



Everyday Sustainability

The role of standards in sustainable everyday choices

"Sustainability" is a word we hear a lot at the moment, but what does it really mean? We know that there are finite resources available to us on earth, but the scale of recycling, re-using and renewing to create a circular economy can seem a little overwhelming. In this article, we explore how to make truly sustainable choices every day as marketing, PR, and "greenwashing" muddy the waters.

We asked three leading experts from across the sustainability, ESG and technology sectors for their insights into making sustainable changes and how standards can help us get there.

Meet the experts:



Diana Verde Nieto
Co-Founder, Co-CEO
Positive Luxury

Diana is a pioneer in ESG and a globally recognized figure in the sustainability field. She has been honored by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader. She is an advisor to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



Daan van der Wekken
Head of ESG (Environmental,
Social, and Governance)
BSI

Daan's passion for consumer goods led him on an extensive career with HJ Heinz, Unilever, and various global sustainability organizations. His belief in standards as a driver for systemic change brought him to BSI in 2022 to lead in the ESG sector.



Steve Haskew
Director of Sustainability and
Client Engagement
Circular Computing

Steve has a demonstrated history of working in innovative and disruptive environments. He is a keynote speaker, and driver of positive change, with a deep focus on reducing the impact ICT has on the environment. He is an advisor to Government bodies and sits on the BSI Committee.

Understanding sustainability

A product's lifecycle, as we currently know it, starts with organic materials and ends with it being thrown away. But where is "away"? It could be a landfill site, shipped abroad to be processed, or recycled. The materials economy the world relies on runs in a line from extraction and production to distribution, consumption and disposal. When there's only so many resources available, however, one day those resources are going to run out.

What happens next is a driving force for change around the world. Recent events such as COVID-19 and the current global shortage of many raw materials required to manufacture tech products, is leading many of us to re-evaluate what we think of when we hear the word "sustainability."

"I think COVID has changed the mindset of people; it's made us perhaps a little more mindful about our relationship with the world. I think that we're moving from being just a consumer to being a citizen and actually understanding that we have power in order to change the status quo." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)

"In terms of technology, there's been a big shift in recent years. We stopped believing that technology is fast enough to do a job and realized that the software had become more efficient with its delivery of data. Hardware doesn't need to be any faster; it's the software that has to be more efficient. So something we've done is learn how to make a product brand new again from a product that's already been made, creating a remanufactured laptop experience." - [Steve Haskew](#)

"There are lots of different buzzwords around to do with climate and carbon, and it can be really confusing. Say you have two bottles of water in your hand, one which says it's climate positive, another which says it's CO2 negative. How do you know which one's better?" - [Daan van der Wekken](#)

Circular economy

If something is sustainable it can continue forever without issue. To achieve true sustainability, our economy needs to move away from the materials model of consumption and disposal and instead adopt a circular approach where waste products and old items are re-used, recycled and re-manufactured into new products – so value is retained for as long as possible.

"So "circular economy" has become a buzzword and there is a massive difference between circular economy and circular business models. A circular economy is when you actually design something with the purpose of being able to take every one of its parts and recycle each one into something else. And not many things are actually built to be circular, where they can be used again and again and again - for example, recycled or recyclable plastic bags are recycled into black bin bags which are not recyclable." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)

...vs circular business models

Achieving a circular economy is an ultimate end goal and doesn't just mean recycling - it requires designing into a product the ability to break it down and use it again. A more accessible aspiration for many organizations is to move towards a circular business model, which can make it easier for consumers to re-use. And it's not a new idea - before fast fashion and cheap, mass production, re-using and mending goods was the norm.

"A circular business model is much bigger, it means I buy something and then I can resell it, rent it, repair it, or share it. And that makes a lot more sense because it's not just having a thing and then transforming it into something else, but actually extending the lifecycle of that product. It's a move away from this disposable mindset of "buy today, throw it away" – because there is no away. We need to keep the stuff that we have for longer, and care about it, not just think we can go and buy another one tomorrow." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)

"A decarbonized future state only exists with a circular economy in it, because 80+% of all greenhouse gases are made in a production factory, in IT at least. The world is focused on the transport sector and the energy sector, which is the right thing, but the largest effect we can have is the energy used in "making stuff" which accounts for 31% of all GHG output and we need to address that. Remanufacturing is at the core of the circular economy; therefore, remanufacturing is at the heart of a decarbonized future state."

- [Steve Haskew](#)

Who is responsible for sustainability?

"For me, this is very clear – we are all responsible for sustainability. We are facing unprecedented global challenges which can only be solved by cooperation and collaboration among civil society, business, government, NGOs, foundations and consumers alike. Yes, we as consumers may decide to invest in certain products and certain brands and these can become a little bit tainted with issues such as modern slavery or the gender pay gap and what have you. But I also think that investors are now taking into account ESG (Environmental, Social & Governance) factors and those are driving business strategy.

