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

Why Small Wins Matter More Than Big Sustainability Claims

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Why Small Wins Matter More Than Big Sustainability Claims

Suppliers often feel pressure to make bold sustainability commitments – net zero, carbon neutral, zero waste – because those are the claims that get attention. But in practice, retailers value something else more: credible, explainable progress.

That's not about perfection. It's about trust.

Retailer Sustainability Messaging Is Built on What Can Be Explained
Retailers face real constraints when communicating sustainability to customers. What they share publicly (on websites, product pages or in reports) needs to be supported by data they understand and can stand behind.

That data often comes from suppliers.

Importantly, retailers do *not* expect supplier data to be flawless. Estimates, assumptions and margins of error are normal in sustainability reporting. What matters is that they are documented and disclosed.

Transparency builds confidence.

Big Claims Aren't the Goal – Usable Claims Are
Large, sweeping claims can be difficult to use unless they're backed by:

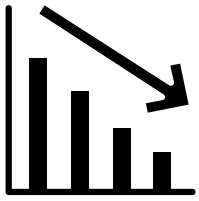
- A clear baseline
- Stated assumptions
- Known limitations
- Evidence of improvement over time

When those elements aren't present, retailers often choose not to use the claim at all – not because the effort isn't real, but because it's hard to explain responsibly.

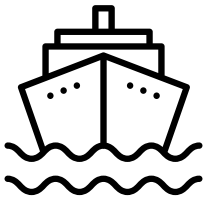
That's why smaller, well-supported improvements are often more valuable.

Small Wins Are Easier to Share – and Easier to Trust

Examples of small wins retailers can confidently use include:



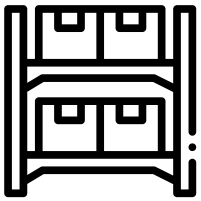
A MEASURED REDUCTION IN ENERGY USE



FREIGHT CHANGES THAT REDUCE FUEL CONSUMPTION



DOCUMENTED REDUCTIONS IN LANDFILL WASTE



PACKAGING CHANGES WITH QUANTIFIED MATERIAL SAVINGS

These improvements don't need to be exact to the decimal. They need to be reasonable, consistent and clearly explained.

A stated margin of error doesn't weaken credibility – it strengthens it.

Improvement Over Time Is What Really Matters

Retailers understand that sustainability data improves year over year. What they look for is:

- A defined starting point
- Consistent methodology
- Clear direction of improvement

Suppliers who can show progress (even incremental progress) are often viewed as lower risk and easier to work with than those making large claims without supporting detail.

The Bottom Line

Retailers don't need suppliers to be perfect. They need them to be honest, consistent and improving.

Small, documented wins – with disclosed assumptions and margins of error – give retailers the confidence to communicate sustainability responsibly and credibly.

That's how sustainability claims move from aspiration to trust without pressure, fear or overpromising.



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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