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**FROM BASELINE TO ACTION:
A PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY SERIES BY PATH ZERO**

Sustainability Isn't a Test – It's a Journey

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Sustainability Isn't a Test – It's a Journey

For many retail suppliers, the word *sustainability* can be intimidating. It's often associated with complex reporting, expensive certifications or the fear of being judged against competitors who appear further along. In today's retail landscape, sustainability isn't a pass/fail exam – it's an individual journey, and everyone's path looks different. Retailers understand this more than suppliers often realize.

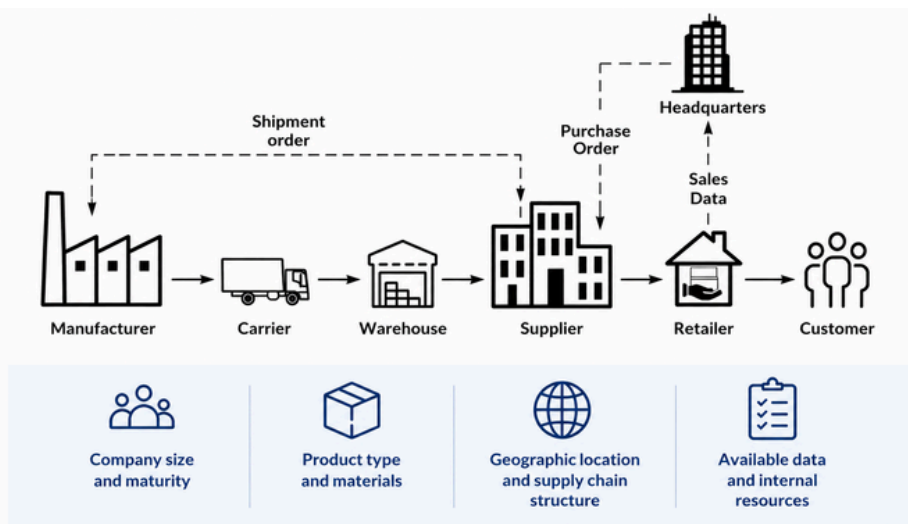
There Is No Single “Right” Sustainability Path

Even direct competitors rarely share the same sustainability roadmap. One supplier may focus on material sourcing, another on energy efficiency, another on waste reduction or logistics. These differences aren't a problem – they're expected.

Sustainability is shaped by factors like:

- Company size and maturity
- Product type and materials
- Geographic location and supply chain structure
- Available data and internal resources

Sustainability progress will never look identical across suppliers – and it shouldn't.



Sustainability is shaped by many factors.

Comparison Can Be Constructive

Comparing sustainability efforts across suppliers *is* useful – when it’s done thoughtfully. These comparisons create shared accountability, reveal what’s possible and set an informal standard the industry can collectively reach for.



Comparisons create shared accountability, reveal what's possible and serve as a formal standard the industry can reach for.

Seeing how peers are approaching similar challenges often sparks ideas, accelerates learning and raises the bar for everyone. The goal isn't to rank winners and losers, but to encourage momentum and normalize continuous improvement across the supply base.

Retailers use these comparisons to understand trends and capabilities, not to penalize suppliers who are still building their programs.

Retailers Don't Expect Perfection

A common misconception is that retailers expect suppliers to already be “good at sustainability.” In reality, most retailers know that many suppliers are still early in their journey.

What they *do* expect is far more reasonable:

- Awareness of sustainability impacts
- A willingness to learn
- An understanding of current practices
- A plan to improve over time

Retailers are not looking for flawless data or sweeping claims. They are looking for honesty, transparency and forward movement.

Start With What Makes Sense

Sustainability is most effective when it begins with the realities of your organization – not with checklists or trends adopted for their own sake. The goal is not to “do sustainability,” but to make better decisions that align with how your business actually operates.

For some suppliers, this might mean addressing material waste because it directly affects cost and efficiency. For others, it could be improving packaging, optimizing freight routes or gaining visibility into material sourcing. These efforts matter because they are relevant, achievable and tied to real business drivers.

When sustainability is grounded in what makes sense for the organization, it becomes durable. It builds internal buy-in, delivers tangible value and creates a foundation for broader initiatives over time.