For example, pension funds are aware of where we as consumers want our money to go. I think our

choices increasingly put pressure on where some of our environmental investments are being made. There's lots of moving parts, and they may look insignificant but they all have a part to play."

- [Daan van der Wekken](#)

"If you look at the Green Deal for the European Union, it's about producer responsibility. It's about tackling obsolescence and stopping planned obsolescence. Where before we had growth at the heart of business models, now we have impact and growth, and that comes from the investment community who are giving money to companies that can qualify and quantify their impact." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)

"Buying sustainably comes down to our behaviour. If we're all hell bent on energy being a resource that we need to conserve, we need to look at our own habits. Can the UK change the way that the world is going to behave from a climate point of view? It can't do that, unfortunately, because we represent a very small fraction of the world's 8 billion people. But we have to take responsibility and be accountable for our decision making, which when combined to best practice will make the difference." - [Steve Haskew](#)

Making sustainable living part of the everyday

There are lots of ways to make small changes every day that can make your buying habits and lifestyle more sustainable.

- Leaving the car for short trips and choosing to walk or cycle is a great way to lower your carbon footprint
- Reducing the amount of plastic you buy and use can result in less plastic waste going into landfill sites
- Insulating your home, avoiding over-use of water and electricity and buying second hand are all great ways to live more sustainably

A big part of helping consumers to make sustainable choices comes down to the language used when talking about sustainability and ensuring that the claims companies make can be verified, giving customers assurance that the choices they make are genuinely sustainable ones. With standards, BSI can help consumers choose sustainable products with confidence.

"One of the things that is really difficult is creating a common syntax. So if you type in "sustainability" into a search engine you'll have a million results, but what is it actually? What does sustainability mean to me? It should mean the same thing and, principally, be the same. Like a four wheel car has got four wheels. We can describe what a car looks like. "Sustainability" should be the same, and standards can provide this common language."

- [Daan van der Wekken](#)

"Assurance gives consumers peace of mind. Our framework – which is co-created with BSI – is based on standards and considers other certifications. This gives us a real understanding of a business' value chains, as the majority of the impact of most companies is in scope 3 – i.e. their suppliers. For example, if you want to know about leather, look at leather manufacturing standards. For cotton, check the different standards for cotton and the risk associated with the areas where it is sourced, etc.

Today, in 2022, no one can know everything about a company's inner workings, so it's about collaboration and transparency. We take in account 180 different certifications and accreditations in order to have a clear view throughout the value chain – and Positive Luxury's assessment is based on BSI standards and an aggregation of reporting frameworks." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)

"What BSI does is provide a foundation against which the consumer can measure any purchasing risk. If the product has a Kitemark then this gives assurances to the customer that the product is what is being described to them at point of sale."

- [Steve Haskew](#)

"As a consumer, we want to invest in something which is green, but get confused by all these different labels using different terms which all claim to be better than each other. But is there not some consistent terminology that could be agreed within the industry? And that's what we're trying to do. What BSI does in terms of accreditation is say to consumers: Don't take our word for it. Take this organization's word for it." - [Daan van der Wekken](#)

BSI and a more sustainable future

BSI is committed to operating sustainably and helping other organizations operate sustainably. Using standards to establish a common language and drive innovation in sustainable practices, across sectors, is the key to creating the circular business models and moving towards a circular economy.

The impact of our everyday choices, such as the standards we hold companies to, through the products we choose to buy, add up to a collective decision and movement that supports and demands sustainability at every level of society. Standards are a way of bringing together ideas and creating a collaborative approach to sustainability.

"BSI has standards for social responsibility, we just published a new standard on managing the risk of modern slavery, which is a big issue within supply chains. In fact, a very good example is where a business might believe it doesn't have any modern slavery, but of course they can't be so sure about tier one, tier two, or tier three countries.

We're developing all these standards addressing ESG risk, but consumers might not be aware of them because they're ongoing and they're providing companies with the tools to identify risk, identify opportunity, and continuously improve their sustainability performance. It's there in the background." - [Daan van der Wekken](#)

"These changes are coming from many, many, many areas all at the same time – it's forming a perfect storm and we've never before in history had this happening, this alliance of intensive thinking about what we buy, how we dispose, how long do we keep things, how do we manufacture, what materials do we use?

This has happened many times in history, for example the Industrial Revolution. But what we can do is at such scale because what it did not have back then is the ability to be completely interconnected, interdependent with each other. I think we are living probably, you know, in the in the most exciting moment where real change can happen." - [Diana Verde Nieto](#)



Explore more standards...

Organizational Responses to Modern Slavery (BS 25700)

A pioneering national standard, giving organizations guidance on how to manage modern slavery risks in their operations, supply chains and wider operating environment.

Purpose-Driven Organizations (PAS 808)

This guidance standard helps organizations reassess how and why they do business. And how to factor in people and planet at the heart of their strategy and operations.