purchased a sustainable good in the past year, compared with 38% of those who did not experience a climate event)[1]
- 82% of Gen Z customers said they consider the resale value of purchases before buying[3]
- Gen Z and millennial women in particular shop sustainably – 81% choose sustainable products when available[1]

Regulations around circularity are increasing, particularly in Europe, which will pressure organizations to act.

- Currently, regulations require reporting on carbon intensity of products and materials – but soon, reporting will shift toward taxing of single use and high-carbon goods
- In Europe, PPWR (Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation) revisions strengthen recycling requirements (e.g., all packaging is recyclable by 2030), design specifications, and reuse / refill targets
- In the US, some states are taking action – in New York, producers of packaging materials are required to fund and manage the end-of-life of their products; in Massachusetts, textiles are banned from disposal or transport for disposal[4]

[1]Deloitte Circularity Gap Report (2024) [2]Sustainable Consumer Survey (2023) [3]2023 Resale Report | ThredUP [4]Clothing and Textile Recovery | Mass.gov

Some customers are primed, and regulations are increasing - organizations need to be prepared in order to mitigate risks and win in the market. The conversation has shifted from why to how.

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What does this ***changing landscape*** mean for retailers?

Retailers have a unique role to play in the circular economy – based on their spheres of control and influence over products in circulation

RETAILER CONTROL

- Retailers control **what products are offered for sale and how they are delivered** – which in turn can impact customer habits and preferences
- Sometimes – particularly among individual brands – **retailers can control how products are designed and manufactured.** There are choices retailers can make early in the value chain about which materials to use, and how to design products for long-term value retention and waste diversion at end-of-life*

RETAILER INFLUENCE

- Retailers can influence **what customers do with products after they are no longer needed,** but they cannot control customers' decisions. Retailers' influence can involve designing business models to keep products and materials in circulation and **support customer efforts to live more sustainably**
- Retailers can also influence demand for circularity by **collaborating on industry-wide innovations** needed to achieve scale

*This guide will NOT explore product design in detail, though this remains a critical component of achieving a circular economy.

Retailers that prepare for the changing landscape — and leverage their control and influence to advance circularity — should be better prepared to capture long-term business value.

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Retailers that embed circularity in their business can capture business value – though ***the applicable drivers will vary based on the strategies chosen***

1 GROW REVENUE

Growing revenue through innovative strategies and market expansion to enhance profitability



PRODUCT & SERVICE INNOVATION
Developing and launching new, in-demand, sustainable offerings



CUSTOMER ACQUISITION
Attracting new customers and expanding market share through sustainable products or services



CUSTOMER LOYALTY
Cultivating strong relationships and loyalty among existing customers, by leveraging recurring touchpoints in circular models to encourage repeat business and sustained revenue



PRICE PREMIUMS
Leveraging a unique value proposition to charge higher prices for products or services



INSETS & OFFSETS
Utilizing carbon reduction and avoidance to generate carbon credits and sell them on the secondary market as a new revenue stream

2 REDUCE COST

Reducing costs through streamlined processes and efficient resource allocation to boost bottom-line performance



RAW MATERIALS & WASTE DISPOSAL
Reducing virgin raw material extraction and increasing waste diversion from landfill to positively impact the bottom line



OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY
Reducing material inflows and product return flows to optimize efficiency throughout the value chain



TALENT ENGAGEMENT
Fostering a motivated and engaged workforce to improve productivity, reduce turnover, and align employee interests with employer activities



COST OF CAPITAL (INVESTORS)
Garnering beneficial rates from the market to minimize borrowing costs and interest expenses



TAXES, CREDITS & PENALTIES
Strategically navigating tax regulations, leveraging available credits, and avoiding penalties to lower overall tax-related expenses

3 REDUCE RISK

Mitigating risk by implementing robust measures to protect against potential threats and uncertainties



CONSUMER SENTIMENT
Monitoring customer concerns to avoid brand risk and potential loss of customers due to wasteful practices



SUPPLY CHAIN RESILIENCE
Building a supply chain that relies on fewer virgin materials to withstand disruptions and reduce exposure to price volatility



LICENSE TO OPERATE
Ensuring ethical and sustainable business practices to safeguard the company's reputation and legal standing, as well as gain support from community members and NGOs



SHAREHOLDER RISK
Maintaining transparency to enable raising capital, securing investor confidence, and driving positive shareholder returns



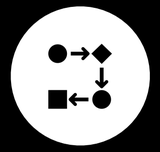
REGULATORY COMPLIANCE
Staying up-to-date with relevant laws and regulations, and adhering to them diligently to reduce legal and regulatory risks

*Source: EDF + Deloitte – Visit the **full report** for additional case studies on value creation*

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While there are opportunities and value on the table, retailers do face challenges in the nascent circular economy; ***this guide aims to provide a starting point for progress***

KEY CHALLENGES IN RETAIL



Understanding which circular business models are best fit for a given retailer, as well as building the business case for circular models and **mobilizing internally to operationalize** are primary challenges



Designing circular products at scale will require greater access to recycled and other **alternative materials**, as well as widespread uptake of **design principles** enabling more products to be repaired, reused, resold, or recycled at end of life



Retailers need to adhere to the industry **standards in place today** – including product safety, quality, and shipping and handling standards – which **are not always designed with circularity in mind,** and will require industry-level change



Today, it is challenging for retailers **to collect and supply products** for circular models – retailers need an increased supply of high-quality recovered materials for recycling, high-quality post-customer products for resale, and high-quality parts for repair



Retailers struggle to recycle used products at scale when multiple textiles, metals, and non-standard parts are involved; **advancements in recycling solutions and infrastructure** are needed to lower costs



Today, retailers are limited in their ability to **track and grade products and materials at end of life,** making it difficult to monitor for proper disposal or recycling downstream

This action guide will focus on helping retailers prioritize best-fit circular business models, articulate the value, and mobilize internally to get started.

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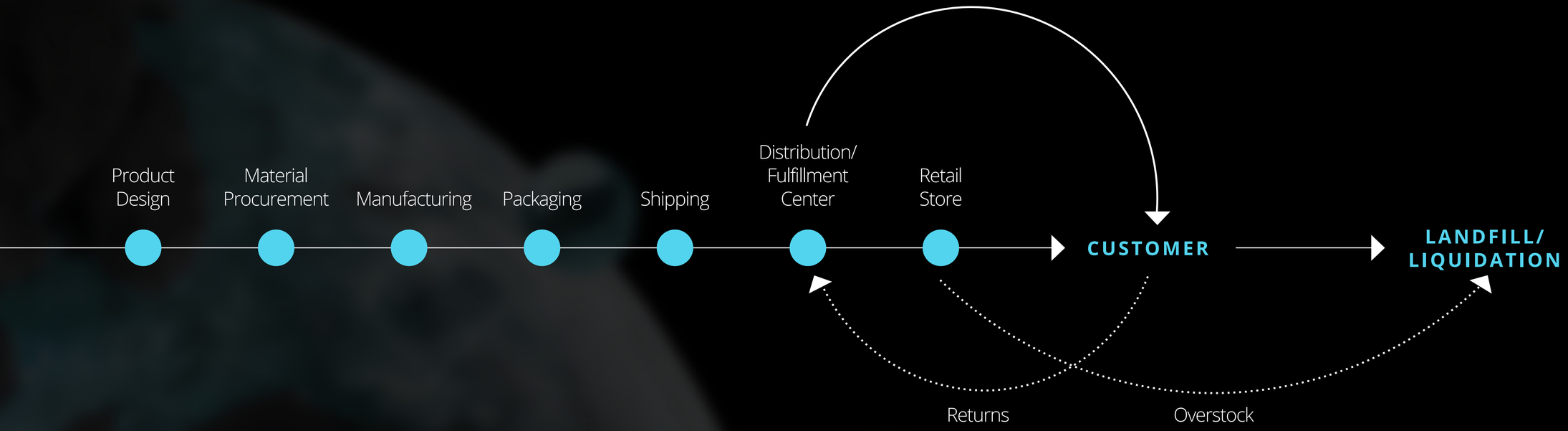


CHAPTER 2

Circular ***Business Model***

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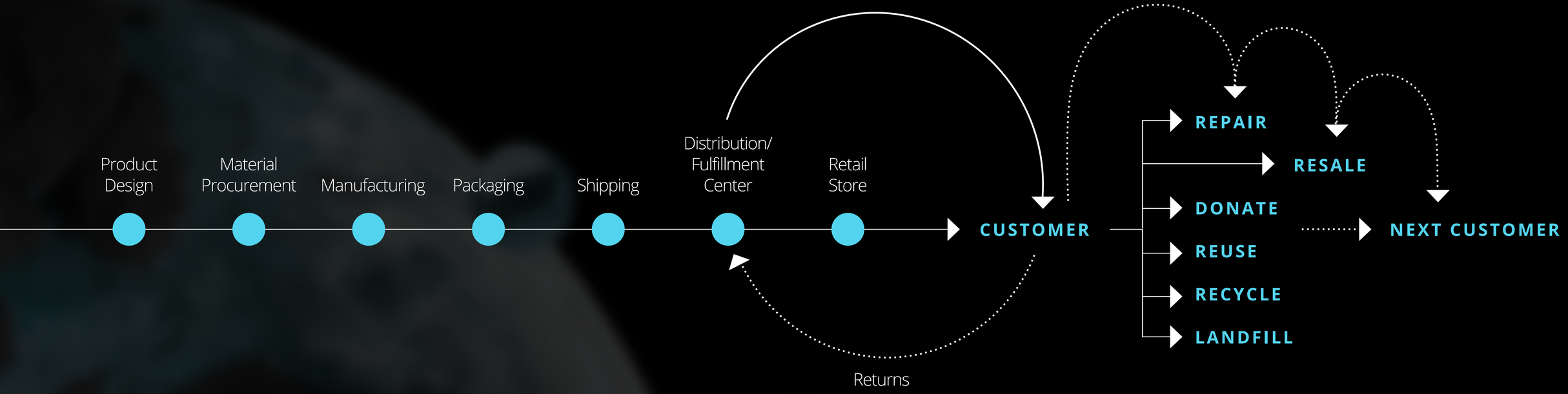
For decades, the ***traditional retail model*** has focused on a linear product lifecycle, which concludes with a singular end customer



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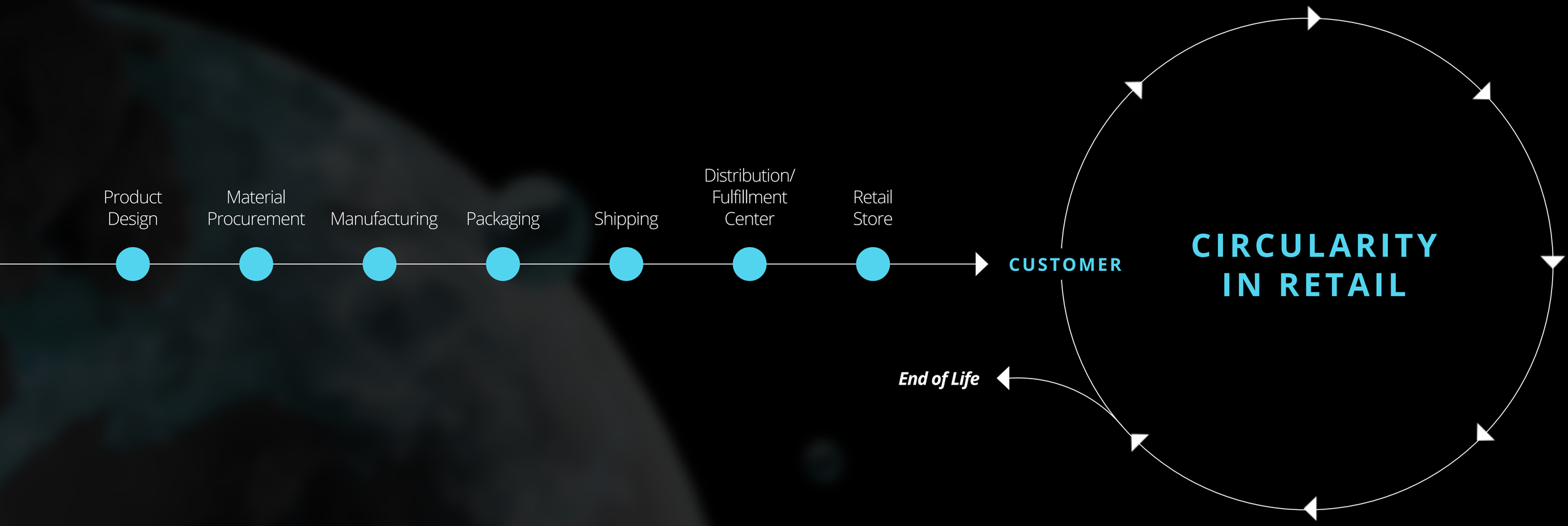
Today, customers have options at the end of this product lifecycle, with many of these options ***extending the life of the product***

Some customers are already participating in some aspects of the circular economy.
Retailers have an opportunity to make it easier for customers to do so while meeting the retailer's sustainability goals and generating business benefits.



