

Got Eco?

Sustainable Business

It ain't easy being green. We're all feeling the crunch. When it comes to being eco-friendly, who really cares anyway? In this crazy resource-constrained world, faced with rising consumer expectations and government regulations, businesses continually strain to bring on the next innovation to gain market share. But how do we do that, given the current situation? What is the way forward?

For a manufacturing business and all the way down to the end-user, green business is good business. Not only is being environmentally-destructive and uncaring bad PR for any brand, the opposite will increase efficiency, and reduce energy and resource consumption to save money. It will also help you sleep better at night.

The outdoor industry—the brands building down jackets, dome tents, backpacks, hiking boots, water filters and snowshoes—have come up with one solution in the Eco Index. More than 400 businesses have come together to discuss the challenges and solutions to being more sustainable as an industry and are set to launch the Eco Index, which has already changed the way these companies do business in mid-2011.

BY MARK TROTZUK

About the author: Mark Troczuk founded Boardroom ECO Apparel, an apparel design and manufacturing company located in Vancouver, B.C. in 1996. Boardroom specializes in custom manufacturing and technical, fashionable and environmentally-friendly clothing solutions.



Although the Eco Index is a tool developed primarily for the outdoor industry, it is a model that the promotional-products industry should take note of because of the principles and general approach that guide its development. The Eco Index model can be applied to any product and any industry.

The promotional products industry is waking up to startling new Consumer Protection Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) legislation and seems mired knee-deep in green-wash and misinformation. As we move forward into the new decade, we will need an effective strategy to deal not only with legislation like CPSIA, but with other regulations as well as the demand for more sustainable products from corporate, government and private customers.



RECYCLED POLYESTER - HOW IT'S MADE

Step 1: Plastic PET containers are picked up at community recycling centers, then sorted by type and color.	Step 2: They are stripped of their labels and caps, washed and crushed, then chopped into flake.	Step 3: The flakes undergo a second melting and are made into consistently shaped pellets.	Step 4: The pellets are melted and extruded to make fiber. The fiber is crimped, cut, drawn and stretched, then baled.	Step 5: The baled fiber can be processed into fabric for a variety of textile product end uses.
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Garments that contain a recycled fiber component are growing in popularity in the industry. (Chart courtesy the author)

Green practices = green dollars

For those supplier businesses that have stayed the course, it has been an uphill battle within an industry that discouragingly seems to reward inaction on the sustainability front. However, businesses that have embraced sustainability have been rewarded with their share of lucrative contracts from those corporations that measure the bottom-line in more than maximized profits. Whether it is a corporation that heavily markets green in their general messaging (and who doesn't these days?), or one that is trying to reduce its carbon footprint, the commission goes to the distributor that offers a truly sustainable product and stands behind what they sell.

In fact, many distributor businesses have changed the way they do business, aligning their product offering with more environmentally-friendly suppliers. It is these nouveau-green enterprises that have experienced growth in an economy that seems to go the other way for everyone else.

Although it has become a casually-traded anecdote, it is true that green practices equal green dollars. The three main factors—dwindling resources, increasing regulation and consumer

demand—make it clear that green business is not just an option, but essential to being competitive in the new economy.

The elephant in the room

Although it has been stalled and postponed numerous times, sooner or later, our industry will have to face it the culmination of revisions to the CPSIA. In the Promotional Products Association International's (PPAI) Guide to Navigating the CPSIA, we learn that "it is illegal to place on the market or distribute into commerce any consumer product that is not in compliance with applicable regulation. Whether a supplier or distributor, you are placing a product on the market and therefore must be confident in the product's regulatory compliance."





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THE ECO INDEX:

The Eco Index is a tool to assess the environmental impact of individual products. More than 400 companies, including familiar name brands (The North Face, Brooks, REI, Carhartt, Columbia, Eddie Bauer, New Balance, Hanes, Nike, and many others) have come together as The Eco Working Group, to figure out an effective way to deal with the complex challenge of sustainable products and practices.

Product environmental sustainability is complicated. One must consider multiple impact types along a complex, long and interwoven supply chain in order to get the true picture of the environmental 'footprint' of a product.

