

Guide from

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[Insert a line about your business here]

**Essential guide to producing sustainable products and services**

Consumers and other businesses are increasingly making purchasing decisions based on environmental and sustainability concerns. Making your products and services more sustainable can protect your livelihood as well as the planet.

Producing sustainable products and services is a strategic issue. The most successful strategies cover from the concept and design stages of product and service development, through production and delivery to end of life and disposal. Domestic and global legislation is also requiring businesses to think more holistically about the lifecycle of their goods.

**1. Sustainability benefits**

**Ensure regulatory compliance**

* Producing sustainable products and services will mean you are more likely to be aware of and comply with environmental regulations.
* Key areas where you need to comply with legislation include waste management, health and safety-related laws covering hazardous chemicals or dangerous substances, recycling, packaging and anti-pollution measures.

**Maximise potential for cost savings**

* Minimising waste, getting the most out of materials and reducing energy consumption are key parts of any sustainable development policy – all of which can lead to cost savings.

**Reduce the tax you pay**

* Reducing waste production and energy consumption can reduce the built-in costs of environmental taxes such as landfill tax and the climate change levy.

**Use the marketing benefits**

* Consumers and businesses are increasingly attracted to environmentally sound suppliers. A proven commitment can both help safeguard existing business and extend your reach.
* Offering sustainable products and services can add value to your products and services, possibly providing a point of differentiation with competitors. Some premium products may be more saleable if their environmental credentials can be proved.

**2. Assess your products and services**

**Adopt a 'cradle to grave' approach**

* Assessing your products and services throughout their lifecycle is essential to making the most of your commitment.
* Failing to consider any of the stages in the lifecycle can fatally undermine your attempts: for example, if your product can only be disposed of through landfill.

**Review your raw materials**

* What are the raw materials you routinely use?
* Where do you source them?
* Are your raw materials sustainable?
* Do they contain any toxins or dangerous chemicals?
* How far do they have to travel to reach you?
* Have your suppliers made a commitment to sustainability?

**Assess your business processes**

* What energy sources do you use?
* How much energy and water do you use?
* How much waste do you create?
* How do you dispose of your waste?
* Do you use packaging? If so, what type and how much? How easy is it to recycle?

**Examine how your products or services are delivered and sold**

* What transport systems are routinely used by your business?
* How are products delivered?
* What sales methods do you use to sell your products and services?

**Consider how your goods are used**

* How durable are your products?
* Are they easy to upgrade or repair?
* Can their lifespan be extended?
* Is there any secondary market for your goods?
* Do your customers use your goods or services to their maximum potential?
* 'Ecodesign' regulations set limits on how much energy household appliances and other products can use, and require manufacturers to make them easier to repair.

**Analyse end-of-life issues for goods**

* What do your customers do when your goods reach the end of their useful life?
* Do they dispose of them? If so, how?
* Can they be repaired, recycled or reused?

**Isolate the issues you need to address**

* The lifecycle assessment will immediately show any areas of your business that require attention as part of a commitment to sustainability.
* It's likely that some small issues can be easily addressed, while others may need some fundamental rethinking of your processes.
* If you can see 'quick wins', take them straight away. For example, if you are about to purchase plant or equipment, consider the most sustainable option which is compatible with your existing kit.
* Larger issues should be considered as part of your wider strategy to develop sustainable processes.

**3. Comply with legislation**

**Check environmental law in your sector**

* When committing to sustainability, you must be sure that you comply with relevant environment and health and safety regulations.
* There are no overriding regulations specifically defining sustainable processes – but if you are failing to comply with key environmental and safety laws, your business will not be running sustainably.

**Consider waste regulations**

Every business has a legally defined 'duty of care' to ensure safe treatment and disposal of the waste it creates. There are also specific, detailed regulations covering:

* effluent
* incineration
* animal by-products
* contamination of land and water
* electrical or electronic goods
* greenhouse gas and ozone depleting substance emissions
* dangerous or hazardous waste

**Review packaging regulations**

* If you use packaging or sell products that are packaged, you must minimise the amount of packaging used, ensure the packaging can be reused or recycled and doesn't contain high levels of heavy metals.
* If you have a turnover of more than £2 million and handle more than 50 tonnes of packaging a year, you must register with a compliance scheme or your environmental regulator, and recycle and recover specific amounts of the waste.

**Check key health and safety requirements**

Some elements of health and safety legislation will have an impact on sustainability, such as:

* safe use and disposal of dangerous or hazardous substances, such as chemicals
* noise, dust and odour control
* pollution control

**Assess other requirements if you manufacture, distribute or sell goods**

There are sustainability-related regulations covering a variety of specific goods or components. These include regulations that cover:

* electronic and electrical equipment – the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) regulations and the Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) regulations
* vehicles that have reached the end of their useful lives (End-of-Life Vehicle regulations)
* goods that use batteries: many batteries must be recycled

**4. Develop sustainable processes**

**Source and use sustainable raw materials**

* You may be able to use more sustainable raw materials simply by a process of substitution. For example, you could use recycled paper or FSC wood from certified sustainable sources.
* Examine the use of other businesses' waste. Could you use another firm's waste (or could they use yours)?

