



THE IN-
DEPEND-
ANT
SOURCING
SUSTAINABLE
FASHION
RETAILER
SUSTAIN-
ABILITY
TOOLKIT

THE SHOP ENVIRONMENT



As we explored in the previous chapter, the majority of your business' footprint will come from your suppliers but making changes in your shop environment still has an important role to play. Any step, no matter how small, is important if we are to meet the UK government's [net zero target by 2050](#). It also helps demonstrate your commitment to sustainability to your customers and actions such as cutting out waste and making your shop more energy efficient can save you money too.

Many retailers are already highly conscious of many of these issues and being prudent is in their nature as a business owner. New initiatives and products are coming to the fore all the time to help retailers improve in these areas so it's worth continuing your research in this space and speaking with other business owners to find helpful tips and ideas.

Joining initiatives and campaigns in this space is also a great way to get help and demonstrate your commitment to your customers.

- Key issues within the shop environment include:
- Packaging (both consumer-facing and from suppliers)
- Water, electricity and gas use in shops and offices
- End-of-season stock
- Shop fittings and fixtures
- Ecommerce



Some of these issues will be more pertinent to you as a business than others. You may already be doing things you didn't realise were sustainable. Below are some ideas, resources and tools that you might wish to engage with if you'd like to go further with some of these issues...

The British Independent Retailers' Association has a [sustainability hub](#) with lots of helpful ideas and campaigns such as the #BeatTheReceipt campaign to reduce paper waste. On the issue of plastic waste, the [UK Plastics Pact](#), while mostly aimed at larger businesses, is a helpful tool and way to demonstrate your commitment to your customers.

THE SHOP ENVIRONMENT

There are now numerous ways to buy more sustainable options for packaging, clothing hangers, mannequins and shopfitting but also consider how you (or your customers) might dispose of them responsibly at the end of their life. Non-branded packaging might make it more reusable, for example, or offering former display units on waste reduction platforms such as Freecycle or Olio.

In addition to reducing energy usage and switching to a renewable energy supplier, check with your local bank to see if any help is available to make your business premise more energy efficient. The [Energy Saving Trust](#) can also help you as a business. Your website also contributes to your footprint and the [Eco-Friendly Web Alliance](#) can help you reduce its impact and get accredited as an eco-friendly or carbon-positive website.

STAFF

While tracing worker rights in your supply chain can be a difficult task, addressing worker rights should begin in your own company. Many independent retailers are excellent employers, but there are still some ways they can go further to commit to this:



- Paying a living wage. The [Living Wage Foundation](#) campaigns for a level of pay which they calculate each year to represent the true cost of living in the UK. You can become a certified Living Wage employer to commit to this and show potential employees your commitment to being a good employer. Living Wage employers also have a plan to pay a living wage to contractors. Support is available to help you become a Living Wage employer too.
- Paying interns. Many businesses unknowingly break the law by not paying interns. The [government website](#) outlines the limited exceptions for paying minimum wage.

You may also be unwittingly funding fossil fuel projects through your employees' pension schemes. Make My Money Matter is a helpful resource to understand the role UK pensions play in the climate crisis and what you can do as an individual and as an employer to put your pension to better use.

THE SHOP ENVIRONMENT

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Mike Barry

Small businesses are not typically part of chambers of commerce or other chartered institutes, but they can organise, however informal, businesses around them on the same high street. There's a great opportunity for shared conversation. There are a number of councils in places like Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow, that are starting to create hubs and collaborations for small businesses to work together in those communities, irrespective of what they sell. Reach out to the council to see what it is doing to bring people together.

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Local spaces and communities are hugely powerful when it comes to implementing a more sustainable way of life for everyone. As a retailer, why not use the space and the role you have in your local area to host events related to sustainability or partner with other local businesses also helping customers live a more sustainable life.

Joining local activism groups can be a great way to find other local people to support you in your efforts. Both [Friends of the Earth](#) and [Greenpeace](#) run local action groups. If campaigning doesn't feel like the right step for you, your local business association may have a group dedicated to supporting local entrepreneurs in doing green business, or if not, you could start one.

No one person, or one business, can tackle the climate crisis on their own but bringing people together for change can have a huge ripple effect.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

[British Independent Retailers Association Sustainability Hub](#)

[Energy Saving Trust](#)

[Eco-Friendly Web Alliance](#)

[WRAP UK Plastics Pact](#)

[Make My Money Matter](#)

[Living Wage Foundation](#)

ACTIVITY SHEET



Reach out to three other businesses local to you (they don't have to be retailers) and **ask them to share five things they do to run their business in a socially and environmentally responsible way**. This could be via a message or next time you're chatting to them. You may pick up some good ideas and start an important conversation

NAME OF BUSINESS:

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NAME OF BUSINESS:

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NAME OF BUSINESS:

- 1.
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An example message you might send:

Hi XXX,

I'm currently researching more ways I can run the shop in a more sustainable way, and I'm interested to hear what other local businesses are doing. I was wondering if you'd be happy to share five things you do to reduce your impact on the environment and create a good workplace for your employees? This could be pledges you've taken, initiatives you're part of, how you reduce waste or plastic use, how you're reducing your energy use, employee perks or anything else you're proud of. I'd be happy to share some of the things we do with you so that we can learn from each other and help each other make a difference!

