



BRINGING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO FRUITION

We've witnessed a fundamental shift in the world. The well-being of the earth, the health of our bodies, the quality of the food we eat, the purity of the air we breathe, and the survival of the plants and animals we share the planet with are now all part of our expanded realm of responsibility. Global population levels and our collective burden on the environment have reached a crescendo, bringing laser-sharp clarity and focus to the reality of the damage we are creating.

Previous theories on global warming and the carbon impact caused by humans have become our current reality. And the role that designers play has moved to center stage—to helping figure out how to slow the change, maybe prevent it and hopefully even reverse it. To protect the health of our biosphere, we must create modes of production and consumption that can be ecologically and economically sustained. It isn't often that such profound changes occur in our way of life and work.

A few years ago, I was in a factory in France observing the initial production of some new products emerging from the assembly line. They were all molded in ABS polymer and were perfectly executed. I was proud to see the results, thinking about all the hard work that went into them. However, within 10 minutes I began to have the opposite reaction. I felt strangely uneasy. I realized that these products were going to be bought and installed in thousands of homes and would work great for their useful life span of less than 10 years. But after that, they'd end up in some landfill for an eternity. How many hundreds of years does ABS last in a landfill? Are there toxic additives in ABS that might leach out? Will the polymer and the additives return to a molecular level without harming the earth and all of us? Are most of the products being manufactured around the globe usable for a relatively short time to only become trash deposits for millennia?

Most of us see the computers in our offices replaced every few years or so not because they are broken but because they are rendered obsolete by software. How odd: computers that still work but can't be used. Most of us accept this as the progress of technology. But we also wonder what happens to all the resource-intensive materials—all the components sourced from around the globe to form a single product, which then ends up in the trash. Not a good feeling. Yet we also realize how major corporations are built around this model of obsolescence and depend on it for their profitability and viability.

Now what do we do?

Two business perspectives have resulted from considerations about sustainable development: How can business take a leadership role in these concerns, and how will doing so take away from the ability of companies to earn a profit? The trajectory of most corporations is to produce as many things as possible in order to make the most profit possible. The burgeoning pressure of greater numbers of people consuming greater numbers of products and creating larger amounts of pollution challenges that conventional model.

If we make products healthier but keep making more of them every year, are we really making much progress? Producing fewer products will reduce waste and require fewer materials, which in turn will create less ecological and

