



## [Finding Your Path: Defining Green for Your Business](#)



Written by [Megan Prusynski](#)

Published on May 23rd, 2008

Building your green business, or greening an existing one, is a journey. And like any journey in life, you may have to blaze your own trail.

Sustainable business models are a rather new phenomenon - there aren't exactly a slew of entrepreneurs out there concerned with a [triple bottom line](#). So although there are many places you could turn to find a checklist for greening your business, you probably won't find one that's an exact fit for your company. The best solution is to [define for yourself](#) what it means to be a sustainable business, and make your own checklist of actions and standards to hold yourself to.

Your [green checklist](#) will be something that's unique to your business and industry. Once you have a working list of actions you will take to green your business, green standards for every purchase or decision, and steps you can take to be more sustainable, you'll have a road map towards a green future.



Start your list by thinking about what it means for your business to be green, which largely depends on your industry and operations. Coming up with a mission statement defining what sustainability means for your business will give you a good jumping off point for your list. Next, think about taking actions in the following areas: compliance with environmental laws and regulations, waste reduction, resource conservation, pollution prevention, and environmental advocacy.

You may want to divide your list into these sections, or into sections based on what you can reasonably accomplish in a given time period, with more sustainable actions to accomplish later on as your level of commitment deepens and you have the resources to try new things. Structure your list in a way that makes sense for your business: as a to-do list, a step-by-step plan for reaching your goals, or as a checklist of questions to ask yourself before making major purchases or decisions. Every item in your list should refer back to your definition of a sustainable business, and help you work towards that goal.

So, for the graphic & web design studio that I am planning to start, I may define being sustainable as not only reducing waste and resource usage in my office, but as communicating about sustainability through my work, and spreading the message through the media that I create and the people I work with. My ultimate goal as a designer is not just to change the way I do business, but to inspire change in others through my work. My definition of being a sustainable business has a lot to do with the type of work that I do. As a communicator, I am in a unique position to create messages that speak to people, spread ideas, and change minds. So my business will focus not only on the usual green business principles, but also on working with clients and vendors with a similar vision, so that together we can create change.

“...what it means for your business to be green... largely depends on your industry and operations...”

My checklist of actions may include: conserving energy in my home office, hosting my company web site and clients' sites that I design with a [sustainable web hosting](#) company, using recycled or tree-free paper in the office and for printed projects, finding green vendors to work with, seeking like-minded green clients, recycling or disposing of any hazardous materials and electronics sustainably, reducing my use of resources like paper and water, composting all organic materials and food waste, using green cleaning products in the office, offsetting my business travel with [carbon offsets](#), replacing office furniture and equipment with greener options, seeking projects that will allow me to communicate green ideas to the public, and [developing a workflow](#) that incorporates sustainable practices. The list can be as long and detailed as you like, but the idea is to make it unique to your business and your goals.

Your list will be a living document, a constant work in progress, and something you use for every business decision, so it's important that it fits your company well. Once you have a checklist in place, you may want to compare it to checklists prepared by the various [green certification](#) agencies. Having your own green checklist in place is one way to get you one step closer to [certification](#), if you choose to go that route. Whether you choose to certify your business as green or not, a customized sustainability checklist will not only show your customers and clients how committed you are to the environment, but it will define your path towards a truly green business. Be sure to share your list and use it as a marketing tool - a well-defined commitment to sustainability can certainly set you apart from the competition.