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The Low Carbon Agenda

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Hello Again,

I hope you are having a great summer - by the time you read this I'll be on a (relatively) low carbon break in the Lake District - I'm praying for better weather as I type.

Back when we considered the [definition of a carbon footprint](#), I said that it must include the carbon footprint of suppliers or it is meaningless. For example, a recent carbon footprint of the UK's National Health Service found that almost 60% of emissions lay in its supply chain, so there is no excuse for ignoring it. So read on to get the low-down on low carbon supply chains.



All the very best,

Gareth

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Why bother?

As a rule of thumb, the lower down the supply chain you go, the more destructive industries become. Extracting and purifying materials such as oil, minerals and metals uses a huge amount of energy and generates a large amount of waste. Don't forget, either, that environmental pressure groups will hold you responsible for environmental damage caused by your suppliers.

Basic Principles

There are two basic principles to reducing your supply chain footprint:

1. Buy less stuff

This is the easier of the two, as less of the same thing is always better. Techniques include:

- checking you really do need the product (you'd be surprised...)
- ensuring dimensions and quantities match your needs
- carefully managing perishable items
- keeping stocks low (eg lean manufacturing)

For example, I have worked with two companies who were purchasing components too long for their needs and cutting them to length every time. By buying smarter, less material was being bought in the first place, the cutting was eliminated and less waste was produced, saving money and carbon.

2. Buy 'better' stuff

'Better' in carbon terms means:

- Materials with a low 'embodied energy', usually natural materials and recycled man-made materials (eg sheep's wool insulation has 9% of the embodied energy of rockwool, recycled aluminium has 5% of the embodied energy of virgin material);
- Products and services which are powered by low carbon forms of energy (eg a solar powered web services provider or a cycle courier);
- Products and services which require less carbon to get from where they are produced to

where you need them (eg buying local food).

Advanced Techniques

There are a couple of other ideas that can help reduce the carbon footprint of your supply chain:

1. Buy a service rather than a product.

For example Xerox do not sell photocopiers, rather they provide a copying service. As such their machines have been designed to be long lasting and easily upgradeable. You pay per copy you make, which discourages you from being wasteful. Other examples include:

- Solvent management services where the supplier keeps ownership of the solvents, advises on how best to use them and removes them for recycling;
- Interface's novel flooring service where they replace and recycle worn carpet tiles leaving the unworn carpet tiles untouched.

2. Engaging your suppliers

You may find your suppliers can change their process to suit you. When the Carbon Trust carried out their carbon footprint of Walker's Crisps, they found that potato suppliers were keeping the potatoes hydrated as they were sold by gross weight - but the water need to be driven off during frying. Walker's swapped to buying by dry weight, the hydration stopped (saving carbon) and the frying took less energy.

Next Month

Next month we'll be looking at low carbon products and services.

News

The [Carbon Trust](#) has shone some light on the confusion over micro wind turbines. They are useless in urban environments (as is well known), but they are effective in the country, producing four times as much energy as their city slicker cousins.

[Edie](#) is reporting that only 20% of biofuels in the UK meet sustainability standards, leading to more calls to scrap the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation from green groups.

The UK Government's [Renewable Energy Strategy consultation](#) is now open for your views. Notable issues are the potential increase in the renewables target to 35%, the inclusion of a discussion on Feed In Tariffs and options for rewarding 'renewable heat'.

Tip of the Month

Reward the cyclists in your organisation with covered cycle stands, showers and lockers. Generally speaking, the more you provide, the more they will be used (up to a limit!).

The small print:
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