Therefore, at the foundation of the eco index tools, there exists a framework.

This framework was created to guide the process of index development, as well as the use of the tools. It has provided a common platform by which environmental impact is referred and has served as an effective 'road-map' for the work group.

The Eco Index is guided by five key principles:

Collaboration—Because the challenges we face are so complex, it has taken unprecedented collaboration and sharing of research and best practices among more than 100 companies in the outdoor industry to get this far. Businesses that would normally be considered in fierce competition for market share, Adidas and Nike, for example, have committed to working together to tackle the shared goal of sustainability.

Open-Source—The Eco Index is a totally "open source" model, meaning that the tool is freely available for use by all companies without restriction.

Transparency—It is critical that anyone can know exactly how the Eco Index works, that anyone can view and contribute to its ongoing development.

Scalability—Because smaller businesses may not have the same resources as larger ones to invest in sustainability, it is important that the Eco Index is modular and scalable to work for all companies, big and small. It is also important that the Eco Index can be applied to industries and sectors outside of the outdoor industry, to be most effective.

Global Reach—The Eco Index must be effective as a valuable tool for all members of the supply chain no matter where on the planet they are located, not just as a North American initiative.

At the core of the Index is the framework, consisting of the lifecycle stages; where an environmental impact is experienced within the supply chain, and the Lenses; what is impacted upon by the manufacturing of goods and services.

The Lifecycle Stages are divided into six parts:

1. Materials (subdivided to feedstock, raw materials, processing),
2. Packaging,
3. Product manufacturing and assembly,
4. Transport and distribution,
5. Use and service, and
6. End of life.

The Lenses are divided into seven parts:

1. Land-use intensity,
2. Water,
3. Waste,
4. Biodiversity,
5. Chemistry/toxics (people),
6. Chemistry/ toxics (environment), and
7. Energy use and greenhouse gas.

The Index, which is in the beta phase right now, but is expected to launch soon, takes the user through a series of questions about a product, with points attributed to that question. This comparative scoring system at indicator-level provides a standardized level achievement and the data capture tool at metric level provides a means to collect quantitative data.



What is the way forward? The Eco Index attempts to answer that. (Image courtesy the author)



This means that it is no longer okay to take your supplier's word as bond that the cotton used to build the T-shirt is indeed organic, that the dyes used are non-toxic and no impact to the environment for human health occurred along the way.

If a product is found to be non-compliant in any way, whether it is made using lead, PVC, or toxic substances, the decorator or distributor is responsible for it, all the way down the supply chain. Do you know specifically every material and every process that was used to get a product to you, from the very origin, to delivery at to your customer's door, and then the impact of end-of-life disposal or recycling? Didn't think so.

What many of us in the industry realized, is that being *eco* means not only asking the tough questions, but also being prepared to hear the answers... and doing something about it.

The three main factors—dwindling resources, increasing regulation and consumer demand—make it clear that green business is not just an option, but essential to being competitive in the new economy. (Image courtesy S&S Activewear)

Consider the whole life-cycle of any product—from resource extraction through processing and manufacturing, packaging, delivery, customer usage and end-of-life. Then consider the breadth of the supply chain for any product, and it becomes apparent that there are dozens, hundreds and thousands of touch points where the impact occurs.

Decorating businesses are now going to have to be responsible for every step of the supply-chain. You are being asked to have specific knowledge and to be responsible for the impact at every stage of a product's supply chain and life-cycle. Not only that, but you will be expected to prove

that you have mitigated the impact at each of these stages.

The way to do this is to accurately measure supply-chain and life-cycle impact. You can't manage what you don't measure. Sustainability is an enormously complex subject, and measuring it is very, very hard. Pw

Who are your Favorite Supplier Sales Reps?

These reps were nominated by the NBM Long Beach Show attendees for going above and beyond for them every day and at the show!

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of Marco Awards Group



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NANCY ESTIN
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RUBEN TORRES
of Nu Signs



SATURDAY'S SHOW WINNER

WALT MARKENS
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STAR REPCONNECTION
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Congratulations Reps!



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