THE GLOBAL ETHICAL FASHION MARKET
IS EXPECTED TO GROW FROM
\$6.35 BILLION IN 2019 TO
\$8.25 BILLION IN 2023 (+6.2%)
THE MARKET IS EXPECTED TO THEN
GROW TO **\$9.81 BILLION** IN 2025
AND BY A FURTHER
\$9.1 TO \$15.17 BILLION IN 2030



THREE QUARTERS

OF CONSUMERS SAY THEY THINK ABOUT

Sustainability

AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME WHEN
SHOPPING FOR FASHION.



SEARCHES FOR
UPCYCLED,
RECYCLED
REPURPOSED
& REWORKED
ITEMS ON FASHION
SHOPPING PLATFORM
Lyst INCREASED
177%
YEAR-ON-YEAR IN



2021

SEARCHES FOR
FOR
VEGAN
LEATHER
INCREASED 178%
YEAR-ON-YEAR IN



2021

DEMAND
FOR PRE-ORDER
ITEMS ON *LYST*
UP 64%

IN 2021

CONSUMER DEMAND:

The growing market for sustainable products

SOURCING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLIERS

The hard work of adopting more sustainable materials, designing for longevity and evaluating and monitoring labour rights in the supply chain is down to brands. It might feel like you have little control over fashion production, and, therefore, the sustainable impact of it, but retail is how sustainable practices become business.

Retailers play a really important role in encouraging brands to adopt more sustainable practices. Brands want to meet the needs of customers and if those needs include being able to provide adequate proof that garments were made

in a responsible way, they'll adapt to provide it. For your existing suppliers, your relationship with them can help them understand what customers are looking for and, if they're willing to make changes, your loyalty to them can help with this transition.

For pioneering labels who are leading the way in sustainable fashion, your business can help them grow and thrive financially so that the biggest brands of tomorrow also meet the needs of today's world.

ASKING QUESTIONS

So much of this journey starts with asking the right questions. We ask questions to our suppliers all the time: **What's the price? What's the material? When was the brand founded? When can you deliver?** It's time to bring more questions into our conversations that relate to the environmental and social impact of products.

A common question you might hear from customers is **"Is it sustainable?"** The problem with this question is that there is no set definition for what constitutes a sustainable fashion product. It depends on numerous factors throughout the entire lifecycle of the product and these factors will vary depending on the type of product it is.



SOURCING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLIERS

Instead, more direct questions about where the materials come from, where the product is made and what the brand is doing to reduce its environmental impact will give you a clearer idea of how to answer. So this is the approach you should also adopt when speaking to your suppliers. No brand is perfect but answers that come across as detailed and informed are a good sign. The more you start having these conversations, the more you will begin to develop a sense of what constitutes a strong answer.



Safia Minney

In the future, it won't just be a question of which are the most aesthetically appropriate brands to choose from, it will become essential that they are judged through a lens which is about being modern slavery free, respectful of human rights and also, increasingly, made with respect to nature.

WHERE TO SOURCE BRANDS

There are more and more brands who are starting their business with a sustainable mission at its core and more established brands who are making progress on these issues. That means a greater variety to choose from and a strong likelihood of finding something that fits with your store's style.

At [Pure](#), we're making it easier to identify which brands are leading the way on sustainability issues with an area of the show dedicated to them. We're also offering every brand who is working towards one or more of the UN Sustainable Development Goals the opportunity to showcase that on their stand with a badge. We hope that can act as a good conversation starter.

There are also a number of other organisations who have a directory of brands in this space such as [Common Objective](#) and [Good On You](#).

Organisations who certify brands and products often have a directory of accredited brands on their website too.

SOURCING SUSTAINABLE SUPPLIERS

CERTIFICATION

Certification is a great way to ensure brands meet certain standards that are verified by a trusted third party. There are many certificates available covering different criteria including fair labour practices, organic materials, responsible forestry and vegan products. Some certificates apply to end products, others apply to companies, specific facilities (such as factories) or textiles. If you do stock any certified products, it's worth doing some brief research on exactly what it means so that you can fully inform your own customers.

For some smaller brands, certification can be cost prohibitive or impractical for other reasons despite responsible production. **Don't be afraid to ask why they don't have certification and be open to listening to their reasoning and consider whether you feel they still meet your standards.**

Below are some of the most common certificates you might encounter in fashion.

