



eBrands

Better for the Planet

'A practical plan for making e-commerce brands more environmentally & people friendly'

The world needs better e-commerce companies

Climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe and human influence is contributing to this, particularly for 'hot extremes'

- *The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)*

5 trillion single-use plastic bags are used every year and if current plastic pollution trends continue, our oceans will contain more plastic than fish by 2050

- *The United Nations Environment Programme*



eBrands

& e-commerce companies that aim to be better ... will find better opportunities

- **Amazon co-founded *The Climate Pledge* in 2019**, a commitment to be net-zero carbon across its business by 2040 and has included features such as Climate Pledge badges to **promote products** that focus on sustainability
 - “We’re done being in the middle of the herd on this issue” - Jeff Bezos
- **There was a 71% increase** in Google searches related to sustainable goods (globally) between 2016-2020
 - The Economist Intelligence Unit (report commissioned by the Worldwide Wildlife Fund)
- **The size of sustainable investment funds has doubled** in the 4 years up to 2020 to reach \$3.6 trillion
 - The International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, Oct 2021



What 'Better for the Planet' actually means

Language on topics surrounding sustainability is usually vague and difficult to understand, so - to be clear - when we talk about making brands Better for the Planet we mean making e-commerce companies and more specifically Amazon FBA brands that are...

1. **Environmentally Focused** 🌱 - and consistently reduce their environmental footprint - whether that's through the volume of waste or amount of pollution that they create
2. **People Caring** 🙌 - for their own team and for anyone that is working in their supply chain - through fair pay, strong working rights and equality of treatment
3. **'Loved by' & 'Good for' Consumers** 🧡 - because they are a source of quality and durable products that have been ethically sourced (and hopefully improve their consumers wellbeing, too).



Contents

(AKA Why we think you'll want to read this)

This guide is focused on providing information and value for Amazon FBA Sellers that want to build brands that meet this definition of 'Better for the Planet'.

We will outline **practical and fast-acting plans** that can allow **anyone**, whatever the size of their Amazon FBA business to minimise their environmental footprint, support the people in their company and supply chain, and build and sell products that people are proud to be associated with. Building brands that are Better for the Planet can be done by everyone and we hope this guide will help to make sure that you get your goals ticked off the To Do list 

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Strategy . AKA: 'How' To Make Sure that Goals are Achieved

Given the difficulty and commitment needed in creating brands that are Better for the Planet - for every goal/project that we choose, we first check whether it is in line with these ideas:

Simple Goals, Practical Plans 🖐️ The more complicated a goal is, the harder it is to achieve or communicate - so wherever possible, simplify the goal and create practical plans so that you can explain to anyone in a short, clear and compelling statement what you're doing, why you're doing it and how you will achieve it

Start at the Finish 🏁 If you want to know how to going to achieve a big goal which requires many steps into the unknown - it's important to understand what the end result will look like AND why you're doing it in the first place. So define what success for your Planet Friendly goal looks like and then work backwards

Small, Consistent Steps - Big Wins 🏔️ The bigger the goal is, the higher the risk is that you will become overwhelmed or lost. So break every goal down into smaller pieces where you can execute your plans better and get quick, meaningful results to keep you and your team motivated. Then over time this positive feedback loop of small victories can create the progress and momentum needed to achieve bigger goals

Measurable Goals 📊 Data isn't everything, but it helps (a lot), so pick goals where you have clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and the ability to measure your progress over time (e.g. how much packaging a single product has) - then you know if your actions are taking you in the right direction

Action Speaks Louder than Words 💪 It's easy to talk about making your brand Better for the Planet, it's harder to do it. So don't use up too much time talking about what you're going to do, just outline your goals, what you need to do to get there - and then start going after them! In addition, the more you take action on achieving your goals, the more opportunities that are likely to begin to present themselves, too.

