

THE ROLE OF BUYERS

How fashion industry is reacting to sustainability?

From my point of view and as recent studies already proof, more and more companies in the fashion industry realize and believe that good business must go hand in hand with environmental and social excellence and therefore many companies are guided by a growing commitment to these issues. And even more interesting is the fact that these studies reveal that commitment to sustainability is not due to factors related to obligation anymore (legal requirements or pressure from investors or workers) but to factors related to the market demand and business competitiveness.

What is the impact of the Fashion buyer role towards sustainability in the fast fashion industry?

Fashion buyers can work towards a sustainable development together with suppliers and collaborators at all levels of the value chain. Both criteria, PRODUCT INTEGRITY and ENVIRONMENTAL&SOCIAL PERFORMANCE could be taken into account in the suppliers' choice and evaluation stage.

How important is the buyer role in contributing to sustainable practices within a company?

Buyers are a key role in contributing to sustainable practices within a company since they are responsible for the partnership relation between the company and material suppliers, factories and logistic suppliers:

- Buyers can finally choose suppliers according to their adherence to the company's vision giving preference to those compliant with the environmental and social standards required by the company and identifying those suppliers unable to receive further orders until minimum social and environmental compliance is guaranteed.
- Buyers can encourage suppliers to join the sustainability cause and make improvements in their procedures both in environmental and social aspects.
- Buyers can strive to build a transparent relationship with suppliers, full traceability of any material and process involved in the development of products.

What are the sustainable practices that fashion buyers can apply? How the buyer can contribute to sustainable practices within the industry?

In terms of materials, buyer can:

1. **promote** those materials that have a lower negative impact on the environment (preferred fibers like organic cotton, linen, hemp, tencel, recycled polyester) making sure that any supplier of environmentally preferred materials can provided the correspondent guarantees about any material or product sourced (PRODUCT INTEGRITY)

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2. **support** the development of innovative and more sustainable alternatives when using non environmentally preferred raw materials (e.g. fossil fuel based, regenerated cellulosic such as rayon...) being updated by leading organizations and companies eager to innovate with efficient and sustainable processes.

In terms of production, buyer can:

1. **Eliminate** the use of chemicals linked to human or environmental harm, banning chemicals in production processes through a Restricted Substances List (RSL) which all suppliers must commit to comply with.
2. **Require** its suppliers and their value chain partners to comply with the applicable domestic laws on social and environmental compliance. (ENVIRONMENTAL&SOCIAL PERFORMANCE)
1. **Encourage** suppliers to comply with at least one of the internationally acknowledged standards regarding social performance (Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) , Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI), Fair Labor Association (FLA), Fair Wear Foundation (FWF), Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000), Worldwide Responsible Apparel Production (WRAP)...) or environmental performance (: ISO 14.001, OHSAS 18.000 or EMAS)in order to get a both efficient and safe environment in the different facilities.

In terms of transport, buyer can **reduce** the impacts resulting from transporting goods and work actively with transport suppliers and other organizations to find ways to do so, integrating an environmental and a cost perspective at once.

Do you think that implementing sustainable buying practices will be more expensive for an organisation?

On one hand, preferred materials are usually more expensive (p.e. organic cotton could be 10-15% more expensive than conventional cotton) but material cost implies just around 40-50% of total cost so, sustainable practice impact on final price is very little in this case.

On the other hand, working with certified factories could imply a higher cost, since they have to ensure specific social and environmental work conditions but there is more and more demand of “clean production” so its costs are getting more and more competitive.

In any case, sustainable practices should be considered an investment and not an expense by companies, producers and consumers as well as companies CEO's should look at sustainability as a long term issue.