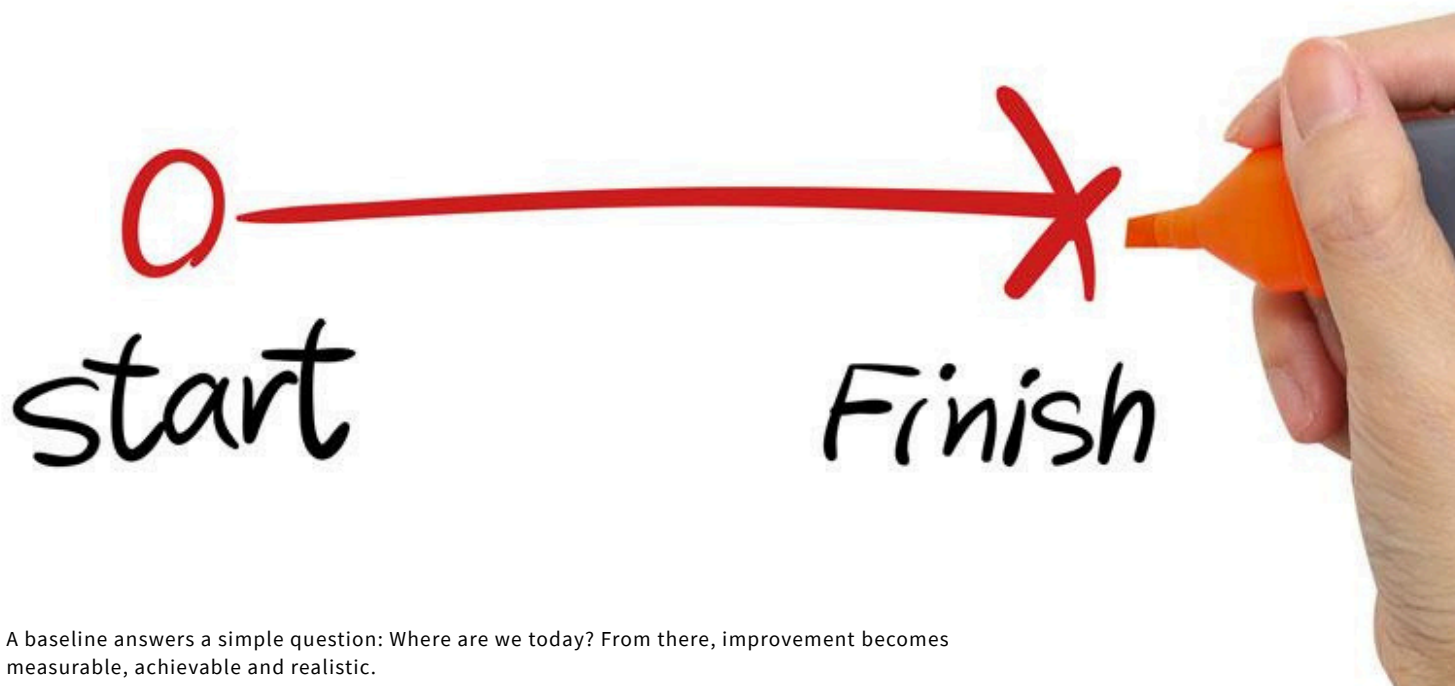
Establishing a Baseline Is a Win

One of the most valuable steps a supplier can take is establishing a baseline – documenting current materials, processes, energy use, transportation methods and waste streams. This isn't about judgment; it's about clarity.

A baseline answers a simple question: Where are we today? From there, improvement becomes measurable, achievable and realistic.

Even saying, “We are just beginning to track this data,” demonstrates maturity and credibility.

Sustainability doesn't require fear. It requires intention, transparency and commitment. Wherever you are on the journey, starting with what makes sense – and building from there – is what matters most. ◀



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ABOUT PATH ZERO

Shop! Association offers a suite of Path Zero sustainability programs designed to help members document, track, and improve performance—building credible, measurable results across operations and projects.

Path Zero Emissions: An easy-to-use platform for tracking Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions—capturing utilities, waste, water, and operational data in alignment with the GHG Protocol for reporting needs, including California SB 253.

Path Zero Element: Transforms architectural drawings and specifications into material quantities and embodied carbon—capturing store-specific variations across design, fixtures, and displays for scalable, repeatable reporting.

Path Zero Benchmark: Evaluates sustainability performance across 135 qualitative and quantitative data points—delivering industry benchmarking and recognized ratings supported by third-party assurance.

Path Zero Consulting: Provides hands-on support for sustainability strategy, facility and program audits, target setting, and implementation planning.

Each program can be used independently or together, depending on your organization's goals and reporting needs.

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ABOUT SHOP! ASSOCIATION

Shop!, the global trade association dedicated to enhancing retail environments and experiences, embraces a culture of inclusion where diverse voices are active in all aspects of our organization. This supports an environment in which all individuals feel respected and are treated fairly, and different viewpoints, opinions, thoughts, and ideas are encouraged and embraced. We proudly maintain the highest standards of ethics and transparency.

Our Purpose: Empowering our members to innovate at retail.

Our Mission: From ideation through implementation, Shop will engage our diverse array of members with education, insights and events that enable them to co-create innovation that evolves retail worldwide.

Our Vision: Shop's members will shape the evolution of retail.

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