By following these strategic points we can ensure that the goals we set provide simple, practical and fast acting solutions that move in the right direction and get ticked off the To Do list ✅

Using Data

- How to Track Your Progress

Before you start to implement your Better for the Planet actions 🌍, it's important to know how to record your progress so that you know:

- What your starting point is,
- Where you want to get too, and
- Whether you're moving in the right direction between those two points

If this guide was only for Fortune 500 companies, we would recommend a full carbon accounting of the entire business and its vendors, along with comprehensive assessments of labour practices, governance and other factors. **However**, this guide isn't for Fortune 500 companies, it's for small to medium Amazon FBA brands. Therefore, we'll focus on looking at general measures and **key performance indicators** that can allow you to track whether you're making a real, meaningful impact... without taking up hours of your time. ⏳

To do this we will aim to use data that you can record yourself with minimal effort. We will list one or more of these KPIs on every section that we discuss. Examples will include ways to:

- Reduce your shipping emissions,
- Monitor your packaging volume
- Check how transparent your supply chain is

Keep all of this data in a simple spreadsheet so that you can see how your brand is improving and also so that you can see which of your actions are having the most impact. 📊

Making sure that you have measurable goals is included in the last section on strategy, but this point is so important that it deserves another page.

Data certainly isn't everything, but it does help (a lot).

Taking Action

- How to get your 'First Wins'

Now that we have thought about the why and the how of making brands more environmentally and people friendly it's time to think about the 'what'. So we'll start off with some **quick** and **simple** ways to make your brand more planet friendly, so that you can demonstrate and enforce the value of taking these actions to yourself, to your team (and also to your customers by showing them this action and improvement).

NB: We'll discuss the KPIs for these in the sections after.

1. **Quick packaging assessment** 📦 - check the current packaging of your biggest sellers. Order a unit to your house if you don't have any available. Look through the box and identify anything that doesn't add value to your customers or is necessary for product protection or compliance.

When eBrands acquired a new brand we found that there were two unnecessary plastic bags in one of the A-category products. A quick call to the factory helped to remove 42 000 plastic bags from our supply chain annually.

2. **Get rid of unnecessary returns** 🚫 - look through your customer reviews for common complaints. Are any of these due to misunderstandings about your products or disagreements with core features of the products? If so, be honest about these and you can even frame these features in a positive light.

For example, if your product has fewer settings/options than competitors, your product description = "Our product is simple to use and comes with a refined set of only a few key settings to make sure that you get the most out of every option."

3. **Plan out your orders and diversify** 🚢 - if you order from overseas and you've got a high rate of air and emergency shipments (which might be the case in the current supply chain climate) then start planning your orders out on a 6-month basis and diversify your orders into smaller shipments. This means a lower chance of emergency orders (even if your order gets delayed) and consequently a higher ratio of your orders being moved by container ships rather than air freight. Container ships certainly aren't perfect, but their lower CO2 emissions profile makes them a preferable choice to air freight when it comes to climate change.

Packaging - Analysis, Design and Waste Removal

After getting some quick wins it's time to take a deeper look into your brand (but we will still focus on goals and processes that anyone can achieve and do).

First off, packaging. Packaging is the primary source of waste for an e-commerce business. Packaging waste per year amounted to almost a couple hundred kilograms per person in 2019, according to the latest analysis [by the European Union](#), and this problem has most likely intensified during the pandemic as e-commerce sales have boomed at rates faster than recycling infrastructure can keep up.

In addition, Amazon continues to reconfigure its FBA fees to support brands that are more focused on minimising their packaging volume, while for European sellers, initiatives such as Extended Producer Responsibility mean that brands that minimise waste and use less plastic may reduce their environmental tax costs (particularly for brands that sell major product volumes in France and Germany). So, make sure that you:

- **Minimise** your packaging volume
- **Remove** anything that doesn't add value (e.g. for the unboxing experience, product protection or safety compliance)
- Use only **reusable, recyclable** or **biodegradable** materials
- **Reduce plastic** in your packaging (and product if possible)
- **Digitise** product extras such as instruction manuals, thank you cards, etc..

