

SUSTAINABILITY FOR SMEs



A GUIDE TO REDUCING YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT & ENHANCING YOUR BUSINESS

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INTRO

As a small or medium sized business, it can be overwhelming when it comes to trying to be more sustainable. There are so many barriers that you could be facing, like time, money and in-house knowledge.

If you're a purpose-led SME trying to reduce your environmental impact, then we are here to help. This guide is designed to give you some support and ideas based on some of the challenges that local businesses told us they were facing, including reduction in:

- Waste
- Energy
- Water
- Travel

Use the checklists provided in each section to track your progress.

TOP TIP #1: IDENTIFY YOUR BIGGEST IMPACTS

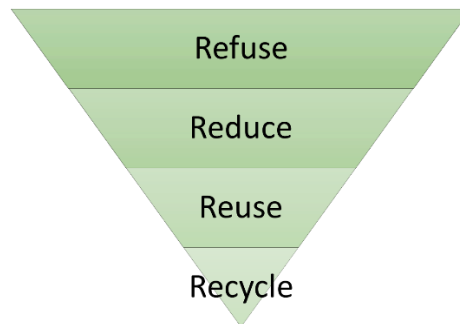
Every business will vary in terms of its business impacts. The key is to work out your main business activities and which ones have the biggest impact on the environment. For example, if you are an online business, you might find that packaging has the business environmental impact.

WASTE



I can't think of many businesses that do not have to consider the impact of their waste in some way, shape or form. Whether you're trying to reduce your waste or get rid of single use plastics, it really does affect us all. You may have seen in the news recently that countries like China and Malaysia are refusing to accept our waste anymore. (Yep, our recycling solution used to be shipping our waste abroad to countries that don't have

the facilities to deal with it and so dumped it in the ocean! Very "ecofriendly".) When in doubt, refer back to the waste hierarchy.



Waste Reduction Checklist

- Stop buying single use products & swap to reusable ones (coffee cups, water bottles, plastic bags).
- Set the default to double-sided printing to reduce paper.
- Introduce centralised waste bins & get rid of under desk ones so you can separate waste streams properly (e.g. recyclable or general waste).
- Donate old furniture to local charities or schools.
- Set a target for zero waste to landfill (you will need to engage with your waste provider on this).
- Encourage better recycling practices with employees by setting up competitions between floors / teams with prizes for the winners.
- Reduce the amount of packaging you use. This could be for items sent in the post or take-aways.

- Engage with customers on your waste goals to help them understand why you're doing what you're doing. Many shops offer discounts for bringing your own cup, which is great, but can you go a step further? Run a competition over the course of a week and ask customers to guess how many bits of microplastics are in a jar at the register (for example)? Winner gets a prize. This is a great conversation starter too.
- Organise take-backs of products that are harder to recycle, for example crisp packets and plastic bottle tops. Use this link to find out where these items can be recycled (often for free!) if kerbside recycling isn't available: <https://www.recyclenow.com/>.
- Make sure you know what your local council recycles as every council is different. Check here: <https://www.gov.uk/recycling-collections>.

TOP TIP #2: DO YOUR RESEARCH

If you are buying products that claim to be biodegradable, compostable or recyclable, make sure you understand exactly what that means. Compostable cups may only be compostable at commercial facilities which can reach higher temperatures and they will need to go in the food bin NOT the recycling bin. There are only a couple of locations in the UK that currently offer coffee cup recycling and they will ask that you have a separate bin for the cups & that they are free of liquids / stirrers, etc.

TOP TIP #3: GET ENGAGED

Waste is one of the hardest things to get right as you will need to engage with employees, suppliers & customers. If you don't communicate with them, all your efforts will go to waste (sorry...).

ENERGY

Energy consumption is another area that affects pretty much everyone and with the rising cost of energy, it makes good financial sense to do all you can to reduce the amount of energy you use.