**Consider using certified sustainable supplies**

* Opportunities for sourcing sustainable goods and services are increasing in many business sectors. For example, you can buy certified sustainable palm oil as well as Fairtrade Foundation goods.

**Reduce waste**

* Audit your waste. Check all your business processes and see where you may be able to increase efficiency. For example, can you reuse materials you are currently discarding?
* Find out how and where waste is being created. Remember that waste isn't just what you throw away – it's also where you are not getting the best use out of a resource.
* Focus first on the processes that have the worst environmental impact. For example, if you're sending a lot of waste to landfill, assess your other options for this waste first.

**Use the waste hierarchy to find the most effective route to waste management**

Consider your options in the following order:

* Prevention – can you avoid creating the waste?
* Minimisation – if it is absolutely necessary, can you reduce it?
* Reuse – can you reuse any of your waste?
* Recycling – if you can find no further use for the waste, can it be recycled?
* Energy recovery – can the waste be used to create energy?
* Disposal – the least favourable option.

**Cut energy use**

* Walking round your business is a surprisingly effective way to uncover where energy is being used unnecessarily. For example, you may find that heating systems or machinery are switched on at times when they're not really needed.
* If you have staff, it's a good idea to involve them in the walk-round. As they are using the facilities day in, day out, they may be able to see more energy-saving measures than you.

**Minimise packaging**

* Reducing packaging can cut your costs as well as making your business more sustainable.
* Consider how much you can reduce your packaging. For example, are you using containers that are not completely filled? Can you use thinner or less packaging to carry out the same function?
* Consider reusing packaging. Can you switch to reusable packaging or tailor your packaging so it can be used throughout the supply chain, avoiding repackaging?
* If you can't further reduce or reuse packaging, try to ensure that what remains is recyclable or biodegradable.

**Review your premises**

Key areas to consider are:

* Making the building itself moderate temperature and humidity. This can be achieved through careful consideration of ventilation, windows and siting of heat-generating equipment.
* Careful use of planting can create areas of shade reducing the temperature of buildings and reliance on air conditioning equipment. Vegetation and trees can also improve air quality and reduce surface runoff during heavy rain.
* Self-generating power: it may be possible to use methods such as solar, wind, air or ground source heat or biofuels with small adaptations to your premises.
* Making the most of your space: keeping your premises compact will reduce the amount of 'dead space' you provide heat and light to.
* Eco-friendly equipment: you can consider a wide range of measures ranging from environmentally friendly insulation and rain water collection through to compost toilets.

**5. Design for sustainability**

**Consider product sustainability from the start of the design stage**

* Design is more than just what something looks like – it is a complete plan for how something is created and used from the beginning to end of its life.
* At the design stage, consider if you can find ways to make the goods or services more efficient to use or make them last longer? Can you make their end of life more sustainable?
* Are there raw materials that you can use that are more sustainable that perform a similar function? And if there are, can you adapt your existing processes to make use of these materials on other goods or services?
* Can you improve your business model to make it more sustainable? For example, can you source materials from local suppliers, cutting transport costs and fuel use?

**6. Prove your commitment**

**Use a labelling scheme to demonstrate product sustainability to customers**

* No one scheme is a 'gold standard' so you should consider which environmental claims are the most important to your customer base and find a scheme that matches those concerns as closely as possible.
* Check competitors' products and services to see what standards and claims are already being made to your customers.
* Ask your trade association about environmental labelling and accreditation schemes in your sector.

**Identify any widely-recognised labelling schemes that might be appropriate**

For example:

* Soil Association organic certification
* Forest Stewardship Council certification, proving that any wood used in products comes from a well-managed source
* recycling labels showing that products or parts of products are suitable for recycling

**Make sure that you comply with mandatory labelling requirements**

* For example, for household electrical appliances and cars.

**You can make your own environmental claims**

* The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has published [green claims guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/make-a-green-claim).
* While it is not a legal requirement to follow the guidance, bear in mind that Trading Standards and the Advertising Standards Authority can take action against you if you make incorrect, false or unclear environmental statements about your business.

**You can also introduce an environmental management system**

* Your system can be certified to a recognised environmental standard, such as ISO 14001.

**Signpost**

* Find information on [WRAP funding programmes](https://wrap.org.uk/what-we-do/our-services/grants-and-investments) and advice on improving resource efficiency and reducing waste.
* Download [The journey to Net Zero for SMEs](https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/the-journey-to-net-zero-for-smes) from the Carbon Trust.
* Read government guidance on [packaging regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/packaging-producer-responsibilities).
* Find guidance on [Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) recycling](https://www.hse.gov.uk/waste/waste-electrical.htm) from the Health and Safety Executive.
* Read government guidance on the [restriction of hazardous substances (RoHS) regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rohs-compliance-and-guidance).
* Read government guidance on the [End-of-Life Vehicle regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/elv).
* Read government guidance on [batteries regulations](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/batteries).
* Read government guidance on [making an environmental claim](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/make-a-green-claim).
* Find [Environment Agency](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency/services-information) services and information for businesses in England and Wales (03708 506 506).
* Find [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](https://www.sepa.org.uk/) services and information.
* Get information from the [Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/) (0300 200 7852).

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## *May 2023*

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