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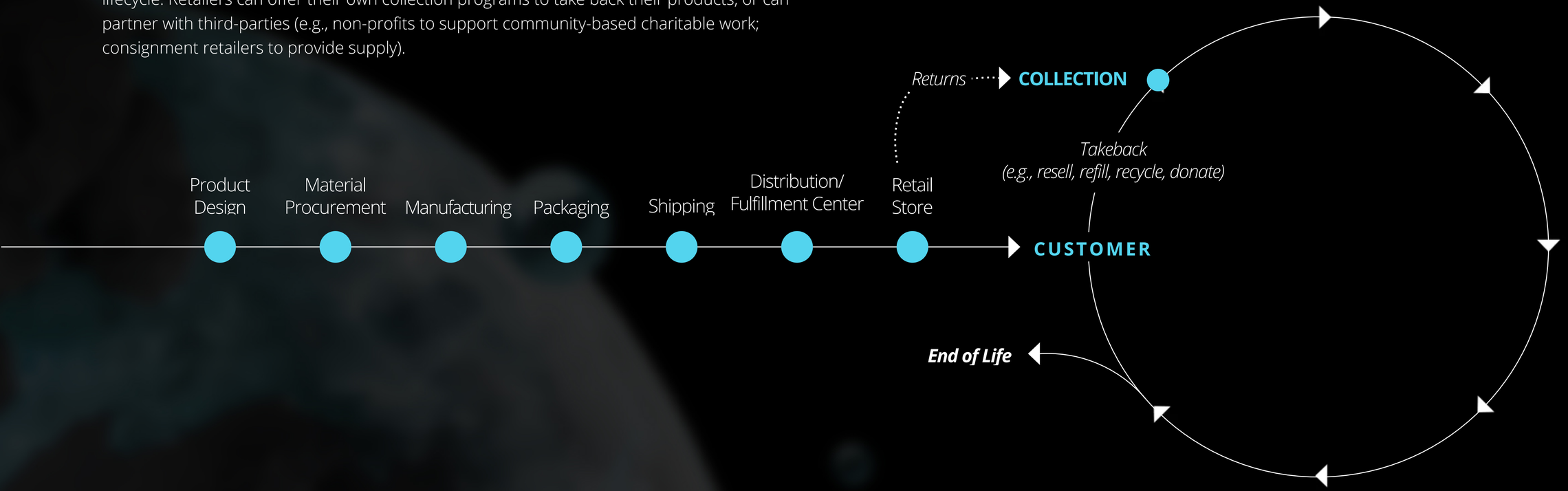
There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***



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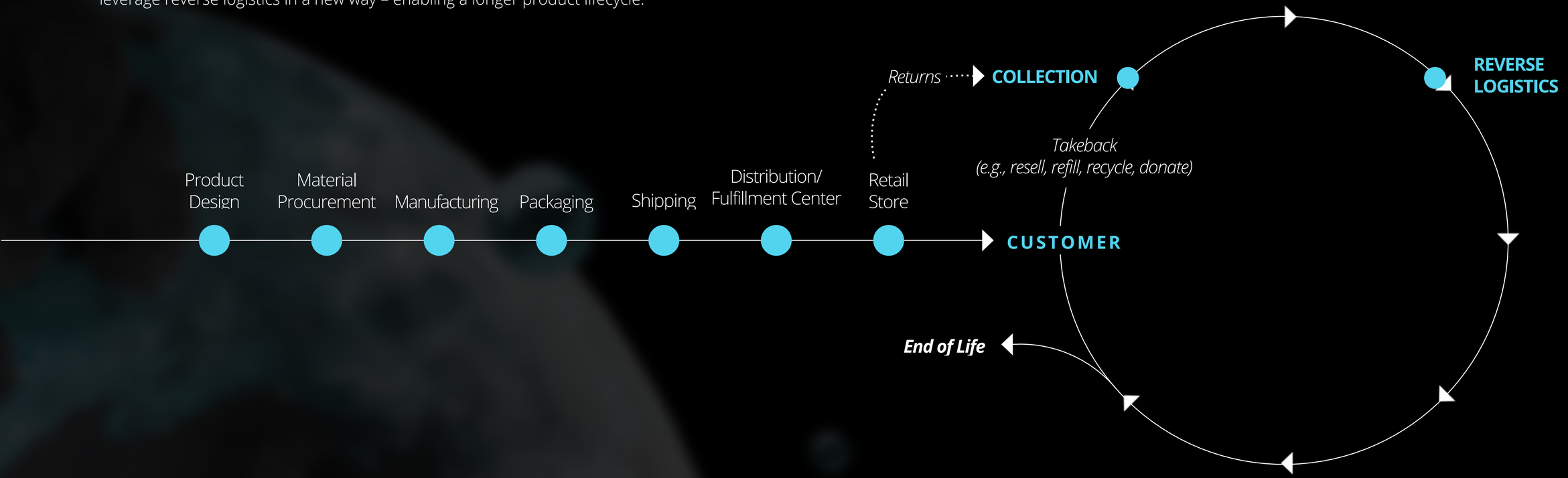
A crucial step in many circular business models is aggregating a supply of post-customer goods or other excess product. **Collection programs** enable retailers to recoup used products, or repurpose returned merchandise, as a first step in monetizing a longer product lifecycle. Retailers can offer their own collection programs to take back their products, or can partner with third-parties (e.g., non-profits to support community-based charitable work; consignment retailers to provide supply).



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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

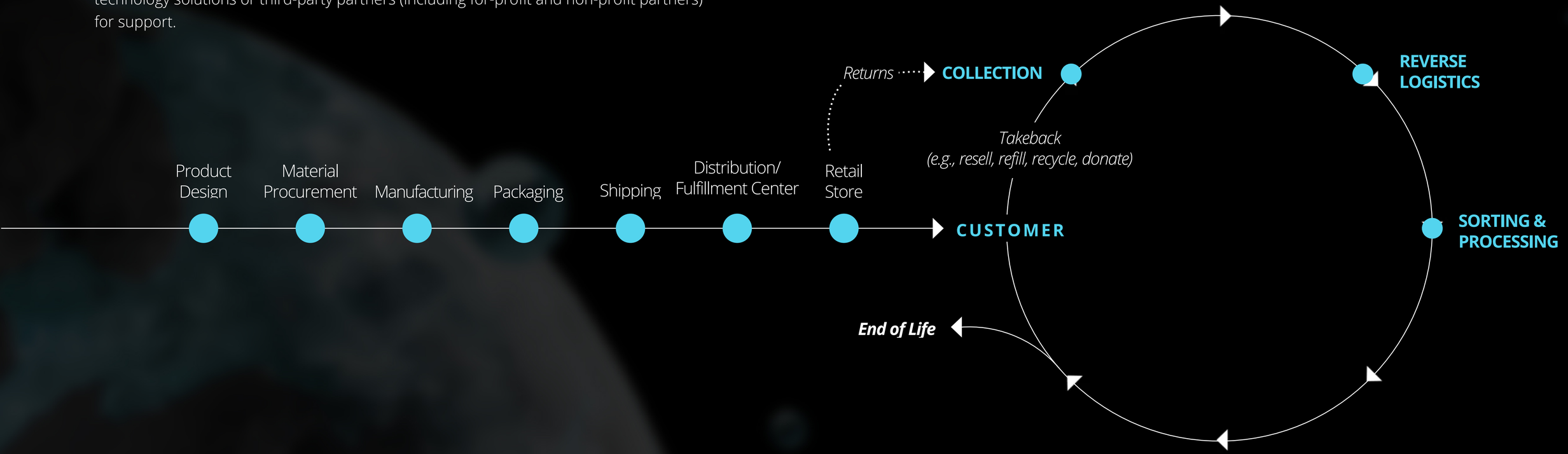
After collection of post-customer or excess products, retailers engaging in circular models are faced with choices about how to store and move those products. For decades, retailers have relied on **reverse logistics** for returned or damaged goods; however, circular models leverage reverse logistics in a new way – enabling a longer product lifecycle.



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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

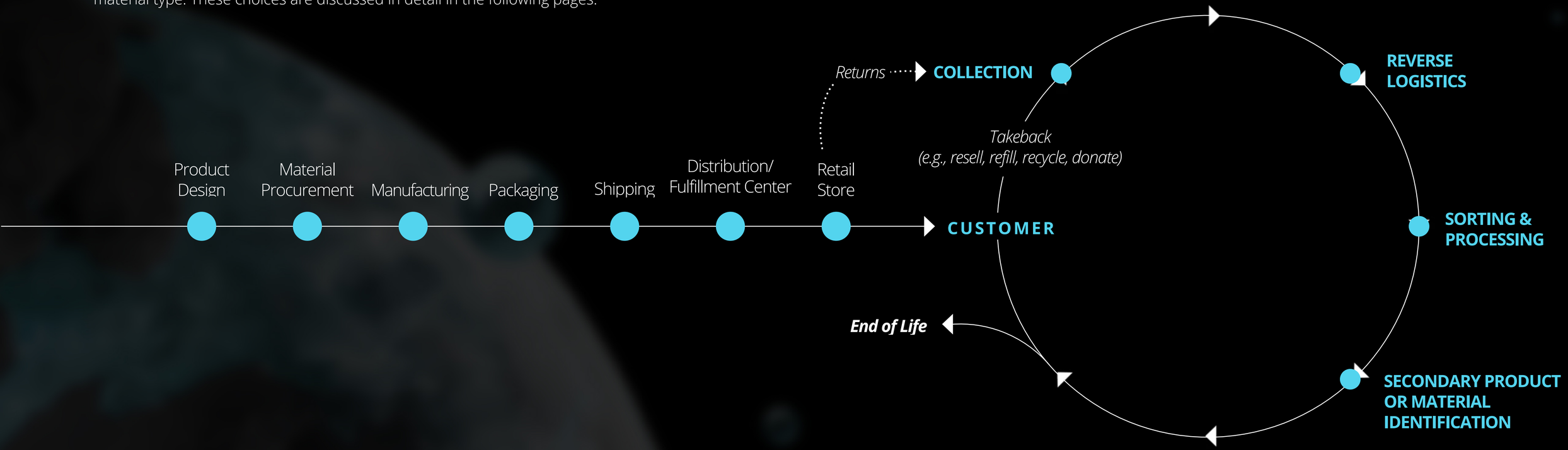
Sorting and processing of post-customer products — whether this involves grading products based on condition, or sorting materials based on type — is a necessary step in keeping products or materials in circulation. To operate cost effectively, retailers can leverage technology solutions or third-party partners (including for-profit and non-profit partners) for support.