Energy Reduction Checklist

- Upgrade your lighting to LEDs. This is a really quick win as you start saving immediately and you can easily make your money back in 2-3 years if not quicker.
- If your budget allows, consider installing motion or daylight sensors.
- Make sure your computers go into hibernate mode automatically when they haven't been used for a while.
- Buy appliances like kettles & dishwasher that have a good energy rating.
- For larger offices, make sure you can zone your heating and cooling systems according to requirements.
- Swap to a renewable energy provider. Take a look at companies like Bulb to see how much you could save: <https://bulb.co.uk/>.
- Take a look at what offers might be available to help you if you are planning on investing in energy efficiency. Companies like Greentech South offer free energy audits and funding for SMEs looking to reduce their energy consumption.

WATER



Although water may not be one of your bigger impacts, it is good practice to reduce the amount of water you use, especially as estimates show that in the UK, the amount of water lost from **leaks every day** is enough to meet the needs of **20 million people!**

Water Reduction Checklist

- Check for leaks. The easiest way to do this is to keep an eye on your water bills. If your bill shoots up unexpectedly, you could have a problem. You can get a refund on confirmed leaks as well through your water supplier.
- You can get freebies like save a flush bags from local water companies to help reduce your water use: <https://www.southernwater.co.uk/save-a-flush-form>.
- Install dual flush toilets.
- Sensors on taps can be a big help in reducing water use as they switch off automatically.
- If you have showers on site, install water-saving shower heads. Technology has come a long way, so water saving doesn't necessarily mean dribbly tap anymore.
- Buy appliances like dishwashers and washing machines with good water ratings.

TRAVEL

Transport accounts for nearly a quarter of UK greenhouse gas emissions, but it's not only the effects on the environment we should be concerned about. A recent study by King's College, London estimated that UK deaths linked to air pollution could be as high as 36,000 and this figure seems to be on the rise.



Travel Reduction Checklist

- Consider setting a company policy to encourage train travel over air travel, where appropriate.
- Buy locally to reduce emissions generated by getting your delivery to you.
- Buy food that is in season. Not only will it taste better but it won't need to be transported from another country to get to you.
- Consolidate your orders to reduce transport emissions. This will save you money and prevent stockpiling which could lead to additional waste.
- If you need to fly, try to choose direct flights as emissions during take-off are much higher.
- Off-set your travel emissions. Try this free online calculator to work out what your carbon emissions are: <https://www.carbonfootprint.com/calculator.aspx>.
- Encourage other modes of commuting to work like cycling or walking by providing shower facilities and bike racks. (See Top Tip #4 for more on this.)
- If you are meeting a client out of the office, suggest a location with good transport links to make it easier to avoid taking the car.

TOP TIP #4: IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH & WELLBEING

Encouraging your employees (or yourself!) to walk, run or cycle to work will improve productivity and reduce stress. If you don't have the space for shower facilities, look at partnering with a local gym or spa. Could you negotiate a discounted membership for your staff? Looking after your staff will always be a positive for any business and will help you attract & maintain the best employees.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This list is by no means exhaustive but hopefully it's given you some ideas. Just a couple of final thoughts which could apply to any of the above and are definitely worth considering.

TOP TIP #5: SPEAK TO YOUR SUPPLIERS

It's so important to speak to your suppliers about what you're trying to achieve and understand what they are doing to manage their environmental performance. You might find they can support your goals. Ordering paper? Why not see whether your supplier has FSC certified or recycled paper on offer.

We are not just responsible for products while they are in our possession. We really should consider the whole lifecycle of everything we buy and think about what will happen to it when we no longer need it.

TOP TIP #6: GET TRACKING

Implementing many of these initiatives will actually save your business money, but if you're not tracking your data, you're not tracking your savings. Start tracking your energy, waste, water and orders in the same way as you would track other business objectives. You might be surprised by how much you save. It makes perfect business sense.

NEED MORE HELP?

We'd love to hear from you. Get in touch or book in a free, no obligation call to discuss your goals.

[Book a free call](#)

T: 01590 381 105

E: nancy@truehorizon.co.uk