



HOW CAN BRANDS INCORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY WITHOUT SACRIFICING **EXHIBIT DESIGN & EXPERIENCE?**

Implementing sustainable practices is no longer an option. Brands have a responsibility to reduce waste and practice sustainability at trade shows and live events. Luckily, there are suppliers and partners who can empower event marketers to make choices aligned with their brand's sustainability promises in one of the world's most wasteful economies.



IN THIS ARTICLE, WE'LL COVER THE RISE OF SUSTAINABILITY AND HOW IT TRANSLATES TO THE TRADE SHOW INDUSTRY:

- Find out what it means to be a B Corp, or to partner with a B Corp, and how it's different from being "green"
- Learn about the [Access Model](#) and designing sustainable exhibits on a budget
- Get four tips to expand your company's sustainable initiatives

”DESIGN SHOULDN'T HAVE TO TAKE A
BACKSEAT TO SUSTAINABILITY AND MAKING
THINGS RESPONSIBLY.”

– Amber Valletta

Trade shows and corporate events have become synonymous with “waste,” contributing to more than 600,000 tons of garbage in our landfills each year.

At this rate, creating a sustainable future seems to be inching further away. At Steelhead, we understand the anxiety this causes for corporate event marketers. But the good news is, with the right partnerships in place, it's not too late to make an impactful difference.

So, what does it mean to be a B Corp?



Many companies claim to be “green”. So what does it mean to be a [B Corp](#), and how is this different from other sustainable initiatives? Eliza Erskine, the founder of [Green Buoy Consulting](#) and Steelhead’s B Corp consultant, explains the process behind acquiring a B Corp certification:

*“Basically, a B Corp is an external certification granted by the B Lab. **You have to legally change your business status to a benefit corporation**, meaning you’re committed to people, the planet, and profit. To get the certification, companies must take an assessment with 120 questions that examine five key areas: workers, governance, environment, community, and customers. They need to score an 80 or higher to qualify, but unfortunately, the average company scores around 50. Many companies claim to be green, but it simply does not equal B Corp.”*

Elizabeth Martinez, Steelhead’s Marketing Manager, explains how Steelhead’s internal culture made the transition to becoming a B Corp easier:



Each department at Steelhead reviewed its outputs, processes, energy usage, water usage, and waste disposal, to look for ways to improve our sustainability efforts. Luckily, we already prioritized our employees and migrated our business model to the Access Model and the share economy, which helped naturally align us with B Corp’s mission. We’re proud to say the B Corp accreditation process has led to some amazing initiatives, such as a partnership with One Tree Planted and offsetting our travel emissions through [carbonfund.org](#).

If you're an event planner or producer in a company that embraces sustainable initiatives, you may be wondering why more companies aren't jumping on board to make trade shows and events less wasteful. **Unfortunately, the myth that sustainability costs more holds some companies back.**

While it's true that companies pay to become certified B Corps, the cost of the certification is easily offset by its benefits. B Corps have less turnover, higher employee engagement, reduced waste and energy, and increased partnerships with like-minded organizations.

THE BOTTOM LINE? GREEN DOES NOT EQUAL B CORP!



B CORPS HAVE LESS TURNOVER, HIGHER EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT, REDUCED WASTE AND ENERGY, AND INCREASED PARTNERSHIPS WITH LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS

Designing creative and sustainable exhibits on a budget is easier than many realize.

You might be wondering, “How can I design a sustainable exhibit on a budget?”

The truth is, sustainable exhibits can actually save you money without sacrificing the “wow” factor consumers expect.

Once companies realize this, they’ll find they are enhancing their creativity and flexibility while contributing to sustainability!



Let’s take a look at how this works.

Thanks to the [share economy](#), exhibits can be repurposed instead of ending up in the 600,000 tons of garbage associated with single-use trade show exhibits each year.