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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

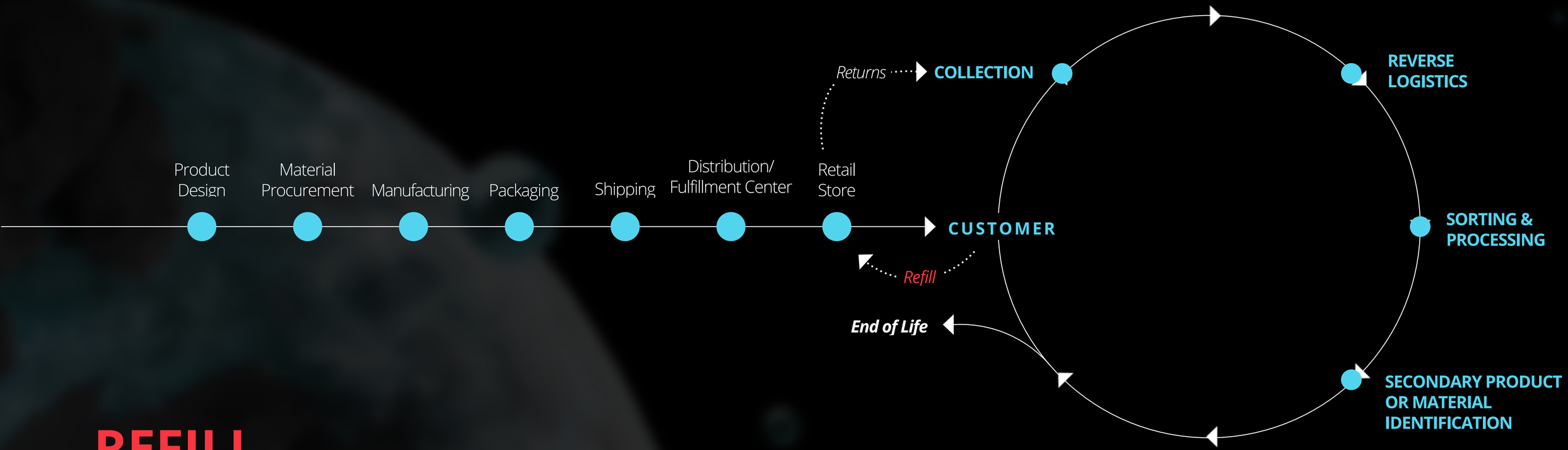
After post-customer products have been collected, transported, sorted, and processed, the **secondary product or material** is identified. Retailers have choices about how to engage in circular models from this point, depending on the segment in the sector and the product or material type. These choices are discussed in detail in the following pages.



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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

When customers have completed use of a product and have empty containers, retailers can offer mail-in or in-store **refill** programs to extend the customer relationship.



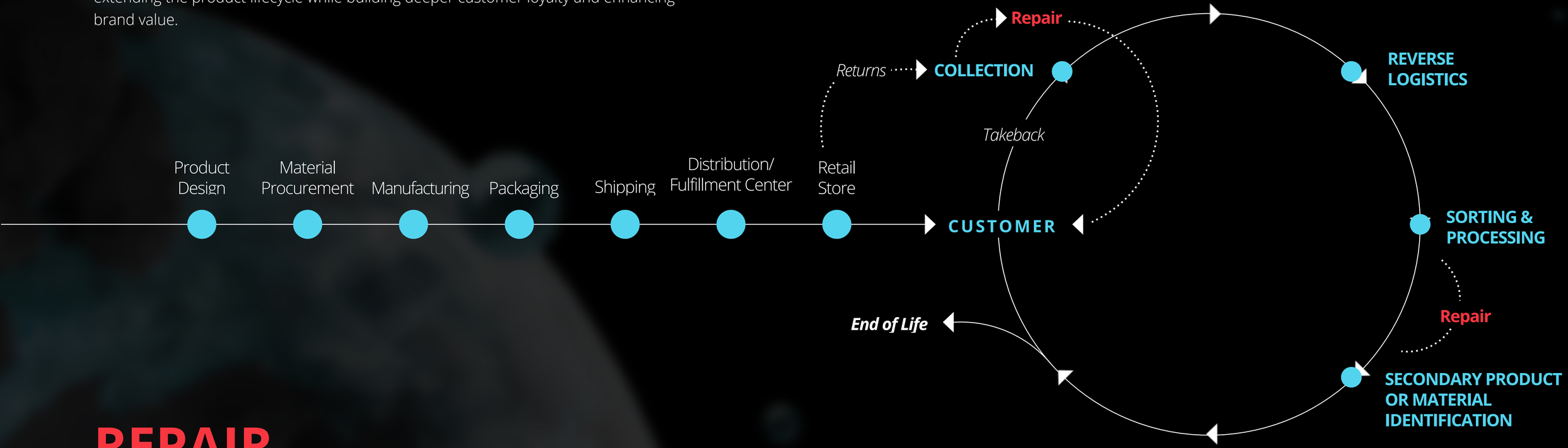
REFILL

The take-back of used containers to restock with new product, or provision of stations for customers to replenish product

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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

One offering that can keep products in circulation after collection from customers is a **repair** program. Retailers can offer repair services for products to either be returned to the original customer, or prepared for a secondary customer – with both options extending the product lifecycle while building deeper customer loyalty and enhancing brand value.



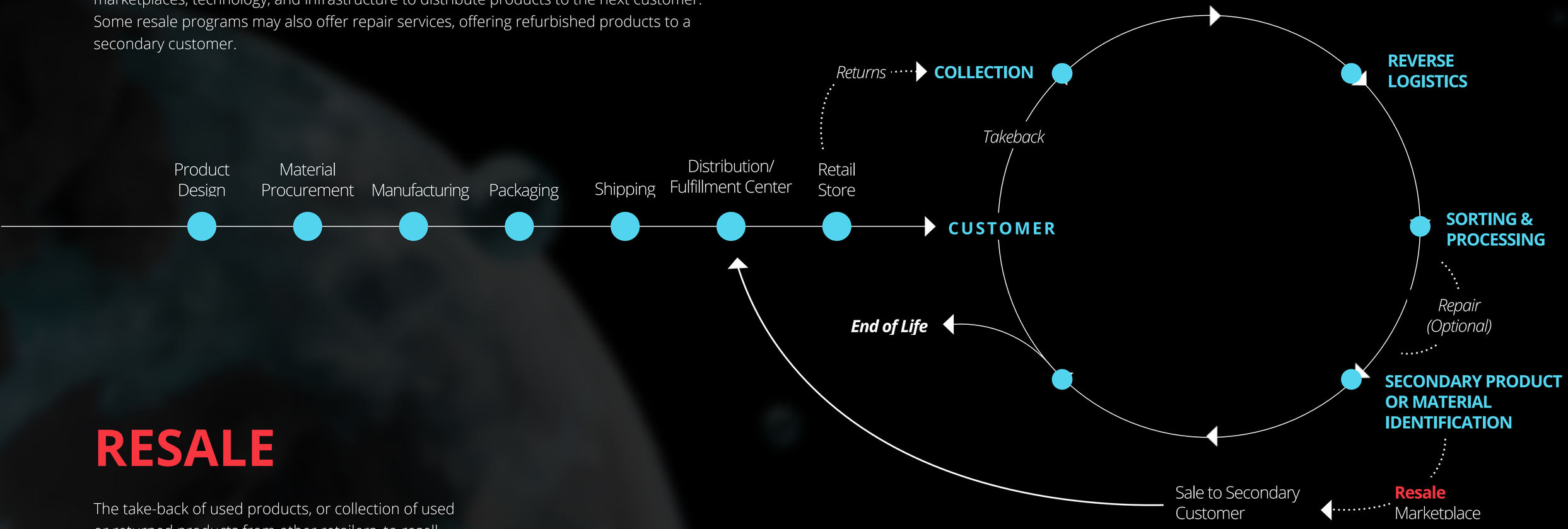
REPAIR

The refurbishment or repair of used or damaged products to extend the life of the product

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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

Some retailers can engage in **resale** programs – selling the secondary products to a next customer to extend the product lifecycle. Retailers can choose to operate resale programs in-house, or work with third-party partners (for-profit or non-profit) to leverage their resale marketplaces, technology, and infrastructure to distribute products to the next customer. Some resale programs may also offer repair services, offering refurbished products to a secondary customer.



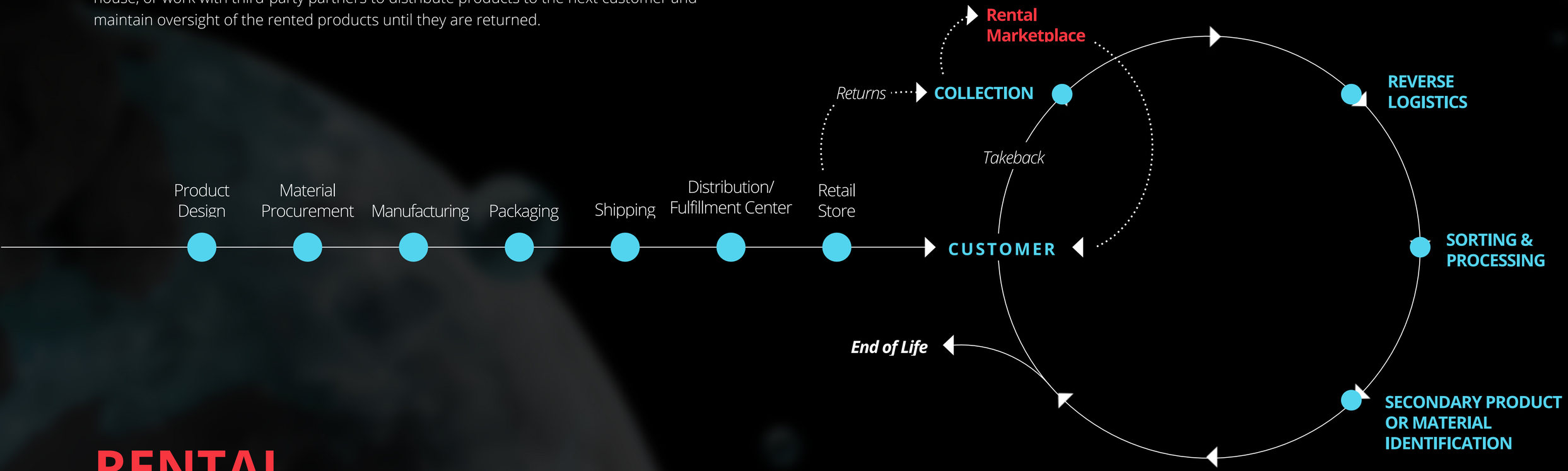
RESALE

The take-back of used products, or collection of used or returned products from other retailers, to resell back into the market

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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

Some retailers can engage in **rental** programs – offering the secondary products to a next customer for a defined period of time. Retailers can choose to operate rental programs in-house, or work with third-party partners to distribute products to the next customer and maintain oversight of the rented products until they are returned.



