

GUIDE TO SUSTAINABLE EXHIBITING

When making the most sustainable choices for your event circuit, there are many ways to approach decision making. Because of the nature of temporary structures, waste is high for exhibitions and trade shows, and because many companies visit multiple expos a year, transportation and shipping costs are high too. However, by analyzing what our current purchasing patterns are and adjusting some behaviors, we can make an impact. We often make decisions for our events simply because we've always done it one way. Sustainable decision-making can save costs, drive efficiency, and improve your ability to connect with people instead of worrying so much about things. This guide focuses on some best practices for decision making in your planning process.

BUILD A BETTER BOOTH

1 Building materials

2 Rethink carpet

3 Consider furniture

4 Signage



1 Build for reuse and efficient packing and transportation. Booth materials should demonstrate at least one of the following attributes: reusable, recyclable, recycled content, provides social good/value, bears a recognizable eco-label. We recommend the EC3 Tool¹ to measure your booth's embodied carbon as a baseline for GHG impact. You can request materials from your contractor's Sustainable Materials List, such as LED bulbs, biodegradable table coverings, and FSC-certified wood².

2 Avoid flooring or carpet if possible. If absolutely required, do not use custom cut or vibrantly colored carpet, or install carpet in outdoor areas to ensure the ability to reuse. It's verified that recycled carpet could not only positively affect landfill diversion, but remove GHG gases from the materials harvest and manufacturing of virgin carpet³.

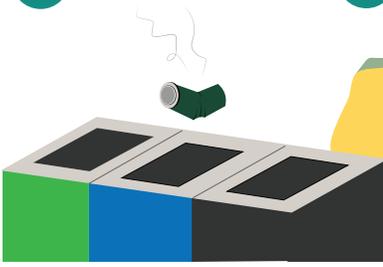
3 Fast furniture is common at trade shows and other events. But its quick use and fast disposal has a consequence: 10 million tons of furniture are thrown away each year in the EU⁴. To avoid the landfill (and the cost of a disposal fee), rent furniture as the preferred choice. As a secondary option, donate or upcycle your furniture locally when the event is over.

4 Signage and floor decoration are important ways for events to communicate information, branding, fulfill sponsorships and engage attendees. These common materials can contain harmful chemicals or be difficult to recycle and reuse. Select responsible materials like recyclable falconboard or digital signage, and identify end-of-use plans to donate or upcycle high-impact items like vinyl and foamcore to cycle them out of your supply chain (check out Mile High Workshop⁵). And design for reuse: no dates, no booth numbers, no show logos.



WASTE

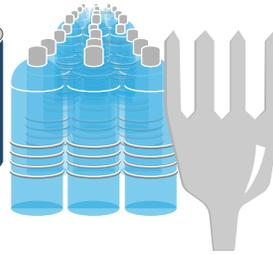
1 3Rs



2 Smart Swag



3 Reusables



4 Upcycle and donate



1 Some of the of the biggest waste impacts are from the items we select in the planning process months before the exhibit hall opens. Plan quantities practically to save money and prevent potential waste going to landfill. Then, when you are on site, use the waste-sorting system provided to avoid contamination of recycling and compost.

2 Attendee gifts are one way to remember your brand. They cost you money and the planet carbon emissions, so make sure the item is good quality and relevant to a professional audience. Prioritize experiences (manicures, photo ops) over physical items. Support local economies by prioritizing manufacturing location and reducing transportation impacts.

3 Use and provide items that are reusable at best like silverware and thermal coffee cups and water bottles, and easily recyclable at worst like aluminum and cardboard. “Using ceramic mugs or dishes rather than paper reduces material consumption, air and water pollution, and solid waste after just 60 uses.”⁷

4 Donating booth materials in good condition, unopened nonperishable goods, and swag can be valuable for local charities and resale thrift shops when internal reuse is not available. Ask show management about a managed donation program, or seek out local partnerships.

THE ZERO WASTE HIERARCHY

A decision-making tool used to operate a successful waste management plan. Adapted from the Zero Waste International Alliance⁶.



- **RETHINK/REDESIGN:** Is it necessary in the first place? Can a reusable or more durable product be purchased instead?
- **REDUCE:** Plan ahead for appropriate quantities to meet needs. Evaluate excess to reduce in the future.
- **REUSE:** Can it be used again for the same or a new purpose? Can it be donated?
- **RECYCLE/COMPOST:** Avoid sending materials to the landfill
- **MATERIAL RECOVERY:** can you salvage components of the material for a different purpose?
- **RESIDUALS MANAGEMENT:** Analyze what materials remain and why; explore ways to refine the system to avoid these materials in the future
- **UNACCEPTABLE:** Remaining materials sent to landfills or incinerators or waste-to-energy plants.



TRANSIT

- 1** Getting Around
- 2** Go Local
- 3** Reduce Shipping
- 4** Offset



1 Favor walking, biking, carpooling, and public transit over more fuel-intense methods.

2 Employ local labor and travel using public transportation to reduce carbon.

3 Use Smart Way Shipping⁸ to increase efficiency and cost savings for freight.

4 For emissions that can't be avoided, like air travel to the event, purchase verified carbon offsets for their equivalent.

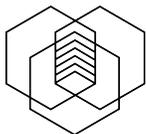
EXHIBITOR SUSTAINABILITY PLEDGE

Your event may solicit commitments from you to reduce its overall impact. These pledges often are paired with public recognition for compliance, compensating your company with free publicity. If these pledges are available, join event management by committing to reducing waste and exhibiting mindfully.

OFFSETS

In pursuit of reducing GHG emissions, look into verified offset options for water and carbon in addition to reducing onsite usage. This can balance the negative impacts with the positive ones from gathering together. Note, if you're using offsets as your only strategy to achieve carbon neutrality, you're not doing enough; reduction is the priority.

There is no "right way" to make sustainable decisions for an event. Being thoughtful of our impacts on the environment and on our communities leads us to the best solutions. Honeycomb Strategies works with events, conferences and venues to make sure that exhibitors and attendees have the maximum positive community benefit at the lowest environmental impact. We're here to help.



HONEYCOMB STRATEGIES

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SOURCES

- ¹ Building Transparency EC3 Tool; <https://www.buildingtransparency.org/>
- ² Forest Stewardship Council; <https://us.fsc.org/en-us/certification>
- ³ Science Direct; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S095965262202830X>
- ⁴ European Environmental Bureau; <https://eeb.org/library/circular-economy-opportunities-in-the-furniture-sector/>
- ⁵ Mile High Workshop Vinyl Banner Upcycling; <https://www.milehighworkshop.org/>
- ⁶ Zero Waste International Alliance; <https://zwia.org/>
- ⁷ Carbon Clear. Disposable Cups vs. Reusable Cups: Solving the Carbon Intensity Question. Issue brief. Carbon Clear, n.d. Web. 18 June 2014
- ⁸ Smart Way Shipping; <https://www.epa.gov/smartway>