Redesigning your packaging doesn't have to be difficult. As we discussed in the First Wins section, a quick look at your products, especially your best sellers, can allow you to identify whether there are any obvious pitfalls with your current product. Then there are plenty of designers available on contracting websites where you can review pricing, speed and quality of work - before you call up your factory to check what they are able to do and what materials they have access to. A reduction in volume can even give you leverage to negotiate reduced production costs.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): Per half-year or year - Measure the total weight of your packaging and separately, the weight or percentage that comes from non-recyclable or non-biodegradable material. Use total surface area or volume for low weight items e.g. width*height of one side of a plastic bag - this doesn't need to be a perfect measurement, it just needs to be consistent so that you know which way you're headed. Multiply this with sales volume of each product to get a weighted measure.

NB: Secondary packaging - AKA the boxes that the transport companies you work with put your items in - is a little more difficult and will require good transport company selection. One important way that you can have a positive effect here is by making sure that your product can be 'shipped in own container' - i.e. removing the need for any additional packaging during its journey.

An extra note on Packaging - Recycling Instructions

‘Make things easy for the consumer’ is a common piece of advice across every industry - and it’s no different for recycling your product or its packaging. The more effort that a consumer has to put in to working out how to recycle your product, the more likely it is that it will end up in a landfill or incinerator.

So you can aim to *make things easier* for the consumer by adding recycling instructions to your packaging - and even adding positive points to demonstrate how taking recycling action for a product can benefit the environment.

Unfortunately, due to the variation in recycling schemes per country (and even per state in the US), finding a one-size fits all approach can be difficult.

However, given the fact that it only requires some extra written information on your packaging, providing some general advice on whether the product is recyclable or not and which are typically the easiest ways to recycle can at least help to increase the recycling rate of your product

Compact By Design & Other Climate Pledge Badges

As part of Amazon's commitment to be net carbon zero by 2040, in 2020 it added in Climate Pledge Badges to help promote any products that are certified to be sustainably made. 🌍

The certification status is open to all Amazon Sellers and can be achieved by meeting the standards for Amazon's own certification requirements (e.g. Compact by Design) or with one of a large list of its [sustainable certification partners](#). 📄 Requirements can range from areas such as fair trade practices through to carbon free initiatives and global recycling standards. Amazon's own certificate in this programme is called Compact by Design and is focused around areas such as efficient packaging for consumables.

NB: A way to get some quick wins on this is to check with your suppliers to see if they already have certification with one of these agencies.

After certification, which can be for a range of reasons, Amazon will either receive a range of SKUs from the certification partner or you can provide the certificate to Amazon directly by opening a support case. After a product is verified by Amazon, the product will receive a Climate Pledge Badge (in approximately 2-4 weeks), which will help to promote your product to any consumers who are interested in finding sustainable products. Methods which Amazon may engage in to support your products include displaying the badge in search results and on storefronts, as well as allowing consumers to filter search results by Climate Pledge Friendly products.

These certificates can consequently act as a useful proxy to measure how many of your products are meeting a set of standards to make them Better for the Planet, while also potentially boosting their sales (although reports on the success of this seem to vary).

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): Per half-year or year - Number of products or % of products with a Climate Pledge Badge (i.e that have achieved a certification for being sustainably made)

The Packaging Hierarchy

Finding the best mix of **environmentally friendly packaging** for your products will depend on your specific product's needs, suppliers, material availability and other factors. That being said, we have included some pointers on things to consider if and when you do decide to change your product's packaging.

While this list is certainly not infallible (and ultimately all packaging is bad for the environment), it can help to give a base of information for further investigation when comparing different types of packaging or even product materials. It is important to note, though, that you need to **check the specifications of individual packaging products for yourself** before making a final choice as not all types of packaging are created equal (even if their name implies that they are) - for example, some types of biodegradable plastics will only actually degrade in specific atmospheric conditions and likely won't degrade in a landfill. So take a little extra time and then discuss with your suppliers about what they're able to provide.