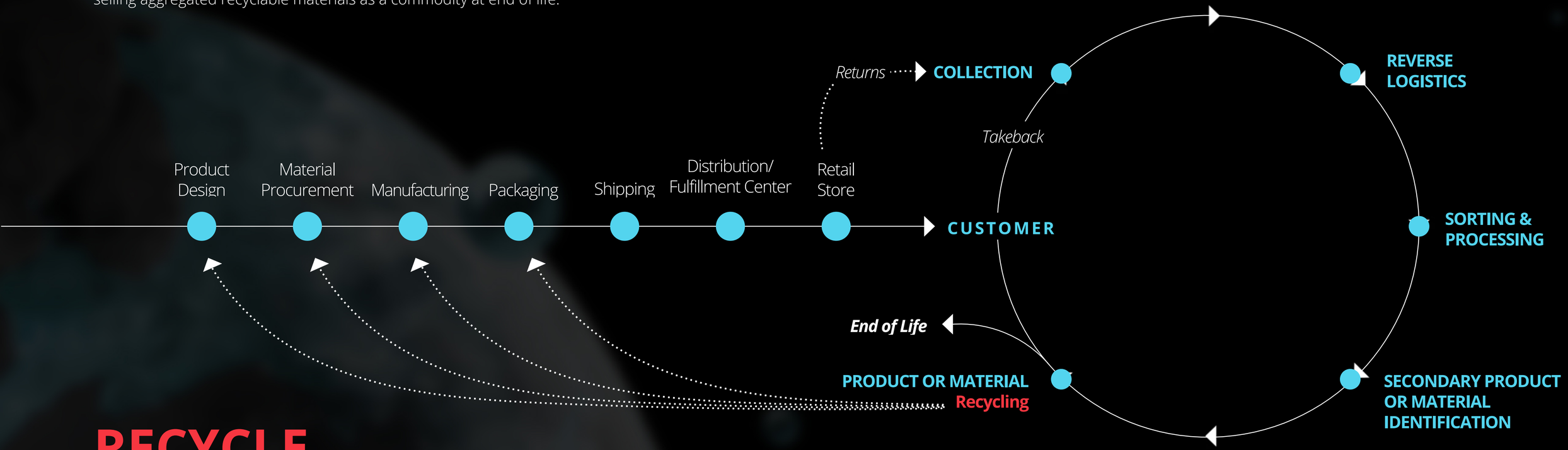
RENTAL

The ability for customers to use products on a part-time basis before returning for additional use

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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

Another circular model for retailers to consider is **product or material recycling.** There are several options for recycling – including designing products for greater recyclability, procuring recycled materials for product manufacturing, using recycled materials in packaging, and selling aggregated recyclable materials as a commodity at end of life.



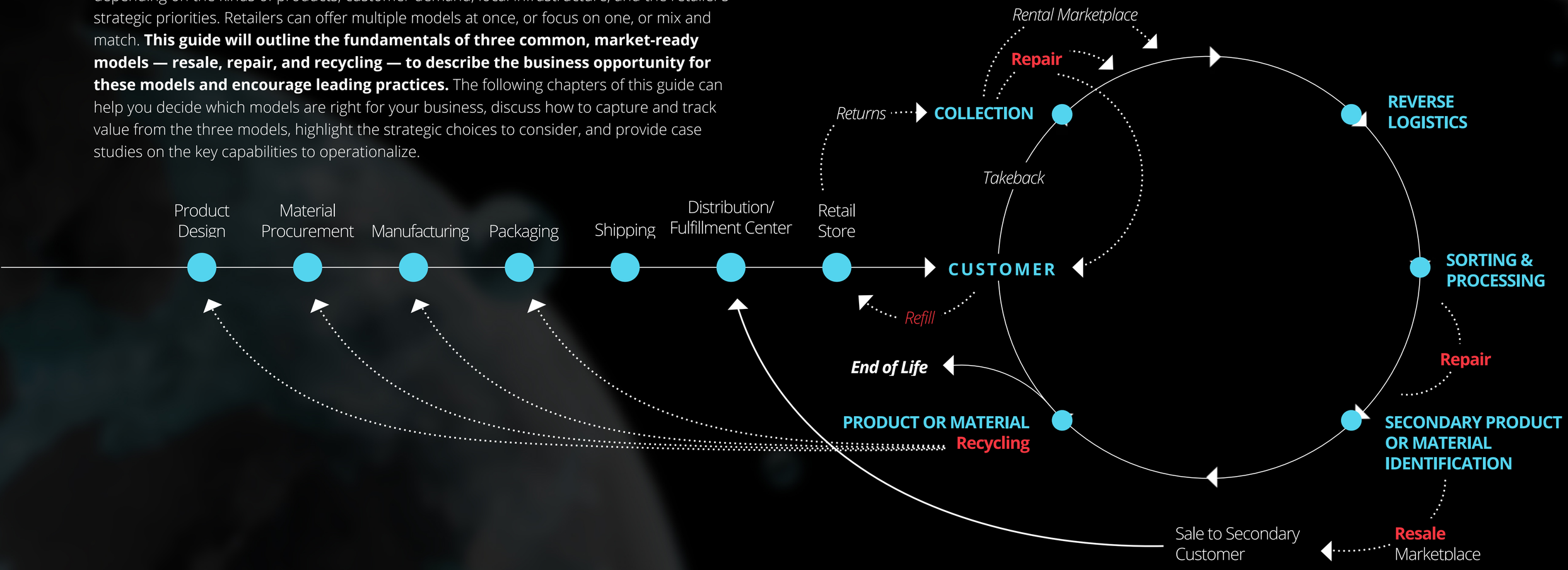
RECYCLE

The breakdown and reuse of end-of-life products or materials to extend circulation

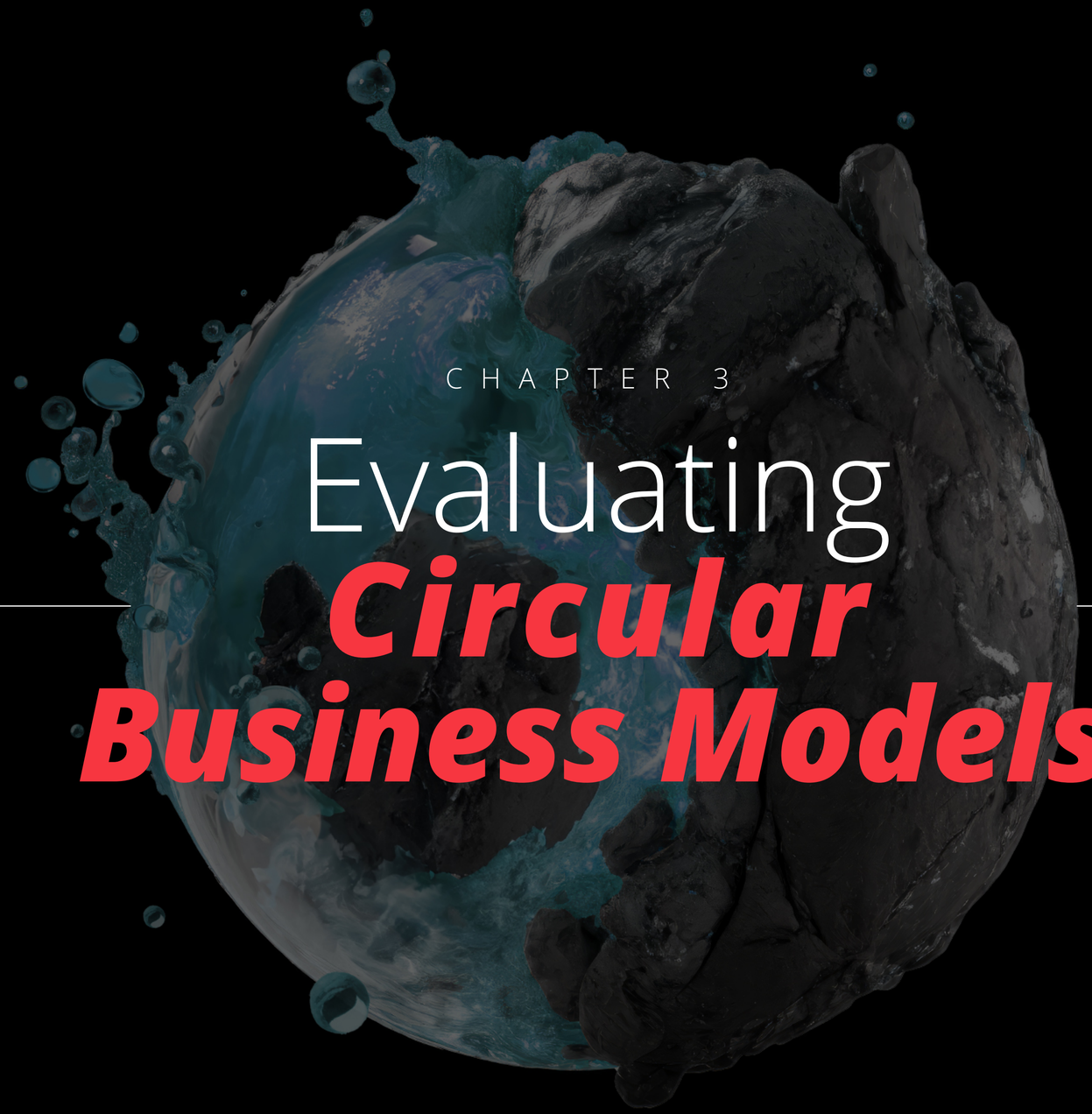
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There is a business opportunity for retailers to help customers make these choices and ***capture value throughout a longer product lifecycle***

In practice, how **retailers choose to engage in circularity will differ and will be tailored** depending on the kinds of products, customer demand, local infrastructure, and the retailer's strategic priorities. Retailers can offer multiple models at once, or focus on one, or mix and match. **This guide will outline the fundamentals of three common, market-ready models — resale, repair, and recycling — to describe the business opportunity for these models and encourage leading practices.** The following chapters of this guide can help you decide which models are right for your business, discuss how to capture and track value from the three models, highlight the strategic choices to consider, and provide case studies on the key capabilities to operationalize.



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CHAPTER 3

Evaluating ***Circular Business Models***

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As a retailer, the first step in embedding circularity is evaluating ***which business model or models are best fit for your business***

Retailers can focus on the **criteria and questions** in the table below to evaluate potential model options; the responses in each column represent the most **applicable or dominant characteristics,** but are not exhaustive

CRITERIA	RESALE	REPAIR	RECYCLE	REFILL	RENTAL	RE-DESIGN
PRODUCT CATEGORY What types of products do you sell?	Apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, furniture	Apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, furniture	Apparel, footwear, electronics, household products, product packaging	Cosmetics, household products, food and beverage	Apparel, accessories, specialty equipment	Apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, cosmetics, household products, packaging
PRODUCT PRICE POINT Are your products highly priced (e.g., luxury goods), medium priced, or low priced (e.g., value brands)?	High to Medium	High	Low price point, or any products that can no longer be resold or repaired	Low to Medium	High	All Price Points
PRODUCT RESIDUAL VALUE How long do your products typically retain value over time?	Mid- to Long-Term Durability	Mid- to Long-Term Durability	Short-term or single-use, or any products that can no longer be resold or repaired	Short-Term or Single-Use	Long-Term Durability	Any Level of Durability
INDIVIDUAL V. MULTI-BRAND Are you an individual brand or a retailer offering products from many brands?	Individual Brands	Multi-Brand Retailers or high price point individual brands	All Retailers	Multi-Brand Retailers	Individual Brands	Individual Brands
MOST RELEVANT CAPABILITIES What capabilities do you have today that could be leveraged for circular models?	Reverse Logistics	Skilled Craftspeople	All Sorting & Processing	Marketing	Reverse Logistics	Sustainable Sourcing & Product Design

Note: Refill, Rental, and Re-Design models are not the focus of this action guide, but represent additional circular business models for consideration

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Consider the following ***examples...***

A luxury accessories brand offering high-quality leather goods

A mass market retailer offering a wide variety of apparel and cosmetic products

An outdoor and sports equipment brand with products made to last multiple seasons

An e-commerce retailer selling multiple brands of electronics and appliances

An apparel brand offering a high volume of low-price point clothing

A department store with products across appliances, furniture, and other home goods

A mid-tier apparel brand with quality products at a level below luxury pricing

Any retailer with a high volume of cardboard and/or plastic packaging

CRITERIA	RESALE	REPAIR	RECYCLE
Product Category | What types of products do you sell?	Apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, furniture	Apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, furniture	Apparel, footwear, electronics, household products, product packaging
Product Price Point | Are your products highly priced (e.g., luxury goods), medium priced, or low priced (e.g., value brands)?	High to Medium	High	Low price point, **or** any products that can no longer be resold or repaired
Product Residual Value | How long do your products typically retain value over time?	Mid- to Long-Term Durability	Mid- to Long-Term Durability	Short-term or single-use, **or** any products that can no longer be resold or repaired
Single vs. Multi-Brand | Are you an individual brand or a retailer offering products from many brands?	Individual Brands	Multi-brand retailers or high price point individual brands	All Retailers
Most Relevant Capabilities | What capabilities do you have today that could be leveraged for circular models?	Reverse Logistics	Skilled Craftspeople	Sorting & Processing

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What information or data could ***impact the decision?***

FRAMING QUESTIONS

PRODUCT CATEGORY
What types of products do you sell?

