

THE O2NORDIC GUIDE TO

SAVING THE PLANET IN STYLE



Contents

Page 3 Introduction

Page 4 Sustainability

Page 4 Economic Perspective

Page 5 Social Perspective

Page 6 Ecological Perspective

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Introduction

The purpose of “the Guide” is to break down the issue of sustainability into some key design considerations.

The difficulty with all kinds of guides, check-lists or systems is that one might feel that they possess the truth or cover everything – they don’t, and they often miss that the real guidance is in your own common sense and experience. This guide is just a little help on the way, and don’t forget to:

Be courageous!

One can be discouraged by sustainability being such an abstract concept, but essentially it is about doing the right thing. It is the small steps that count. Trade-offs are a natural part of the design profession and it is totally ok to make sacrifices in order to move forward. Be encouraged by the long perspective and the little things.

Be inspired!

If you are challenged by these issues you will soon find that there are loads of opportunities out there. When peoples attitudes and values change, new business and product opportunities arise, just as when a new technology is breaking ground. People want what’s good. People also want to feel cool, sexy, smart etc.

If you can combine these driving forces you will be a winner, and have lots of fun in the process.

Feel free!

There is no eco-aesthetic. Sustainability is more a value system and a frame of mind than a certain product category or style. You decide if your product is both cool and more sustainable. As far as we are concerned it is a far better strategy to make attractive sustainable products that appeal to the masses than ones that appeal to the hard-core few. Maybe the real challenge is to make your product even more attractive, sexy or cool than the less sustainable ones, to push them off the shelves.

Be human!

Use human behaviour to your advantage. If for example people crave for “bling”, make your sustainable product luxurious, or make it a luxury to have your product. The Louis Vuitton Moët Hennesy group do just this by using a Trendbook developed in cooperation with O2 France to connect their products with sustainability – that ain’t eco-boring. Or look at mountainbiking for example. It started with a couple of hippies wanting to go biking in the forest – now it is an industry, trend and lifestyle which isn’t labelled Eco” but which is to the core. Look at lifestyles for inspiration and support the more sustainable ones.

Sustainability

This abstract term which everyone talks about, what is it about?

The concept was identified in the Brundtland report “Our Common Future” in 1987 report to be used in the so called Agenda 21 - the global agenda for the 21st century. It is described as:

“a development that satisfy the needs of today without jeopardising the needs of future generations”.

The concept has been ratified in other international programs such as UN and also in the policies of many nations. Further, many companies interpret the concept into their own business strategies to adapt and contribute to the strategy for sustainable development because they know it affects business.

In the year 2000 the leaders of 189 nations committed to the “Millennium Development Goals”.

The question that we pose is how the concept could be interpreted in the field of design. We don't have all the answers but we can give some clues. Please note that not all suggestions in the Guide are applicable to all kinds of products, You probably know which are the “hot spots” for your product.

Economic perspective

The economic perspective of sustainable development is the foundation for securing that we create more value with less resources - in other words that we can provide a decent standard of life for everyone, without using up the resources. We are far from this goal. We need to cut western resource use to about one tenth of today's to achieve long-term sustainability. Quite a challenge, not least for designers in the years to come!

The economic system can steer us in the right direction if all costs are visible and covered, however today's economic systems do not take into account for example the so called “externalities”.

Externalities can be future costs of cleaning up the mess we create today – in that respect the total cost is not accounted for and the economy tend to favour bad behaviour. However as trends turn to sustainability these issues can instead be made into revenue as willingness to pay for better sustainability performance increase. Costs will also be allocated through for example taxes, CO2 tax being such an example affecting for example vehicle design already today.

🌀 1 🌀

Does your design contribute to trade that is fair to everyone involved, for example do the workers get a fair pay, are they not kids, do they have the right to form a union? The clothing brand EDUN by Rogan, Ali Hewson and Bono add embroideries and prints to tell stories about the fair production of the garments.

🌀 2 🌀

Does your product use less resources or use the resources efficiently? This can mean less fuel consumption, but can also mean if you best serve the need of the consumer in the most resource efficient way. Have you for example considered if the product could be substituted with a service where the material product is used efficiently? Car-sharing is a good example. Increasing fuel prices will favour good resource management.

🌀 3 🌀

Does your product use the readily available resources rather than exclusive and scarce ones that are unnecessarily expensive to refine? By looking at what's available you might get clues to new materials. As transportation has ecological consequences locally produced objects are favourable when possible.

🌀 4 🌀

Have you tried to add immaterial value to your product rather than material? An attractive logo is immaterial and appealing as well as valuable. A lot of people buy ecologically grown products because of the better taste – why not use this as a sales argument in marketing?

Social perspective

The social perspective is essentially about the ethics of the products and services. Sustainability is as much about the welfare of people as of the planet.

🌀 1 🌀

Does your product support the empowerment of people? Do people feel stronger and safer, without others feeling less so when using your product? An SUV could be argued as bringing the feeling of security, but at the cost of others reduced safety. Does the product promote social interaction and participation rather than isolation and segregation?

🌀 2 🌀

Does your product promote, or at least not, oppose the striving for gender equality?

We live in a world of stereotypes but one can choose to use less conservative ones to move forward. Use trends that support gender equality rather than trends which oppose. It can also have to do with function. When designing fire equipment to better suit female firemen they also work better for male.

3

Does your product favour ethnical and cultural diversity? If you work with graphic design, how do you include minorities in your work – could it even be a way of finding new target groups as well as showing the flexibility and openness of the company?

4

Social inclusion – does your product work also for those with lowered abilities whether due to ageing, disability or temporary impairment? Socially acceptable products that are accessible, flexible and easy to use for more people will increase the market potential as stigmatizing by design is not something anyone wants to experience. Neither is bad design of interfaces, manuals etc that complicate for the user, whether he or she is functionally impaired or not.

5

Emotional sustainability – does your product make people feel good in the interaction with the product. Does it become an “extension of the body” or “a best friend”? People liking their objects also take better care of them and keep them longer – this can also be ecologically favourable.

If you can include this in your designs you can probably also raise the price. Look at Harley Davidson or Apple. Think rituals, interaction and individualization.

Ecological perspective

The ecological perspective is probably the most thoroughly interpreted by many organisations world wide and there are many so called eco-products out there, more or less appealing. Aside the guidance below the big issue is a lot about how we consume and use products. If your product can change a pattern of usage into a more sustainable one this is very favourable.

Another avenue for change is to make it immaterial by for example making it digital or by minimizing it. Nano-technology and miniaturization is going to change a lot of things in the near future – what will it mean for your product?

🌀 1 🌀

Does your product use resources efficiently? Efficient resource use can also be made into a sales point. Look at the energy classification of white goods for example. This issue is rapidly increasing in importance to customers.

🌀 2 🌀

Does your product use recycled materials rather than virgin ones? Hooking up your product to the resource loop is of course favourable, and will probably also be cheaper as many incentives favour recycling, and more will in the near future.

🌀 3 🌀

Is your product also designed to be fed in to the resource loop when it is scrapped? To facilitate this both the choice of materials matters and how they are assembled to allow for easy dismantling. As few different materials as possible is also favourable.

🌀 4 🌀

Does your product contain chemicals that are suitable for people? Then they are probably also suitable for the eco-system. Non-toxic and healthy is a clear sales point, especially if competitors are lagging.

🌀 5 🌀

Does your product suit the system, and the users? If you make a packaging design, can it be recycled through existing systems? If you make a bottle that is possible to recycle, but the act of doing so is a hassle due to the design, people won't. The behaviour of people is as important as the function of technical systems. It has to be simple to be sustainable.



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