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Why be Green

Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts



Quick Guide to Sustainability

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The Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts has been a leader in the movement towards sustainable business for over 30 years. As a member of SBN, you know better than anyone that sustainability in business is multidimensional. It's not just about creating environmentally friendly business practices, though that is certainly a part of it. Business sustainability is also about building strong relationships with people and communities that are mutually beneficial. Lastly, and importantly, business sustainability is about making sure that your business is around for a long, long time.

As customers, employees, and investors increasingly prioritize sustainability as they look for businesses to support, it is becoming an increasingly competitive advantage for businesses to jump on board. According to Kearney, a business consultancy, the number of consumers who say that they consider sustainability in purchase decisions is 83% (as of April 10, 2020), up from 71% a year before

Luckily, there are plenty of ways for your business to focus on sustainability, and it's important that you choose to work on the areas that make the most sense for your business.

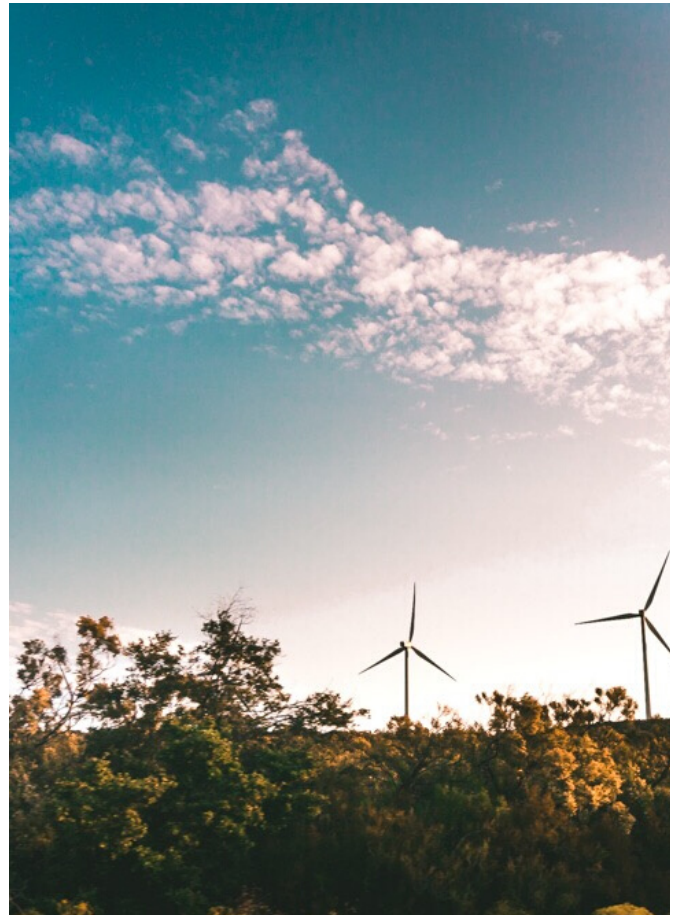
Less Carbon, More Profit

We know that reducing our carbon footprint is critical if we want to mitigate climate disruption (a term that acknowledges that changes are not passive or natural). Climate mitigation has a very narrow definition in the business context - it is a focus only on shrinking your businesses carbon footprint. For example, decreasing your consumption of single use plastics only factors into this type of environmental accounting through the decrease in carbon generated from their manufacture and shipping.

Often, making a conscious effort to decrease carbon emissions is good for your wallet, and it has the added benefit of being good marketing at the same time. For example, choosing ground transport for shipping is cheaper and better for the environment. And if you offer free shipping to customers, pointing out to them that ground transport is the lower carbon option will encourage them to choose that, while also signaling that the environment is a priority for you.

Low-carbon Luxury

ARIELLE, a small fashion brand in New York City, has committed themselves to minimizing their impact on the environment by manufacturing their clothing locally, in the city's garment district, and by transporting goods by bicycle wherever possible. This commitment has given them an edge in a saturated market of small fashion brands, by making them a go-to for those people committed to supporting low-carbon businesses.



Being conscious of your shop's heating and cooling habits is also an easy fix. Keeping windows or doors open to signal that you're open while the AC is on is a waste of energy and money. Instead, consider a chalkboard or speaker. Bigger changes might include working with your landlord to install energy efficient windows or solar panels.

These changes don't have to be huge, but making sure you are aware of your businesses' carbon footprint (there are plenty of free calculators, like [this one from UC Berkeley](#)) gives you the power to control it.

Steps you take to shrink your carbon-footprint don't have to be earth-shattering. Small changes over time count too.