PRODUCT PRICE POINT
Are your products highly priced (e.g., luxury goods), medium priced, or low priced (e.g., value brands)?

PRODUCT RESIDUAL VALUE
How long do your products typically retain value over time?

INDIVIDUAL V. MULTI-BRAND
Are you an individual brand or a retailer offering products from many brands?

MOST RELEVANT CAPABILITIES
What capabilities do you have today that could be leveraged for circular models?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS



FINANCING CIRCULAR BUSINESS MODELS
When developing circular business models and building capabilities to support them, it is likely that investments will be required and may not be profitable to start. Companies may need to adapt their traditional financial models or controls to enable a "try and fail" mindset. Setting expectations is crucial - teams should be prepared for the possibility of short-term losses before realizing the long-term benefits of circular models at scale. Defining additional non-financial metrics, allowing longer time-horizons, and setting different risk factors or ROI expectations may be required to demonstrate success – and tracking metrics closely over time is a critical step.



ACCOUNTING IMPACTS OF CIRCULAR BUSINESS MODELS
A critical step involves deciding how to manage financial accounting of products taken back for customers with the intent to resell or reuse. With circular models, aligning on who has what products on their books at what times will look different than the traditional accounting system, and requires coordination across business functions – especially finance – at the outset. This circular accounting should consider total costs of ownership of a product – including the margins from original sale through takeback of the product, mitigated EPR risks, and other metrics.

In addition to financial accounting, these business models can impact greenhouse gas inventory accounting. According to updated GHG protocol, brands and retailers will be able to use a lower LCA footprint for circular products (i.e., products that cannot be sold new) in their GHG inventories thereby contributing to carbon reduction goals.



POTENTIAL BRAND IMPACTS OF CIRCULAR BUSINESS MODELS
Another key consideration when evaluating circular business models is relative to the organization's brand. If your brand or products retain value, it is very likely some downstream customers will sell secondhand. Companies that operate resell or reuse programs themselves control the quality and customer experience of their products throughout the lifecycle. Unlocking the repeat customer journey and how to incentivize customers to come back can represent a competitive advantage.

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How do you generate ***executive buy-in?***

KEYS SUCCESS FACTORS FOR EXECUTIVE BUY-IN

1. **Emphasize the growth opportunity by capitalizing on shifting customer attitudes.** Launching circular business models offers an opportunity for business growth by responding to customers' shifting demands. Customers are feeling the impacts of climate change, and this experience primes them for action – 6 in 10 people experienced an extreme weather event in 2023, and Deloitte research shows that those who have experienced that extreme weather are 1.4x more likely to buy sustainably. Circular programs can help the business continue to win in the future.

2. **Highlight the opportunity to gain competitive advantage by extending engagement throughout the customer lifecycle.** Some executives may express concern that circular models present a risk of cannibalization to the traditional business. In response, teams should work to shift this perception by highlighting circular models as an opportunity for building customer repetition and loyalty through influencing customer habits. It's also worth emphasizing that if you don't bring your customers back, there is a risk they may go elsewhere with your products.

3. **Monitor regulatory changes and emphasize the risks of inaction.** Building a capability to scan for regulatory changes related to circularity can help your organization stay ahead of the curve. Demonstrating the regulatory pressures that already exist – and emphasizing the costs of non-compliance – might help your executive team support circular models as a path towards sustainable future operations.

4. **Highlight the link between circular business model opportunities and sustainability goals.** Organizations can track the ESG impacts of circular programs (e.g., X number of recirculated products is equivalent to X reduction in carbon emissions, X reduction in water use, X reduction in waste) and include those data points in annual sustainability reports demonstrating progress towards sustainability commitments.

5. **Show up with a compelling business case and industry examples to tell the value story.** Building a business case for circular programs does require a more holistic approach to demonstrating non-financial benefits in addition to financial benefits. Telling your story with proven best-in-class industry examples can help executives start to think differently. Also consider running pilots to test concepts and collect real data on how the models would work, and how your customers respond – then use these data points to build the case for further investment.

6. **Engage leaders across the C-suite to get everyone involved.** Developing circular models takes cross-functional alignment and support – particularly because it requires thinking about value and operations in new and different ways. To get started, convene leaders to discuss the capabilities you already have, understand where you excel, and look at opportunities where incentives are aligned (e.g., reducing material costs and incorporating recycled packaging).

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CHAPTER 4

Resale Model
DeepDive

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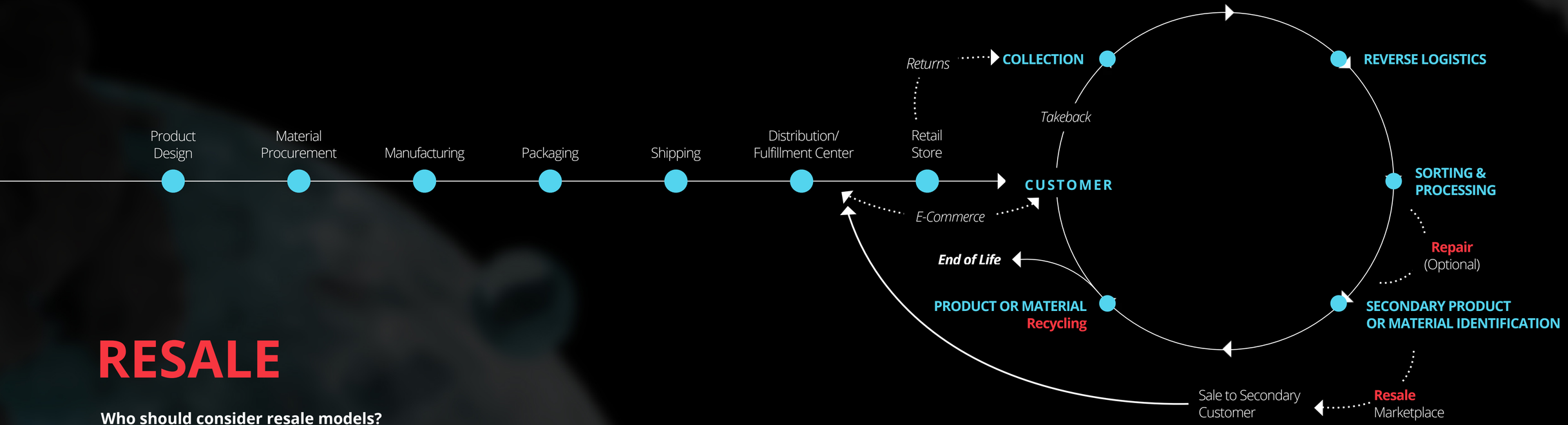
This section will ***answer the following questions...***

- **Who** should consider resale models?
- How do resale models **create value?**
- What **strategic decisions** must be made when developing resale models?
- What **capabilities** are needed for resale?
- What are **best practices** in resale?

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Resale Models

Resale Models involve the take-back of used products from customers, or collection of used or returned products from other retailers, to resell back into the market



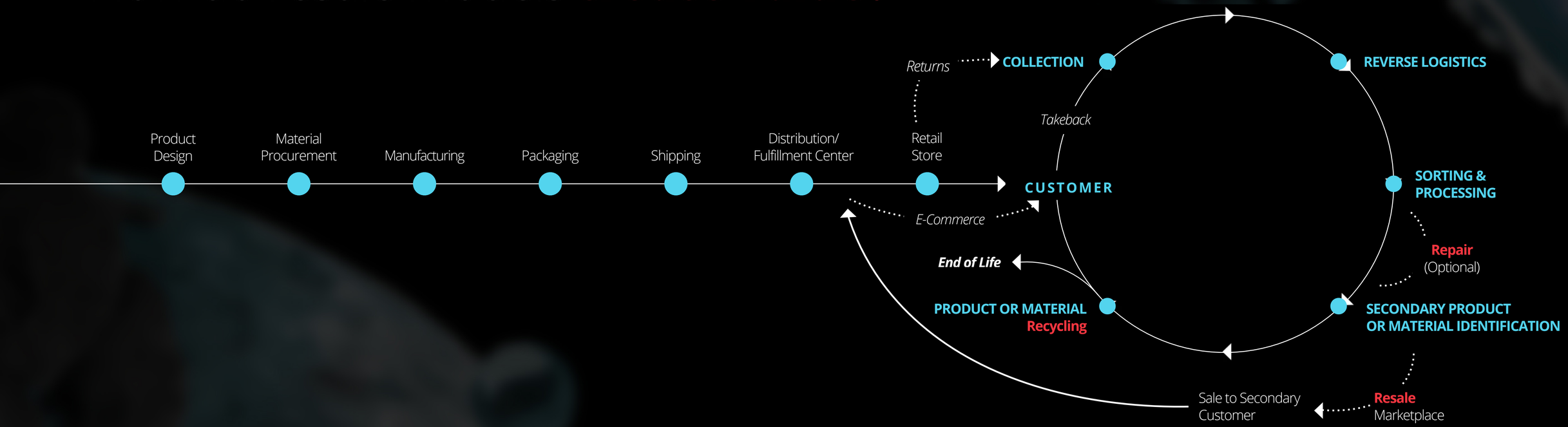
RESALE

Who should consider resale models?

- Product categories best suited for resale include higher price-point apparel, footwear and fashion, electronics, appliances, and furniture
- Luxury brands and other products that retain value and quality over time
- Multi-brand retailers with a large-scale footprint have advantages for collection of used products for resale, but individual brands have more flexibility for bespoke, brand-focused resale programs

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How do resale models ***create value?***



REVENUE GROWTH

For traditional retailers, launching a resale program can create **new revenue streams** adjacent to existing product offerings

Resale models also represent an opportunity to **retain existing customers and acquire new customers –** particularly among customer groups who prioritize secondhand, lower-cost, or "unique" / vintage products, as well as those with a pain point of getting rid of used items and who feel a sense of relief or purpose donating

Illustrative metrics to track | *# of participating customers, # of click thrus on website, # of repeat customers, $ revenue generated through resale program, $ spent in-store after used product takeback*

RISK MITIGATION

By using resale models, retailers can adapt to evolving regulations (e.g., EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive or CSRD), **prevent legal and financial penalties** (e.g., non-compliant inventory held at customs), and safeguard their brand image (e.g., quality control)

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What ***strategic choices*** will you have to make?