CATEGORY	LABEL	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	FURTHER INFORMATION
Ethical business	B Corp	Any company can undergo B Corp's rigorous assessment of their environmental and social impact. It includes a wide range of factors from diversity and inclusion, to supply chain practices and carbon footprint. To be certified as a B Corp the company must score 80 or more (out of 200). The assessment is redone every 3 years with the aim to continually make improvements.	www.bcorporation.net
	Cradle to Cradle	Cradle to Cradle certifies specific products (rather than businesses) with a promise that they are safe, circular and responsible made. They assess a product's lifecycle for the safety of the materials for humans and the environment, circularity, carbon footprint, care for water and soil and social fairness.	www.c2ccertified.org

CATEGORY	LABEL	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	FURTHER INFORMATION
Low impact materials	Better Cotton Initiative	The Better Cotton Initiative is a sourcing scheme which encourages investment in cotton which is better for the environment and farmers. If you see this logo, it does not guarantee that the product is made from “better cotton” but instead it means the brand has committed to an initial 10% of its total cotton needs coming from better sources upon joining with the aim to increase this to 50% within five years.	www.bettercotton.org
	Forest Stewardship Council	The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certifies forests to ensure that they are being responsibly managed for biodiversity, environmental longevity and with fair treatment of local communities and workers. Products which source from these forests can carry the certificate. In fashion this could apply to paper clothing tags as well as garments made from viscose, lyocell and modal.	uk.fsc.org/fashion
	OEKO-TEX Leather Standard	The Leather Standard label by OEKO-TEX tests leather products against harmful chemicals to protect human and ecological life. It can be found on leather at various stages in the value chain from material to finished product.	www.oeko-tex.com/en/our-standards/leather-standard-by-oeko-tex
	OEKO-TEX Standard 100	Standard 100 tests textiles for substances harmful for humans and the environment. It can be applied to fabrics and threads or to finished products where every component (including zips, linings, buttons and thread) has been verified.	www.oeko-tex.com/en/our-standards/standard-100-by-oeko-tex

CATEGORY	LABEL	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	FURTHER INFORMATION
	Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS)	GOTS verifies organic textile products against environmental and social criteria. It can be applied to fabrics, yarns and clothes.	www.global-standard.org
	Woolmark	The Woolmark logo can be applied to any product that has been verified by the organisation as containing wool and meeting certain quality tests such as colourfastness.	www.woolmark.com/industry/certification/
	Recycled Content Standard	Owned by Textile Exchange, the Recycled Content Standard verifies that a product contains recycled materials under their set definition (which includes both pre and post-consumer waste).	www.textileexchange.org/standards/recycled-claim-standard-global-recycled-standard/
	Global Recycled Standard	The Global Recycled Standard adheres to the same criteria as the Recycled Content Standard (listed above) but goes a step further in also ensuring harm to people and the environment is minimised in the process.	www.textileexchange.org/standards/recycled-claim-standard-global-recycled-standard/
Animal welfare	PETA-Approved Vegan	The animal rights' charity offers PETA-Approved certification to fashion brands who don't use animal-derived materials. An entire brand can be certified or it can be used on specific products within a brand's range.	www.peta.org.uk/living/peta-approved-vegan/

CATEGORY	LABEL	WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	FURTHER INFORMATION
Worker welfare	Fairtrade	Fairtrade ensures that workers are paid a fair price and treated well. They work with producers in several countries across South America, Africa and Asia on a number of consumer products. Within fashion, it certifies cotton farmers which requires buyers to pay a minimum price set by Fairtrade and ensures that the factories processing the cotton meets the standards of the International Labour Organization. The Fairtrade Foundation also works with gold miners.	www.fairtrade.org.uk/buying-fairtrade/clothes
	SA8000	The SA8000 developed by Social Accountability International ensures the highest standards of worker treatment across multiple industries. In fashion, it accredits manufacturers. To receive SA8000 certification, manufacturers must be audited by an accredited auditing firm to a set process.	www.sa-intl.org/programs/sa8000

HELPFUL RESOURCES

[Ethical Trade Initiative](#)

[Supply Compass](#)

[Common Objective](#)

[Textile Exchange](#)

[Good On You](#)

ACTIVITY SHEET



Pick an item of clothing for sale in your shop right now. Try to track its entire journey from raw material to finish product. Include every step from spinning the yarn, to dyeing, to any zips, buttons or embellishments that are added.

How much do you know about each step of the process for this specific garment? Do you know the name of the CMT factory it was made in? Do you know which country each step happened in?

Brainstorm a list of specific questions you could ask your current/prospective suppliers to understand what they're doing for sustainability?

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LONDON

www.purelondon.com



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