Things to consider when picking environmentally friendly packaging or product materials:

- **Minimise/Reduce Packaging** - often the best option is just to reduce the packaging or material volume, both for the environment and your costings
- **Reusable Packaging** - useful, and consumes less raw materials and requires less emissions to produce on average - because one piece of packaging can do the work of several pieces.. However, it will be difficult to do this for e-commerce if the packaging goes direct to the consumer as you would also need to have some kind of return scheme.
- **Recyclable Packaging** - this type of material can also lead to lower emissions and reduced uses of raw materials. It is best to aim for products such as corrugated cardboard here, as they have well established recycling streams in multiple countries. Avoid products where it is harder to find general recycling options in your major marketplaces (you can contact local recycling centres if you want to be sure) as this is more likely to lead to 'Wish Cycling'.
- **Biodegradable packaging** - while this can still mean that packaging is like to be single use, it is still an improvement on non-degradable or slow degrading items, such as polystyrene foam packing peanuts, which can take hundreds of years before they begin to degrade in a landfill. Examples of this can include corrugated cardboard bubble wrap and biodegradable packing peanuts.
- **Bioplastics** - while bioplastics can be better for the environment compared to traditional plastics (which have a higher emissions profile for their production), if they are produced from agricultural products such as sugar cane, there is a risk of only shifting the pollution burden from one issue to another (e.g. increasing land use, water pollution, etc...)

A few other points - outside of the above factors, it can also be useful to look for products that are sourced from sustainable materials such as **plant based materials** or **recycled packaging**. The environmental profile of these factors still need to be assessed **but...**

Most importantly - Remember: The above information is just to help optimise your choices and overall, replacing traditional non-sustainable materials with sustainable packaging will more often than not be better than doing nothing - and the more you engage with your suppliers and other vendors on topics of sustainability and making your intentions known - the more likely it is that new opportunities for you to create real impacts in your supply chain will happen.

Shipping - Why it's important to plan

The largest pollution risks for Amazon FBA businesses often come from transportation. 

For freight, one answer to this is to improve your inventory planning forecasts and diversify your shipments to create a more resilient supply chain that is less likely to result in emergency air shipments. This can not only help to reduce the CO2 emissions profile of your Amazon FBA brand (CO2 emissions per KG are considerably higher for air freight compared to sea freight) **but also minimise risks to your profit margins** as air freight costs are also typically much higher than sea freight.

More planning means taking a longer-term view on your inventory forecasts (e.g. 6-12 months) to ensure that when you make orders you can ensure that you're booking in shipments well ahead of time - which is particularly important in the current supply chain climate which has seen shipment times soar. In addition, spreading out your shipments into smaller cargoes can also mean that you have less risk of a delayed shipment for one large cargo putting your whole inventory at risk, along with your hard won Amazon sales ranking if you stock out.

Better planning of your orders can also give you the opportunity to negotiate better prices with your suppliers by showing them a more stable and larger ordering schedule that can take advantage of economies of scale - just remember not to lock yourself into volume agreements if you're unsure of your volumes or you can't afford to make payments if your demand decreases.

Given that **shipping delays and supply chain uncertainty** seem set to continue well into 2022, increased inventory order planning looks like an important bet whether you're aiming to make your Amazon FBA more planet friendly or not.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): Per quarter - % of total products shipped via sea freight (if you want to add extra sophistication you could do this by cbm or total KG).

NB: As with packaging, the best method of transportation for your products from an environmental perspective is no transportation at all, i.e. sourcing suppliers for your products that are located in your marketplace. However, there are a number of things to consider before being able to do this (e.g. ensuring quality standards to make sure you can use the same Amazon listing) and if you sell in more than one marketplace, finding an optimally placed factory or factories requires some extra effort.

Supply Chain Transparency - Onsite Inspections

If you want to know whether your supply chain upholds the same values that you do for labour rights, working conditions, sustainability and more - the best way to do this is to use an external supply chain compliance partner.

There are multiple companies that do this, such as: QIMA, Sofeast Limited (Qualityinspection.org), Asia Quality Focus, etc... Costs for an inspection can be below \$1,000 and even below \$500 depending on the size of the inspection and total products - so this is definitely something that smaller Amazon FBA brands can carry out, too!

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): Per-year - No. of inspections carried out or % of suppliers inspected.

