



[Three, fresh ways to green your supply chain - better and faster](#)



Written by [Olga Orda](#)

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We saw Wal-Mart, a company with worldwide-wide revenues only second to Exxon-Mobile, signal last week in Beijing that it is moving away from “intermittent transactions with many suppliers toward longer-term arrangements with [a smaller group of manufacturers](#)“. Then, this week in the news, [IBM starts on a roll to eliminate](#) the ‘burden’ of paper — including paper costs, compliance risks and environmental challenges — from their customers’ supply chains with a handful of recently launched software and services.

What is going on here? Both companies are adopting tactics used by sustainability minded entrepreneurs as part of the time tested sustainability supply chain model: measure, purchase local where possible, maintain long-term relationships and integrate accountability at all ‘nodes’ of the chain.

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So, if that is all a given, what is new? Small and medium sized enterprises and entrepreneurs can learn from the way that these corporations and others, like Hewlett Packard and Verizon Business, are integrating holistic supply chain thinking into their daily operations.

With no further ado, here are the three, fresh ways to green your supply chain - better, faster, simpler - just like the big players.

1. Measure first...With leadership in mind

No major new tricks here. Except now, reap the same benefits as a corporation with a budget to hire a VP of Sustainability by “renting” a consultant from organizations like [Greenwala](#).

Investments in leadership matter, because once you get your benchmark data on your carbon footprint and how they relate to production, storage and transportation from your measurement stage, how are you going to mobilize resources to bridge the gaps found in the information generated? How are you going to know if a shift in modes or an alternative scenario presented by the raw data (e.g. transporting goods by hybrid locomotive versus a fleet of cars) is feasible within the limits of the organization?

Existing executives already have a lot on their plate while employees will still likely need to account for a time lag (read: decision from the top) to move ahead.

As [Rajeev Kapur](#) speaks up in CRM buyer: “in order to be really serious, [supply chain management] has to be a top-down effort.”

2. Paper - Go green or go digital

Promises of a paperless office have left many green business owners feeling let down - where is our paperless future now? Even with rising costs and environmental concerns, we still have a need to print and for paper products in general.

Case in point: in our transient-who-has-time-for-a-one-hour-business-lunch age, the value of paper made symbolic items like business cards, higher end brochures, gift cards, thank you cards and branded calendars goes up while the value of paper based instrumental products, such as routine reports or financial statements, goes down.

So, what is an entrepreneur to do? Go green or go digital. For symbolic items, look like you splurged with beautiful papers at [Green Printer](#) (while keeping costs reasonable) or consider the “eBilling” model for virtually all instrumental, dime-a-dozen documents.

Next, watch out for how artificial intelligence will change the game for electronic documents and systems:

“Much of the innovation will come in the area using artificial intelligence,” says Bill Metallo, VP of sales with [Seeburger](#) “...[T]his will speed up the rate that electronic partners can be enabled.”

3. Expect accountability, but also be prepared to reward

Anyone who has dabbled in sustainable supply chain management will tell you that “the audits are never-ending”. And, the while everyone is on board that they are creating positive milestones faster than they think (or see), it serves as positive closure and reinforcement to not only reward employees in the organization, but also, the suppliers in the supply chain. Suppliers today are, more often than not, asked by larger corporations

to take on production, manufacturing and transportation concerns under their own stringent responsibility.

[Hewlett-Packard](#) (HP) even goes so far as to evaluate the companies in its supply chain to monitor their carbon emissions, labor practices and other issues.

Reward suppliers who have consistently met and exceeded the bar with longer-term and mutually rewarding contracts. Put aside the saved funds to invest in things that can have 'high' initial costs such as employee discounts on sustainable getaways or clean energy investment funds.

The choices are unlimited when it comes time to celebrate your organization's contribution to conserved natural resources and a healthy bottom line.