Which of our products are best suited for resale?
- Used items
- Returned items
- Overstock from others

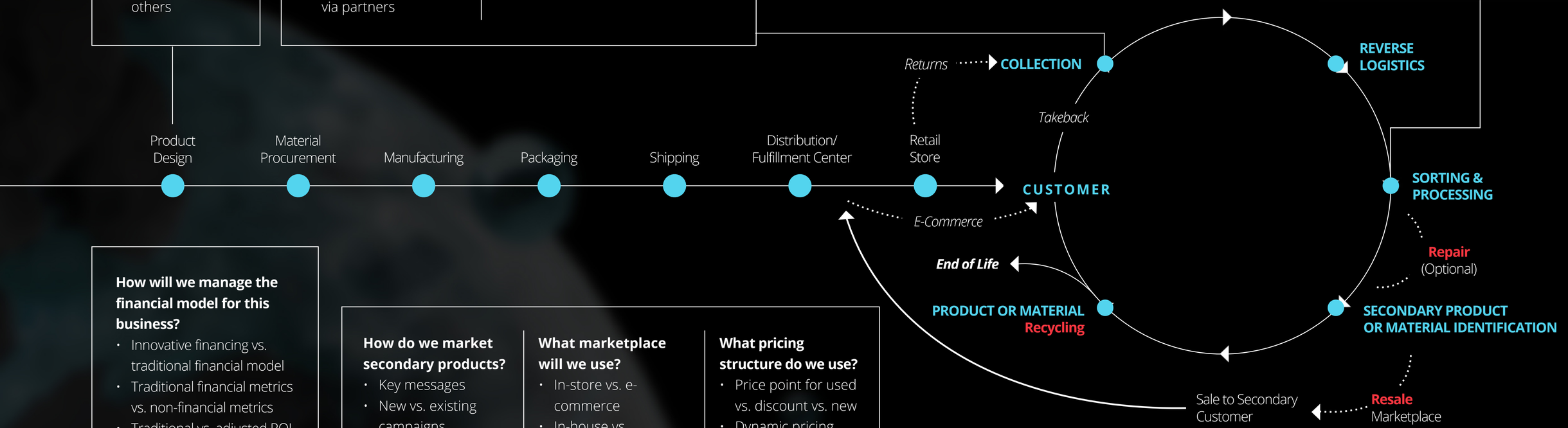
How will we collect used products?
- Mail-in vs. in-store collection
- Buyback vs. donation
- Collection in-house vs. via partners

How will we incentivize customers to return used products?
- Cash payments
- Store credit
- Discounts
- Tax credits (charity retailers only)

What infrastructure do we need to transport and store used inventory?
- Existing infrastructure vs. new
- In-house vs. outsourced

What logistics partners do we need to work with?
- Existing partners vs. new

What technology do we need to manage sorting & processing?
- AI, automation, digital product passport
- Cleaning or repair services
- In-house vs. outsourced



How will we manage the financial model for this business?
- Innovative financing vs. traditional financial model
- Traditional financial metrics vs. non-financial metrics
- Traditional vs. adjusted ROI expectations

How do we market secondary products?
- Key messages
- New vs. existing campaigns

What marketplace will we use?
- In-store vs. e-commerce
- In-house vs. outsourced
- Single vs. multi-brand

What pricing structure do we use?
- Price point for used vs. discount vs. new
- Dynamic pricing based on quality

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What ***capabilities*** are needed for resale?

ILLUSTRATIVE BUSINESS MODEL COMPONENTS

Collection & Returns	***Reverse Logistics***	***Sorting & Processing***	***Sorting & Processing***

RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

Takeback Model

Takeback models can include in-store, centralized, or mail-in collection of used products. Major department store retailers may be more successful in leveraging their footprint as collection centers; whereas at the brand level, partnering with resale companies for mail-in bags may work well.

Logistics Infrastructure

Reverse logistics infrastructure includes inventory management, warehouse space, and distribution of used products – which represents an investment and undertaking. However, some major retailers and third-parties have the scale to operate reverse logistics and offer this as a service.

Sorting & Processing Technology
(incl. grading, pricing)

Advancements in AI and automation already exist to enable sorting & processing at scale. A resale company implemented virtual recognition technology & AI sorting across its warehouses, and sorts apparel products by condition. Other brands have launched digital product passports to process & track throughout the lifecycle.

E-commerce or In-Store Sales Platform

A major retailer has developed a distinct line of business for resale of returned products from their inventory. They process returns in 5 distribution centers and leverage their sales platform to offer resale of returned merchandise at a discount to customers.

Customer Incentives

A major department store retailer has piloted incentive structures for used product take-back – from offering gift cards, in-store discounts, or no incentive; the no incentive case worked the best – customers felt relief, as the program solved for the pain point of getting rid of unwanted items.

Partnership Selection

Companies thinking about launching resale models can consider partnering along the value chain to leverage established logistics infrastructure and/or technology at scale.

Marketing

A sustainability focused apparel and accessories brand has found success in resale of used products – in large part due to the marketing campaigns that have raised awareness of their offering. Their campaigns use concepts such as “pre-loved” and “vintage” to attract customers.

CROSS-CUTTING CAPABILITIES

Data Collection, Tracking, & Management

Leadership Engagement

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What are ***some leading practices in resale?***

1. Many retail resale programs operating at scale today depend on **partnerships,** particularly when managing resale marketplaces. Attempting to handle all aspects internally can drive complexity, and at times lead to inefficiencies and operational challenges. To mitigate the challenges associated with the scale of operating resale marketplaces, consider forming strategic alliances with **retail-as-a-service partners,** which can license their advanced technology and logistics networks

2. Leveraging **reverse logistics-as-a-service** offered by some major retail partners can significantly aid retailers in implementing resale programs. These services provide the essential infrastructure to process returns and handle used products for sale, mitigating the need to manage these complex operations internally. Additionally, connecting with your value chain partners about their programs can further provide operational support, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of your resale program

3. **Strategic marketing of your resale program** can boost customer engagement. Instead of launching a separate, expensive campaign, consider integrating information about your resale program **into existing marketing campaigns** to enhance visibility and efficiently engage your customers
    - There is an opportunity to team with vendors to **provide ESG metrics** from your resale program, motivating your customers to participate

4. When implementing retail resale programs, consider how to gather enough used product inventory (or material) for resale. Collaborating with other brands and storefronts to establish a **consolidated return center** can be an effective strategy, especially for brands located in malls or retail centers. This approach not only helps to build up a supply of used items for resale, but may also have the added benefit of drawing foot traffic to your stores.

5. It can be beneficial to conduct **pilot testing** of the resale program in select locations or with a limited product range. This testing can help you to identify potential issues, gauge customer response, and refine the program based on real-world feedback before a wider rollout

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CHAPTER 5

Repair Model
DeepDive

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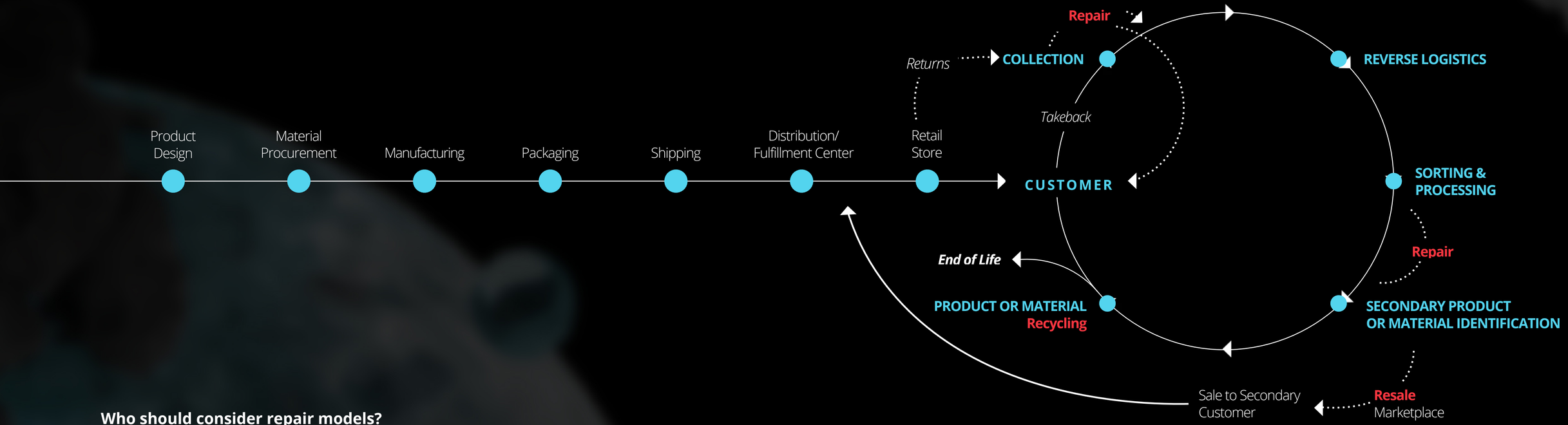
This section will ***answer the following questions…***

- **Who** should consider repair models?
- How do repair models **create value?**
- What **strategic decisions** must be made when developing repair models?
- What **capabilities** are needed for repair?
- What are **best practices** in repair?

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Repair Models

Repair models fix used or damaged items to extend the life of the product – either by returning the product to the original owner, or reselling to a second owner

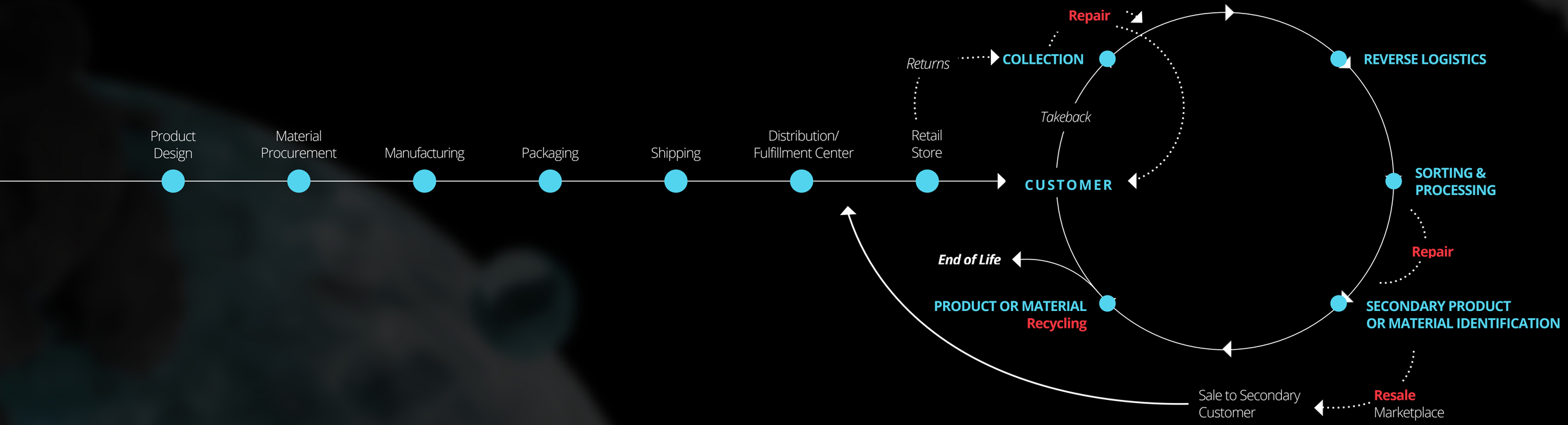


Who should consider repair models?

- Product categories best-suited for repair include higher price-point apparel, accessories, footwear, electronics, appliances, and furniture
- High-use, expensive, mass-produced products such as electronics and appliances that retain value over time
- Department store retailers and multi-brand electronics retailers also often offer bespoke repair services on a smaller scale for apparel and electronics items, delivered through skilled craftspeople

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How do ***repair models*** create value?



