

Green Exhibiting

The great Green wave has finally made its way to the trade show industry. But with it comes a tsunami of information for exhibitors. To stay out front on this evolving issue, don't get bogged down in the details. Rather, focus on incorporating the following basic principles and practices into your exhibit program.

1. Increase sustainability. Whenever possible select materials that are recycled, reclaimed, or rapidly renewable, such as bamboo or sorghum, and plant fibers such as hemp and jute. Reduce the amount of nonrenewable materials in your exhibit, especially PVS, which is harmful to the environment and to human health. Substitute Forest Stewardship Council- (FSC) certified wood or incorporate recycled metal or plastic.
2. Go through detox. Reduce pollution and health hazards by building exhibits with low- or no-VOCC (volatile organic compounds) varnishes, paints, adhesives, and other finishes. Traditional carpeting can be another source of harmful fumes, so consider incorporating nontraditional materials, such as bamboo, seagrass, sisal, cork, marmoleum, or recycled rubber.
3. Don't weight. Reducing the weight of your exhibit, be it via material selection or the use of modular or portable exhibits, can make a big difference in your carbon footprint, as lighter-weight properties require less energy to transport. Also, reduce the amount of printed materials you send to the show to a bare minimum, thus decreasing weight and saving some trees in the process.
4. Eco-accessorize. Make sure your exhibit lighting, signs, giveaways, racks, and accessories promote sustainability too. Ask your suppliers and vendors for products made of renewable, recyclable, and/or sustainable materials. Energy-efficient LED lights can also reduce power usage by as much as 90 percent.
5. Print less or print Green. Using electronic displays rather than printed material is typically a Greener option, but a certain amount of printing is usually necessary, too. So work with a printer that uses water-based vegetable inks, and when possible, print on the highest percentage of post-consumer-recycled material possible, whether paper, plastic, or fabric.
6. Make it last. Reuse is a key consideration, so build, rent, or buy with durability and multiple uses in mind. Design signs with messages that don't need to be constantly updated, or include signage components that can be switched out for different events.
7. Give your old exhibit a new life. When you no longer have a use for your booth, search out companies in the trade show industry or association in your local community, such as colleges or high schools, that would be thrilled to repurpose and recycle your old display. Environmentally responsible vendors such as Go Green Displays will take back their used booths and recycle the components. Nonprofit organizations such as Green Demolitions will pick up appliances, furniture, and luxury booth décor to resell or donate for charitable purposes.
8. Encourage social responsibility. Choose your partners and vendors carefully to favor those who use responsible labor practices, have energy- and water- saving programs, and feature waste-reduction and recycling programs in their operations.
9. Localize. To reduce energy-gobbling shipping, buy locally, and if possible, warehouse materials close to most of your show sites. You'll save a bunch on shipping, and help the local economy to boot.
10. Become carbon neutral. What you can't reduce or eliminate can be offset by purchasing carbon offsets from reliable sources. A directory rating more than 80 offset providers can be found online at www.carboncatalog.com. To offset your shipping (which can account for more than half of an exhibitor's carbon footprint), work with an eco-friendly shipper such as EA Logistics, which offers free carbon offsets to its trade show customers as part of its Delivered GrEAn program.

When it comes to Green exhibiting, there are no magic answers, as few products or practices can fulfill sustainability requirements on every level. Nevertheless, every little bit helps. So focus on incorporating just one or two of these practices to begin with. Before you know it, you'll be a Green Queen (or King) of trade show exhibiting.