For example, Steelhead’s [Access Model](#) allows brands to use an exhibit for the time and event they need it for, then the components themselves are repurposed and used by the next company.



The access model also eliminates the need for storage, transportation, and repair costs, since the exhibit is not owned – which saves precious event marketing dollars.



Now, we're certainly not asking you to skimp on your exhibit during a pivotal trade show or corporate event. Instead, we're asking you to think "outside the box," we're going to mix it up and take a look right inside the most important box of all – the booth!

Instead of reducing the booth footprint size, you can help the environment AND lower costs by simplifying its structure. Simply put, create additional space within your booth while retaining its "wow" factor! One idea is to use aluminum framing instead of plywood structural pieces. Aluminum framing can be repurposed in infinite ways.

Spoiler Alert: Less exhibit structure equals lower transportation, drayage, labor, electrical, graphics, and A/V costs while reducing energy output.

Being mindful of the materials used in the booth is vital as well. For example, you can use fabric, track how much you use, then recycle it after the



TO RECAP, HERE ARE A FEW WAYS YOUR COMPANY CAN DESIGN A SUSTAINABLE TRADE SHOW:

- Participate in the [Access Model](#) and utilize the benefits of a share economy
- Consider the structure of the booth and simplify
- Note the materials used
- Have an action plan for what happens to the booth materials after the event

show. You can also donate the fabric to schools and other organizations. Repurposing and donating are two easy initiatives that help make sustainable trade shows possible.

As the **only** certified B Corp exhibit provider in North America, we'll share several proven sustainable event initiatives for your next trade show. We're here to help your company create a sustainable exhibit while benefiting from the Access Model. To date, Steelhead has helped 80 brands convert to the access model versus the ownership (and waste!) model, keeping football-field-sized exhibits out of landfills.

Four tips for brands to expand their sustainable event initiatives.

If you're aiming to leave a positive impact on others and the planet, here are four jump-start initiatives any company can incorporate in their trade show program (besides joining the [Access Model](#), of course):



1. Don't be afraid to ask thought-provoking questions.

Whether it's asking if your hotel is LEED-certified or talking to your exhibit partner, don't be afraid to ask questions. You can ask your exhibit partner if they have any certifications, what they're doing to reduce waste, how they measure exhibits' sustainability levels, etc. Also, ask what the exhibits are made of and what happens to them later. Asking appropriate questions ensures you and your exhibit partner are on the same page.



2. Be mindful of travel emissions and find a way to offset them.

Limiting travel emissions while finding ways to offset them goes a long way! You'll want to consider how many people are going to the show and track your travel miles. This way, your team can offset their carbon emissions. You can also try limiting travel as much as possible. If the venue isn't far, you may want to walk. Or, you can use an Uber instead of renting a car.



3. Invest in carbon removal technology.

Carbon removal what? Yes, that's right, carbon removal technology! Systems like [Direct Air Capture](#) (DAC) are expensive but likely necessary to create the desired environmental effect. Encouraging your company to fund these efforts is one way to contribute to the greater good.



4. Partner with companies that match or exceed your brand's sustainability initiatives.

When producing and executing events, no one does it alone. It takes an entire team to create an impactful exhibit, and there is no shortage of options for providers in the trade show industry. By asking those thought-provoking questions, event marketers can greatly narrow down the selection and choose vendors that are most aligned with your brand's sustainability goals.

Conclusion

Is designing a sustainable exhibit on a budget an unattainable fantasy? Not with the right exhibit partners! Companies like Steelhead don't just talk about sustainability – we live sustainability. By partnering with a B Corp, you can make a difference and:

- **Have a positive impact on the environment**
- **Connect with your community on a deeper level**
- **Grow your business while focusing on others**
- **Gain valuable insights by partnering with like-minded organizations**

When you collaborate with the right exhibit partner, they can help you create sustainability metrics for your exhibit. To learn more about producing a sustainable trade show or corporate event, [contact us](#) today!



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