REVENUE GROWTH

Repair models that involve fixing products for the original product owner can serve as a mechanism to **retain existing customers and drive customer loyalty.** They can also **enhance the brand** by offering services that extend product use, and in turn, encourage repeat business and sustained revenue. Repair can also increase the resale value of products for secondary customers.

Suggested metrics to track | *# of participating customers, # of repeat customers, $ spent in-store after repair*

REDUCED COSTS

Repair models that refurbish used products for a second owner can **reduce raw material and production costs,** with fewer inputs needed before reselling a refurbished model or product.

Suggested metrics to track | *# of refurbished products sold, $ spent on refurbishment vs. new product production*

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What ***strategic choices*** will you have to make?

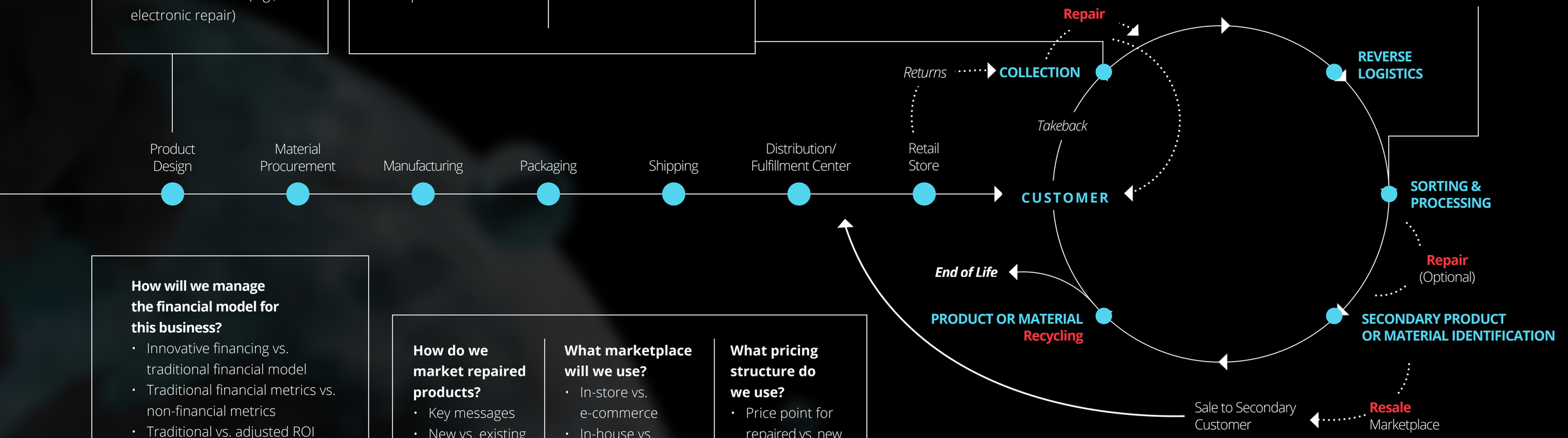
What products will we repair?
Items to return to original owner (e.g., apparel repair) vs. items to refurbish for sale to next owner (e.g., electronic repair)

How will we collect products for repair?
- Mail-in vs. in-store collection
- Collection in-house vs. via partners

How will we engage customers to return products for repair?
- Marketing to raise awareness

What resources do we need to service repairs?
- Skilled resources (e.g., tailors, tech engineers)
- Parts on-hand
- In-house vs. outsourced

What technology do we need to manage sorting & processing?
- AI, automation, DPP
- In-house vs. outsourced



How will we manage the financial model for this business?
- Innovative financing vs. traditional financial model
- Traditional financial metrics vs. non-financial metrics
- Traditional vs. adjusted ROI expectations

How do we market repaired products?
- Key messages
- New vs. existing campaigns

What marketplace will we use?
- In-store vs. e-commerce
- In-house vs. outsourced
- Single vs. multi-brand

What pricing structure do we use?
- Price point for repaired vs. new

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What ***capabilities*** are needed for repair?

ILLUSTRATIVE BUSINESS MODEL COMPONENTS

Collection & Returns	***Reverse Logistics***	***Sorting & Processing***	***Sorting & Processing***

RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

Takeback Model

For apparel repairs, both individual brands and multi-brand retailers primarily offer in-store collection or drop off for products to be repaired for the original owner. For electronics repairs, many retailers rely on customer trade-in programs (e.g., with cellphone carriers) to supply products to be refurbished for new customers

Customer Engagement

Multiple retailers report that raising awareness (e.g., through in-store signage) of free repair programs can drive customer behavior to extend the life of the original product, while also encouraging in-store shopping

Logistics Infrastructure

A high price-point brand is currently implementing a new platform to track the processing and revenue generation of repairs to demonstrate the value of the business model. Once implemented, the platform will monitor metrics including # of repairs, # of linked in-store purchases, # of return customers

Skilled Resources

To offer quality repair services, individual brands and multi-brand retailers need to identify and refer customers to approved providers, work with third-party providers, or hire, train, and retain skilled tailors and craftsman. Due to the expertise required, repair services can be difficult to offer at scale (i.e., beyond in-store footprint)

Parts On-Hand

To operate a repair model, retailers need to have access to additional parts (e.g., textiles, technology components) to service repairs. Retailers can be more effective when they have parts on-hand, or a partner to supply parts quickly

E-commerce or In-Store Sales Platform

A major retailer has developed a distinct line of business for refurbished product sales, particularly focused on electronics and appliances. The products are integrated and offered directly on the retailer's broader e-commerce platform

Marketing

Retailers that offer refurbished products can focus messaging on the high quality and low cost of their electronics and appliances. This marketing also needs to reflect the reality of the product quality; if customers experience low-quality repaired products, they may be unlikely to try again

CROSS-CUTTING CAPABILITIES

Data Collection, Tracking, & Management

Leadership Engagement

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What are ***some leading practices for repair?***

1. To operate at scale, retail repair programs require **skilled craftspeople** (e.g., tailors, engineers) for delivering the repair service. When considering a repair program, a critical first step involves evaluating the economic viability of the program based on the skills required and available, and considering where capacity could be built internally or with third parties

2. A leading practice in repair programs is tracking and demonstrating the value driven by the program. To better monitor value created, consider **implementing a technology platform to collect data and track the revenue** generated from repairs. The platform to track the service can either be delivered by a new vendor or by one that your company already uses internally

3. Repair programs are often overlooked by customers. A leading practice can be **increasing in-store and online marketing** of repair offerings to drive adoption and keep products in use
    - There is an opportunity to **highlight the environmental benefits** associated with the repair program as well as the **cost savings for customers** to encourage engagement

4. When it comes to selling repaired products, **transparency and expectation setting** is critical – if customers take a chance on buying a pre-owned product and it quickly breaks, they may not purchase secondhand again. Emphasizing the cost effectiveness of repaired products through marketing efforts can drive customer uptake – but the product must deliver against the expectations of quality:
    - It is important to **maintain a high level of transparency** concerning the refurbishment process. Clearly communicating the procedures, standards, and checks each product undergoes prior to resale can promote trust and assure customers of the product's quality
    - Offering **warranties on refurbished items** can enhance customer trust in these products. Additionally, providing quality post-purchase customer support for refurbished items can encourage more customers to consider them

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CHAPTER 6

Recycle Model
DeepDive

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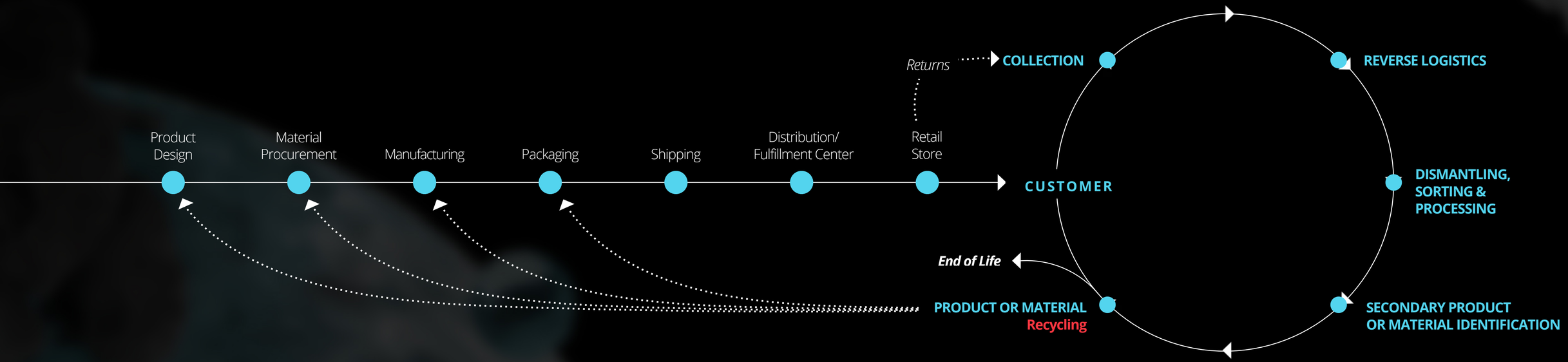
This section will ***answer the following questions…***

- **Who** should consider recycle models?
- How do recycle models **create value?**
- What **strategic decisions** must be made when developing recycle models?
- What **capabilities** are needed for recycling?
- What are **best practices** in recycling?

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Recycle Models

Recycle models involve the collection of products that can be aggregated and sold as recyclable materials for use in new products

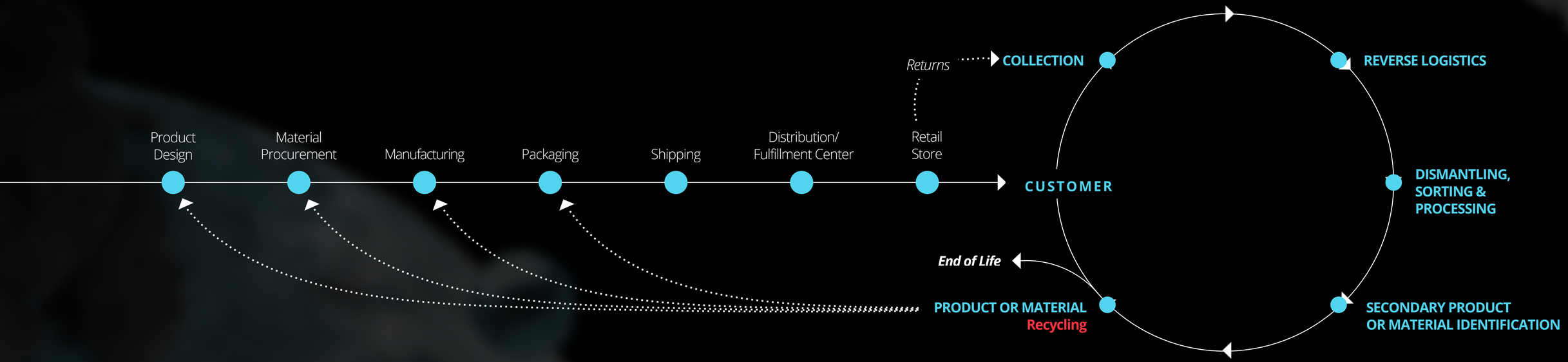


Who should consider recycle models?

- Retailers selling products or product packaging that customers wish to recycle but for which there are not locally available collection points. Depending on the community, this can include single-use plastic bags and film, small form plastic packaging, electronics, fashion and footwear

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How do ***recycle models*** create value?



REDUCED COSTS

Retailers that engage in recycling programs can increase supply of recycled materials to **decrease costs of new recycled-content products** and packaging.

Suggested metrics to track | *$ spent on recycled vs. new raw material*

REDUCED RISK

Retailers that have options for properly recycling the post-customer products they have collected but that cannot be resold or repaired **avoid reputational risks** from those collected products ending up in landfill or polluting foreign countries. Companies may also reduce regulatory and extended producer responsibility (EPR)-related risks.