Outside of using external quality assurance inspectors to ensure that your supply chain is meeting and exceeding global standards, if you can't carry out an inspection of a facility, for example, for relationships with new suppliers, it's important to have processes set up so that you can identify early warning signs.

We recommend having a list of set questions, both direct and indirect, that can help you to make sure that your suppliers, warehouses and transporters prioritise the environment and their labour force in their business practices.

Examples of potential questions for initial vendor interviews:

- How long has the spokesperson worked for the company? (i.e. turnover rate)
- Do they have relationships with large multinational corporations? (which are more likely to carry out quality assurance inspections on all of their vendors)
- What are their environmental targets? (The company should be able to identify what their environmental targets are and what actions they have been taking to meet them).
- Are they certified with any of Amazon's Climate Pledge partners?
- Do you use third-party quality assurance inspectors to assess yourselves and your vendors?

The majority of vendors that you deal with as an Amazon FBA Seller will likely be reputable, but it is important to carry out regular quality assurance assessments as ignoring these factors in your supply chain can cause exposure to legal issues, negative press, loss of customer trust and a multitude of other significant risks.

No Returns

- Avoiding Needless Pollution

Every return journey means an unnecessary, though sometimes difficult to avoid, shipment for your product - minimising returns means that you help to improve your product's profit margin and reduce its emissions and packaging profile.

Making sure your product is of consistent and high quality (e.g., ongoing quality inspections) is the most important factor in minimizing returns. Your listing quality comes as a close second. There are a few ways to improve your listing that take minimal effort and can make a significant difference to your return rates.

- **Use high quality photos**, including 360-degree photographs
- **Use videos** of your products
- **Make sure your product descriptions are clear**, detailed and accurate
- **Address any pain points** from your negative customer reviews in your product descriptions, too - if you can't update/upgrade the item immediately.

You can **frame communication** for the last point in a positive way, too – e.g.

- Negative Review = Fewer settings/options for the product than some of the competitors
- Product description = “Our product is simple to use and comes with a refined set of only a few key settings to make sure that you get the most out of every option.”

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): Return percentage - this data is available via Amazon Seller Central's Returns Performance Dashboard

Cleaning Your Own House

While the best opportunities for improving your Amazon FBA brand's environmental footprint and social standards are found in your supply chain, there are plenty of opportunities to make your business Better for the Planet at your home office, too.

These can range from smaller changes such as switching any paper billings onto digital receipts through to adding solar panels to reduce the electricity usage of your home office.

We've listed a few extra pointers below to provide some extra options:

- Add in recycling processes for all of your office waste
- Put your electric devices on timers
- Source office furniture from sustainable suppliers

If you have employees:

- Offer flexible working arrangements
- Include opportunities for upskilling and training
- Ensure that you utilise diverse hiring practices

There are an endless number of things that you can do here.

How To Make Your FBA Business Better for the Planet - A Roadmap

Small, consistent steps can create big changes - and to outline this, we've set out a roadmap to show you how step by step you can build towards making an Amazon FBA brand that truly is...

Better for the Planet

Only Sell products that are:

- Long lasting
- Sustainably and ethically sourced
- Made of recyclable materials (both for the product itself and its packaging)

Only work with suppliers that have:

- Sustainable production
- Ethical working conditions
- Transparent business practices
- Optimally located (to reduce distances)

Invest in your employees with:

- Training and upskilling (for all!)
- Flexible working conditions
- Tools for a healthy and balanced life

Eliminate all non-recyclable and non-degradables

Any new products or packaging will use recyclable or biodegradable materials - any non-recyclables/non-degradables in pre-existing products will be changed

Redesign supply chains, if necessary

Make major changes to supply chains (e.g. change suppliers) to meet goals

Build an Upskilling Structure

Create a long-term structure for employees that is centred around

Standardise Products for Certification

Redesign products and packaging for Amazon Climate Pledge certification compliance (A products first and B products later)

Source local factories for key brand expansions

For expansions into new marketplaces, locate and develop agreements with factories that are locally placed