Make it Circular

Business depends on materialism. You need customers that want to buy things in order to stay in business, but at its core, the chain of buy → use → toss is depleting the world's resources. Entirely new business models and manufacturing methods have emerged as businesses and consumers begin to acknowledge that this is not sustainable in any sense of the word. The image of a circle has been used to summarize the “reduce, reuse, refuse, recycle” mindset. There are three somewhat overlapping spaces of circularity, and your small business can support all of them.

Firstly, **circular product design** places a heavy focus on using as much recycled or renewable material (like natural fibers) as possible in a product, and then designing that product itself to be repaired or recycled. Applied broadly, “circular product design” could include dishes at restaurants, and packaging at retail stores. Creating dishes that use as many parts of the raw food you buy as possible minimizes both waste and the amount of raw material that you need to purchase. For retail stores, making sure that any products repair options are well marked, and making gift packaging old newspapers or reusable bags contribute positively to reducing waste through leveraging circular product design.



Clean MUD

MUD Jeans, founded in the Netherlands, offers circularity at every level. They manufacture using recycled jeans, saving more than 20,000 pairs from landfills so far, and 90% less water than is the industry standard. MUD also does not use leather patches or tags on their jeans, as leather cannot be recycled, and is a carbon intensive material. They are also pioneering a unique leasing model for jeans so that when a customer wants a new style, MUD can recirculate, repair, or recycle the pair.

Secondly, **circular manufacturing** is a method that involves using as much recycled material as possible, and minimizing waste like water and byproduct in the manufacturing process. Sourcing goods from manufacturers that have adopted this mindset means that you are supporting these companies, and ensuring that the goods you sell can be recycled rather than trashed at the end of their lives.

Lastly, **circular business models** promote good consumer behavior and ensure that “reduce, reuse, refuse, recycle” is carried from manufacturer to consumer and back to manufacturer. Creating incentives programs for repairing or recycling products from your business lowers environmental impact and, if designed correctly, increases consumer loyalty because customers have to continue buying with you in order to reap recycling benefits.

Putting People First

People may not be an obvious aspect of sustainability, but human capital can be depleted in the same way the environment can be if treated improperly. The first step in making sure you are treating people sustainably is ensuring that your workers are being paid fairly, and sourcing goods from manufacturers that are doing the same.

Creating regenerative human capital means happy employees and satisfied customers.

Activism Over Coffee

Trying to carve out a niche in a saturated market, the black owners of [Playground Coffee](#) in Brooklyn decided that the shop would not only be a spot to get a morning pick-me-up, but also a space for education and advocacy in their community. By running an organizing space, radio show, and community organization for kids, they have developed a loyal customer base of people who feel at home at Playground Coffee.

Additionally, getting involved with your community is a great way to increase morale and employee satisfaction. The term “enlightened self-interest” has risen to popularity in recent years to describe a mindset of doing good for others that translates into dividends for your business. For example, sponsoring little league sports or a community block party is good for your community, but also gets your name out to a broader audience of potential customers and employees.

Another opportunity for creating regenerative human capital is participating in apprentice or mentorship programs. Many communities have programs that connect capable but underserved populations to jobs that they might succeed at given a little support. Apprenticeship opportunities can be tailored to your needs and might be centered around customer service or technical skill development.



Why Now?

In the wake of COVID-19, communities understand more than ever the importance of their local businesses. You also understand the importance of your local communities. The most resilient small businesses are woven into the social fabric of the spaces they are a part of. When you support your local communities, those communities act as a sort of insurance, so that when your business struggles, they rally in support.

Additionally, the violence that swelled around the country in the first weeks of June, 2020 serves as a critical reminder of the imperative of fair treatment, and of the responsibility that those with privilege have to use that power to lift up other voices.

Resources

Learn more about the financial argument for including sustainability in your mission:

[FoodDive reporting on consumer views on sustainability during pandemic](#)

[Connecticut Sustainable Business Council's business case for sustainability](#)

Learn more about sustainability:

[2020 Sustainability Trends](#)

[UW Sustainable Management's Triple Bottom Line resource](#)

Learn more about assessing your environmental impact:

[Quick Impact Assessment, by the B Corp people](#)

[Green America's how-to on conducting a Sustainability Audit](#)

Learn more about getting support during COVID-19:

[The Sustainable Business Network's small business COVID-19 resources](#)

Learn more about being a strong ally to disenfranchised communities:

[Pledge to stock 15% of your shelves with products from black-owned businesses](#)

[Mentor another small business owner](#)