Case Study

Runden Group

How the Runden Group Aims to Create Competitive Advantages Along the Supply Chain Through Reusable Transport Packaging

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Runden Group GmbH & Co. KG

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As a logistics company, the Runden Group operates in an industry characterized by complex supply chains, high resource consumption, and growing regulatory pressure. To remain profitable in the long term, the family-owned company must reduce its dependence on raw materials and transition to circular economy. Its subsidiary, WBG Pooling, demonstrates how this transition can be achieved and how it manages risks using reliable data.

Challenges in reusable packaging

With its focus on reusable transport packaging, WBG Pooling relies on durable plastic. This material offers clear advantages in logistics, such as its low weight and the resulting efficiency gains in transportation. At the same time, the material remains heavily dependent on fossil raw materials and is therefore sensitive to price fluctuations and risks—partly due to geopolitical developments.

Furthermore, key customer groups have so far recognized the added value of a true circular economy only to a limited extent. Particularly in highly price-driven markets, short-term cost efficiency takes precedence, while long-term resource efficiency and security of supply are often difficult to communicate.

> “Far-reaching changes take time and require tireless educational efforts. With our Home of Reuse initiative, we want to show that the circular economy is not only environmentally sound but also economically viable.”
>
> *Saralena Gülker, Sustainability Manager*

Profile Runden Group

Headquarters: 12 locations in Germany and Europe
Employees: 567
Revenue in 2024: approx. 84 million € (2024)
Sales: 68% in Germany
Core offering: Reusable transport solutions for the European food supply chain

From goal to implementation

The Runden Group has set itself the goal of consistently developing its circular economy strategy and implementing it systematically.

A key component is Cradle-to-Cradle certification: By the end of 2026, four key product groups of the subsidiary WBG Pooling are to be certified accordingly.

Implementation requires extensive projects, close collaboration between procurement, quality management, and sustainability management, as well as intensive cooperation with suppliers and manufacturers to meet the high standards throughout the entire value chain.

Sustainability Reporting at Runden Group

The data collected as part of the Cradle to Cradle certification process forms a new foundation for the Runden Group's sustainability reporting. Particularly in the area of risk assessment, this data enables, for the first time, a systematic analysis of supply chains, materials, and processes. At the same time, it helps to more closely integrate quality and sustainability management and to use sustainability data in a targeted manner for operational and strategic decisions.

It also became clear that many existing suppliers—particularly plastics manufacturers—did not initially have the necessary data. The certification process served as a catalyst in this regard: More and more partners have begun collecting their own sustainability data, preparing sustainability reports, and undergoing external assessments such as EcoVadis certifications.

Challenges & Investments

- Implementing Cradle to Cradle certification involves significant costs: Investments of up to a mid-five-figure amount were required per product group.
- In addition, internal resources in procurement, quality management, and sustainability management are tied up.
- The process requires close collaboration with suppliers. New suppliers are selected only on the condition that they meet the transparency and sustainability requirements of Cradle-to-Cradle certification and support its implementation.
- Furthermore, many suppliers do not initially have the necessary data and processes in place and must first establish them.

In a highly price-driven market environment, this makes it difficult to communicate the economic value of the circular economy to customers.

> "Sustainability reporting is not merely about meeting requirements; it helps us structure our business reality. It provides guidance and makes transformation more manageable."
>
> *Lisa Runden, CEO*

Why did it pay off?

Through Cradle to Cradle certification, the company achieves an unprecedented level of transparency regarding its material flows: It is possible to track the location of packaging at any time, as well as how often it has been used, cleaned, or repaired. This depth of data enables targeted management of material cycles, lays the foundation for innovation, and supports compliance with regulatory requirements and the growing demands of business partners.

WBG Pooling thus combines environmental and economic benefits:

- Shorter transport routes and the reusability of load carriers lead to lower packaging procurement costs in the long term.
- Already today, customers are reducing their costs by an average of 25% by switching from conventional packaging to the pooling system.
- As part of the audit processes between 2023 and 2024, water consumption for cleaning the packaging was reduced by 25% and the use of cleaning agents by 43%.
- Up to 98% of the materials can be reused in an equivalent manner. A single piece of packaging remains in use for about ten years and goes through up to 164 usage cycles during that time. This results in clear long-term benefits.

98%
Reuse

2022 Launch of Cradle-to-Cradle certifications for key product groups at WBG Pooling. First systematic exploration of closed-loop material cycles.

2023 Establishment of the Sustainability Management department at the parent company. Close collaboration with Controlling, Purchasing, Quality Management, and the Fleet Management department. Expansion of stakeholder dialogue, including with banks and financing partners.

2024 Gründung der Abteilung Sustainability Management in der Muttergesellschaft. Enge Zusammenarbeit mit Controlling, Einkauf, Qualitätsmanagement und Fuhrpark. Ausbau des Stakeholder-Dialogs, u.a. mit Banken und Finanzierungspartnern.

2025 Development of a group-wide sustainability strategy with a clear focus on the circular economy and reusable products. Introduction of a Code of Conduct for business partners and a sustainable procurement policy.

2026-2027 (Re-)certification of additional product groups under the Cradle to Cradle standard. Further development of risk analyses for key suppliers and their gradual integration into operational decision-making processes.

Conclusion & Outlook

The Runden Group is making targeted investments in the future viability of its own companies. In doing so, it is setting an example and encouraging other market participants to become more actively involved in the circular economy. It is not calling on policymakers to reduce regulation, but rather to provide more concrete support: data requirements and industry-specific solutions can facilitate entry into the sector and improve comparability. Furthermore, closer integration of regulation, funding instruments, and financial markets is crucial. Reliable framework conditions and targeted incentives are necessary to make sustainable business models more economically attractive and to enable their scaling—especially in price-driven markets.

The Runden Group's Sustainability Team