Sign up to the UN Global Compact

An agreement that commits to ethical business practices

Optimise Logistics Practices

- Consolidate loads
- Reduce air freight shipments by 65%

Organise recurring supplier inspections

- Use external party to verify the business practices of suppliers

Flexible and supportive working arrangements

Develop working conditions that focus on creating work-life balance and mental wellness

'First Wins' Plan

Analyse brand and carry out available quick implementation and impact actions

Set up diverse hiring & management policies

Build a diverse and inclusive team and management structure

Your Supply Chain 

Your Team 

Communicating Your Progress

As you gradually improve your Amazon FBA brand's ability to be Better for the Planet, it's important to communicate your progress. You can do this by using social media, adding information to your packaging (depending on local regulations), building it into your brand identity and through a variety of other distribution channels.

There are 3 key benefits to doing this (among others):

- It helps to demonstrate **what you've achieved** to yourself and your team as a motivating factor
- There is a **growing section of consumers** that search only for products that are environmentally friendly and that prioritise ethical labour
- The **more that you communicate what your values are**, the more connections that you will be able to make that can provide opportunities in those areas

The world needs more planet-friendly brands and products, so don't be afraid to shout about your efforts and achievements!

Communication Example

- What are we working on

Given that we're discussing how to communicate your Better for the Planet progress - we thought we'd take a minute to show how we have worked with a few of our brands to positively affect eBrands sustainability profile since we got started in 2021....

Environmentally Focused

- **Beauty brand:** Removed all excess plastic bags, strengthening the reusable packaging made of bamboo (this equated to removing over 42 000 plastic bags annually!)
- **Arts and Crafts brand:** Switched from agency to direct factory supplier to achieve better transparency to manufacturing practices, better quality and predictable lead times (fewer air shipments)
- **Household brand:** Switched to biodegradable packaging, and created primary relationships with a factory working fully on solar power
- **Multiple products certified** via Amazon's Climate Pledge

People Caring

- **Set up diverse, flexible and global team** with people based in 9 different countries (and counting...) able to work remotely and at flexible hours
- **Developed equal hiring** and management policies to make sure all employees and candidates have the same level of opportunities and experience
- **Added mentoring, training and skill-building** opportunities for all employees

Brands that people love

- **Created environmental, social and governance acquisition criteria** that any acquisition we make - as a buyer of great Amazon FBA brands - must have achieved, so that every brand we buy meets our standards

& We're now a member of the UN Global Compact, too

We signed up to the *UN's Global Compact* in December 2021 as part of a group of 12,000+ companies based in over 160 countries that are committed to aligning their strategies and operations with universal principles on *human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption*.

We want this to be a cornerstone of how we operate and as such we use an external supply chain compliance partner to allow us to inspect and verify all vendors that we work with, wherever in the world they may be.

Final Word - Having a ‘Mindset To Do Better’

When eBrands was formed, there were already several existing Amazon Aggregators. The idea was solid (Amazon aggregators have been some of the fastest growing startups in recent years), eBrands’ founders had strong, relevant experience and the size of Amazon’s Online Third-Party-Seller Marketplace (which stood at around \$300Bn by the start of this decade and continues to grow strongly) meant there was room for multiple aggregators.

However, the team wasn’t and isn’t interested in only being ‘another Amazon aggregator’; we’re interested in what we could do to go beyond what the standard aggregator business model aims for. This mindset has led to eBrands exploring numerous avenues and developing a variety of ideas that have moved forward and evolved - as the business has done the same - since its inception at the start of 2021.

One idea, though, that has emerged from this mindset and remained consistent throughout, is how can eBrands build a startup that isn’t only focused on making Amazon FBA brands that it acquires better at marketing, sales, logistics, investment, compliance, etc... but one that unites e-commerce brands around a strategy to not just be better in business terms but to be better for the environment, better for communities, better for people and overall...

Better for the Planet

Erika Ottela,
Co-founder & COO





eBrands

Building E-Commerce that's
Better for the Planet

A Member of the UN Global Compact
- Network Finland

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