

## 7 Questions and 7 Tips to Green Your Supply Chain



Painting by Peter Seidel

By Eco-Design Diva  
Julie E. Gabrielli

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie E. Gabrielli". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Many business owners rightly wonder whether taking care in what they buy, and from whom, can make a difference to the environment. I'm here to tell you: absolutely! As you begin to wake up to all the connections your business has, your supply chain is one of the easiest to get a handle on. Whether you are a retail store with many vendors, an architect specifying building materials and systems, or a graphic designer working with printers and paper manufacturers, opportunities abound.

The information below will help you shift how you approach this shopping in your business. You may even want to jot down some categories of suppliers that you typically work with. These might include office supplies, client support materials, products you sell in your business: anything you purchase throughout the year.

## First, 7 Questions to Ask From a Green Perspective

1. Apply life-cycle thinking. This includes:
  - a. Does the product contain toxic materials?
  - b. Where do the raw materials come from and where is the product manufactured?
  - c. How much energy is used to extract and ship components or parts of a product?
  - d. How much energy, water and resources are used to create and package the product?
  - e. How can it be disposed of or recycled at the end of its useful life?
  - f. Are there any environmental or health impacts of its use?
2. Do you even need to purchase the product new? Sometimes a used item is just as good.
3. Exactly how much of it do you need? Don't buy more than you need; this wastes money and resources.
4. What type of packaging does it come with? Environmentally-conscious companies are doing all sorts of creative things to green their packaging. This addresses the materials that packaging is made from, as well as the amount of it.
5. Is the product well-designed for its intended purpose? Often, cheaply made goods fall apart and are thrown away within 3 months of purchase.

6. Does the use of this product require special ventilation? If so, don't buy it! There are plenty of alternatives for low- and no-VOC cleaning products, paints, and adhesives.
7. Depending on how far you want to take it, ask about labor practices. Does the manufacturer pay a living wage, do they give their employees benefits, do they have a diverse workforce? Do they contribute to their community? The social aspects of sustainability / green are sometimes overlooked, but have huge potential payoffs.

## Then, 7 Tips to Help You On Your Way

1. Look for locally-produced and sourced products. This helps support your local economy, and reduces transportation-related environmental costs.
2. Look for materials that are any or all of these: non-toxic, biodegradable, renewable, recyclable, durable, reusable.
3. Look for equipment that is, at minimum, Energy Star rated (a program of the EPA). Buying energy efficient equipment is one of the best ways to green your supply chain, because it saves you money.
4. Even if something costs more in the first place, analyze whether its operating or in-service cost is lower than a cheaper alternative. This is often the case, because more durable, reliable equipment generally costs a little more.
5. For whatever you buy, there is probably a guide to finding environmentally preferable products. For example, [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov) and [www.stopwaste.org](http://www.stopwaste.org)
6. Green Seal is a reputable organization that certifies certain products, such as office products, cleaning products, construction materials, and food service products. [www.greenseal.org](http://www.greenseal.org)
7. When considering something like recycled paper that may cost more, look at the big picture. Do you print on both sides of the paper? Setting your printers to do this can save a tremendous amount of paper and money.

*Source for a few of the points:*

Friend, Gil. (2009). The Truth About Green Business. QUE; 1 edition.  
(Questions: 1 (pg 86), 2 (p 123); Tips: 3 (pg. 124))

## Resources

Here, I've provided some specifics to help you implement the learning above. Since the holiday season is upon us, the first four are suggestions of alternate corporate gifts that you can consider. Remember, though – Tip #1 above suggests looking locally. So, while I have used the Tree Greetings (item #3 below) to great effect, the next year, I supported a local tree-planting organization that also works with urban kids. Get creative!

### CORPORATE GIFT-GIVING

#### 1. Holiday Cards

<http://www.seasonsgreenings.net/> Beautiful, original designs are printed on stock made of FSC Certified 100% post industrial waste, printed with vegetable inks, by an FSC certified printer. Same quality as you would expect from fine, custom printed cards, AND more environmentally friendly.

#### 2. Kiva

<http://www.kiva.org>

Kiva's mission is **to connect people through lending for the sake of alleviating poverty**. It is the world's first person-to-person micro-lending website, empowering individuals to lend to unique entrepreneurs around the globe.

#### 3. Tree Greetings

<http://www.treegreetings.com/> Send gifts to clients, family, and friends. An eCard announces that a tree is being planted in their honor. You can choose what type of tree and where it's planted.

#### 4. Heifer International

<http://www.heifer.org/>

I love this organization. When my son was born, one of the most memorable baby gifts he received was a lamb! Really! Heifer sends out a beautiful card with a picture or drawing of the animal and some information about the family that received it. It just feels so good to support an organization that is doing such AMAZING, transformational work in the world.



## TRUSTED INFORMATION SOURCES

### **US EPA Environmentally-Preferable Purchasing Program**

<http://www.epa.gov/epp/>

Helps the federal government "buy green," and in doing so, uses the federal government's enormous buying power to stimulate market demand for green products and services. Use this site to find information about green products and services; identify federal green buying requirements; calculate the costs and benefits of purchasing choices; Manage green purchasing processes.

### **Green Products Alliance**

<http://www.greenproductsalliance.com>

Consortium of manufacturers who make and sell natural personal care products. Member companies work together to lower raw material, marketing, advertising, and PR costs through cooperative projects and group buying. Membership is free. All products are subjected to a rigorous set of standards measuring the Alliance's definition of "natural."

### **Sustainable Green Printing Partnership**

<http://www.sgppartnership.org>

Due to a growing demand for sustainable printers, the Sustainable Green Printing (SGP) Partnership was formed to establish a source of credible information related to sustainable business practices across all print platforms. Provides benchmarking tools applicable to the printing industry; provides verification of green and sustainable business practices based on a published list of criteria; and publically recognizes facilities that meet established criteria.

### **Sustainable Products Purchasing Coalition**

<http://www.sppcoalition.org>

Uses aggregate purchasing power to show the marketplace the value of providing verifiable environmental product data.

### **ResponsibleShopper.org**

<http://www.coopamerica.org/programs/rs/>

In-depth social/ environmental profiles on hundreds of companies. Compare companies and investigate industries.

### **Environmentally Preferable Products Procurement Listserv**

<http://www.nerc.org/eppnet/index.html>

EPPnet, the Environmentally Preferable Products Procurement Listserv, links public and private purchasing officials interested in buying environmental products.

**Julie E. Gabrielli** is an award-winning architect who was instrumental in starting the sustainable design movement in Baltimore over ten years ago. She has worked with many clients to help them realize their dreams, from concept to construction. As an advisor to the 2007 Solar Decathlon, she helped steer team LEAFHouse to be the top-placing American team, a second-place-overall finish.

Julie sees dismal environmental statistics as a challenge. Surely, with intelligence, creativity, and collaboration, we can do better. She frequently shares her upbeat message on her blog, GOforChange.com, and as an inspiring public speaker.

Julie's expertise is as an industry-changer. She has worked with businesses institutions to develop sustainability initiatives and Climate Action Plans. She now works with small business owners to take their business in a green direction, starting with clear framework and vision, identifying new markets, crafting a green brand and message, developing new products, assessing and reducing their footprint, and giving back.

Her years of competitive sailboat racing taught Julie that when good design is combined with clear vision, steering for changing conditions, and a healthy respect for the forces of nature, great results are possible!