Suggested metrics to track | *Volume / tonnage of goods diverted from landfill*

REVENUE GROWTH

Retailers with recycling can **attract and retain customers** through brand enhancement. Retailers can also generate revenue by selling recyclable products and materials to recycling processors.

Suggested metrics to track | *$ revenue from sales to recycling processors; new and repeat customers after marketing recycling programs*

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What ***strategic choices*** will you have to make?

Can w use recycled materials in my design? (Out of scope for this Action Guide)
- Design tradeoffs
- Supplier engagement
- In-house vs. third party

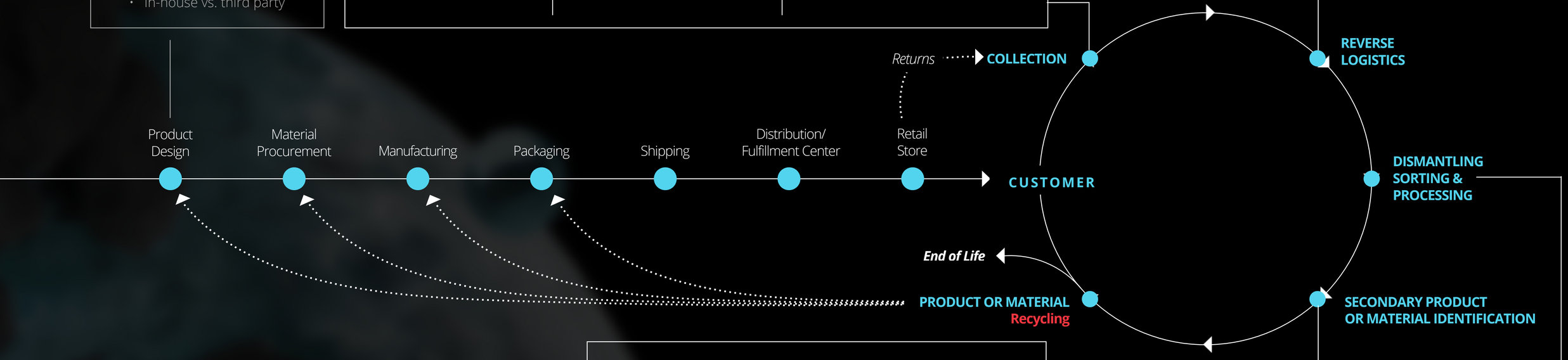
How will we collect products for recycling?
- Mail-in vs. in-store collection
- Collection in-house vs. via partners

How will we incentivize customers to return products for recycling?
- Financial incentives/ trade in value vs. no monetary incentive

How will we finance a recycling program?
- Costs of operating system vs. revenue generated
- Free recycling vs. charging customers

What infrastructure do we need to aggregate and backhaul products or material for recycling?
- Existing infrastructure vs. new
- In-house vs. outsourced

What logistics partners do we need to work with?
- Existing partners vs. new



How will we use recycled material?
- Sell as commodity input for new products vs. retain in-house for closed-loop production
- Sell to multiple partners vs. single partner

What recycling processor(s) will we work with for handling?
- Existing partners vs. new

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What ***capabilities*** are needed for recycling?

ILLUSTRATIVE BUSINESS MODEL COMPONENTS

Collection & Returns	***Sorting & Processing***	***End of Life Recycling***	***Customer Engagement***

RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

Takeback Model

Individual brand retailers can offer mail-in or in-store collection of used or empty products for diversion.

Multi-brand retailers with a large store footprint are positioned to leverage their infrastructure as collection centers for products and facilitate recycling

Sorting & Processing Technology

INDUSTRY GAP – solutions for material recycling at scale represent an opportunity for industry innovation and collaboration

Recycling Channels

Retailers can decide on which channels to leverage for recycling products – such as selling material as a commodity (e.g., cardboard, textiles) or developing closed-loop offerings to reuse recycled materials in new product development

Marketing

A multi-brand retailer that launched a material recycling collection program chose to partner with their in-house marketing team when pitching the business model to their leadership team. The team pitched the program as a way to get more customers through the door, and chose to highlight the sustainability benefits as a secondary positive outcome. This approach was successful in generating buy-in and securing approval. Other retailers can consider partnering internally across functions when developing recycling programs.

Customer Engagement

Retailers that are focused on end-of-life material recycling note that when customer engagement is required for collecting material as supply for recycling programs, interventions based on customer choice and the ability to "opt out" can be more successful

Material Aggregation & Backhaul

Retailers that engage in recycling must collect the materials they plan to recycle (e.g., cardboard, textiles, metals, plastics) for aggregation & backhaul to a recycling facility. Some retailers are testing infrastructure (e.g., mail-in, drop shipping) to support this in smaller store formats

Vendor Selection

Individual brand and multi-brand retailers can engage vendors to sell and manage end-of-life material as a commodity. Retailers that have worked with such vendors suggest understanding the availability of data on downstream material flows to track accurate levels of waste diversion

CROSS-CUTTING CAPABILITIES

Data Collection, Tracking, & Management

Leadership Engagement

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What are ***some leading practices for recycling?***

1. Recycling efforts for end-of-life materials **involve collection, backhaul, aggregation, and sale as a commodity.** It can be challenging for retailers to engage in these steps for smaller-store formats; to mitigate this challenge, consider evaluating various infrastructure options (e.g., drop ship, mail-in, consolidation across shopping malls) or partnerships to deliver the service

2. A leading practice for gaining internal buy-in for recycling programs is **positioning waste streams as an expense line** when building the business case, and framing as an opportunity to reduce costs (e.g., cardboard is a $50M expense line, and by recycling we can reduce this expense by 50%)

3. A crucial step for scaling recycling solutions is **product identification and sorting.** Although manual sorting can be cost prohibitive, this step is crucial for recycling solutions at scale. For recyclability, **consolidated return centers** may help scale take-back (e.g., shopping malls, existing infrastructure at large multi-brand retailers)

4. To effectively implement recycling programs, retailers should consider providing **clear instructions about recycling processes** and install well-marked recycling bins in stores or consolidated return centers. Educating customers and staff about these measures can further streamline the process, which could lead to increased participation in recycling programs

5. Achieving **recyclability for multiple product types** (e.g., non-standard hardware, zippers) involves finding cost-effective vendors and methods for **material separation.** This effort has the potential to improve through industry-wide collaboration and innovation. Existing solutions for some products (e.g., jeans) showcase how this can be done successfully and serve as a blueprint for developing comprehensive solutions for a broader array of products in the long term

6. Retailers can enhance recycling rates by offering incentives like discounts on the purchase of new versions of items when customers bring in and exchange their old ones to be recycled. This strategy can be especially effective for higher-priced items and promotes both recycling and repeat business. Effective communication about these incentives is crucial for maximizing customer participation

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CHAPTER 6

Capabilities & *Activation*

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Across circular business models, there are ***common capabilities that emerge***

BUSINESS MODEL COMPONENTS

Product Design	Collection & Returns	Reverse Logistics	Sorting & Processing	Repair Service	End of Life Recycling	Secondary Resale Marketplace

RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

Sustainable Sourcing	Takeback Model	Logistics Infrastructure	Sorting & Processing Technology	Skilled Resources	Recycling Channels (e.g., sale as commodity)	Secondary Resale Marketplace
Product Lifecycle Assessments (LCAs) & Operational Footprint	Customer Incentives	Partnership Selection	Material Aggregation & Backhaul	Parts On-Hand	Vendor Selection	
Product Design						

KEY | Capability for 3 Models | Capability for 2 Models | Capability for 1 Model | Out of Scope for this Guide

CROSS-CUTTING CAPABILITIES

- Data Collection & Management
- Leadership Engagement
- Customer Care, Engagement, & Marketing

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Segmenting capabilities into ***foundational, core, & advanced can help prioritize***

BUSINESS MODEL COMPONENTS

Product Design	Collection & Returns	Reverse Logistics	Sorting & Processing	Repair Service	End of Life Recycling	Secondary Resale Marketplace

RELEVANT CAPABILITIES

Sustainable Sourcing	Takeback Model	Logistics Infrastructure	Sorting & Processing Technology	Skilled Resources	Recycling Channels (e.g., sale as commodity)	Secondary Resale Marketplace
Product LCAs & Operational Footprint	Customer Incentives	Partnership Selection	Material Aggregation & Backhaul	Parts On-Hand	Vendor Selection	
Product Design						

KEY

- **Foundational** | Baseline capabilities required to operate circularly
- **Core** | Critical capabilities required to effectively and sustainably run a circular business
- **Advanced** | Elevated capabilities required to win with circularity

CROSS-CUTTING CAPABILITIES

- Data Collection & Management
- Leadership Engagement
- Customer Care, Engagement, & Marketing

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Glossary

- **Circularity** | A principle that encourages the reuse, recycling, and repurposing of materials and products to extend their lifespans, minimize waste, and contribute to a closed-loop system that reduces environmental impact
- **Circular Economy** | An economic model that emphasizes the efficient use of resources through recycling, reuse, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing, and upcycling to create a closed-loop system that minimizes waste, reduces resource extraction, extends the life of products, promotes sustainability, and fosters innovation
- **Cradle-to-Cradle** | A sustainable design philosophy that emulates nature's regenerative cycle, aiming to create products that, at the end of their life, can be fully recycled or composted, thereby contributing to a closed-loop system that eliminates waste and continuously reuses resources
- **Donation** | The act of giving items without receiving payment, extending their useful life and keeping them out of the waste stream
- **Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)** | A policy approach that places the onus on producers to manage the lifecycle of their products beyond the point of sale, often involving the take-back, recycling, and disposal of products, which in turn encourages design for environment and waste minimization
- **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)** | A methodology to assess environmental impacts associated with all the stages of a product's life from raw material extraction through materials processing, manufacture, distribution, use, repair, maintenance, and disposal or recycling
- **Recycle** | The process of converting waste materials into reusable materials and objects, reducing the consumption of virgin raw materials, and minimizing waste, pollution, and energy use
- **Refill** | The practice of replenishing an existing container with the same product, reducing the need for additional packaging and waste, and preserving resources
- **Regenerative Design** | A proactive approach that goes beyond merely reducing environmental harm, instead it fosters systems, products, or services that actively enhance and contribute positively to the health of the environment
- **Rental** | A system where a payment is made for the temporary use of a good, service, or property, enabling the shared use of items and reducing the need for individual ownership
- **Repair** | The act of restoring a damaged or faulty item back to its original, functional condition, extending its lifespan and reducing the need for replacement
- **Resale** | The act of selling previously owned or used goods from one customer to another, typically through direct or online marketplaces, extending the lifecycle of products and reducing waste
- **Resource Recovery** | The selective extraction of disposed materials for a specific next use, such as recycling, composting or energy generation
- **Reuse** | The practice of utilizing an item more than once, either for the original purpose or a different one, keeping items in circulation for as long as possible
- **Reverse Logistics** | The process of managing the return of goods from customers back to the manufacturer or retailer, with the aim of recapturing value
- **Takeback Model** | A business strategy where companies reclaim their products post-customer use for purposes of reuse, recycling, or proper disposal, thereby reducing waste, conserving resources, and potentially creating new revenue streams through the refurbishment and resale of returned items
- **Waste Hierarchy** | A structured approach prioritizing waste management strategies from most favored (waste prevention and reduction) to least favored (landfill disposal), with the aim of minimizing environmental impact
- **Upcycling** | The process of transforming by-products, waste materials, or unwanted items into new materials or products of better quality or environmental value
- **Zero Waste** | A philosophy and strategy that advocates for the complete elimination of waste by creating and implementing practices that reduce, recycle, and reuse materials, with the ultimate goal of conserving all resources and keeping them in a closed-loop system

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