

# Sustainable Exhibiting

A Guide to Planning Early  
and Getting the Most From  
Your Investment

Freeman<sup>1</sup>



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Today, the importance of sustainability goes beyond saving the environment. Incorporating sustainability into your brand story increases brand perception (it's expected now!), inspires customers and attendees, and supports corporate goals.

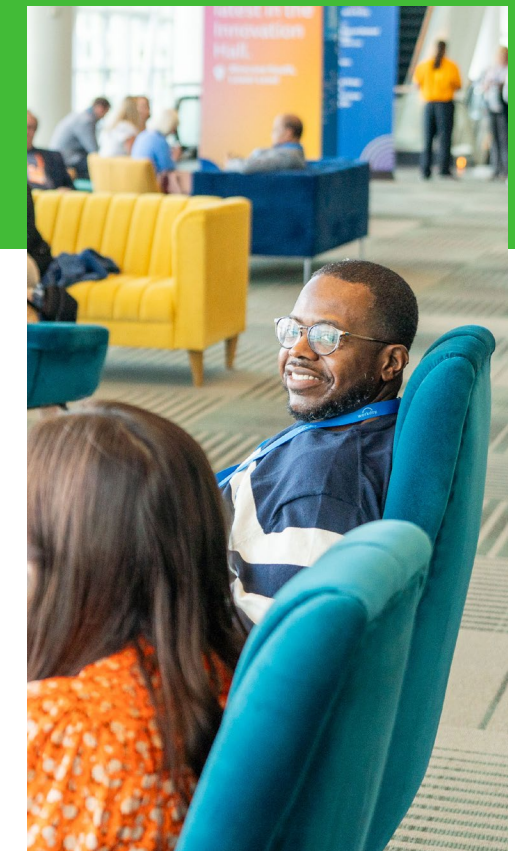
But how can you make a sustainable impact through exhibiting without overwhelming yourself — or the process?

# Plan early, and plan long term.

It's all about thinking holistically, so that everything you bring to your event has a purpose and post-event solution.

This approach allows you and your stakeholders to incorporate sustainability strategically, consider your options, and make intentional purchases (to get the most from your investment).

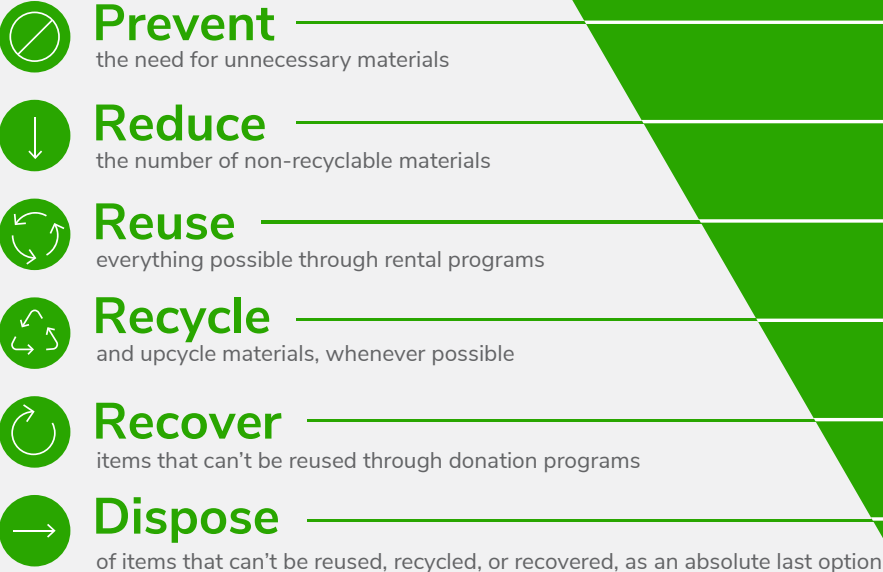
**Pro Tip:** If your product or service revolves around sustainability or makes a positive impact on the environment, then your exhibit is the perfect place to show off your greener side! Talk to your marketing leads about how to incorporate that story into your messaging and positioning.







We use (and you should, too!) the Waste Hierarchy Model as our guide for developing strategies and products that support sustainability efforts across the event lifecycle.



Whether you're planning one exhibit or 20, learn how you can apply these practices to your booth structure, signage, flooring, furniture, and more in this complete guide to planning a cost-friendly, sustainable exhibit.



# Plan early

## Expand your ecosystem

Start by aligning (and meeting) with key stakeholders (such as team leads, marketing, strategy experts, communications, internal green teams, suppliers, and partners who also prioritize sustainability) to develop an overall event and exhibiting strategy that includes sustainability goals and/or specific KPIs.



## Grow greener over time

Build time into your strategy to think through a year-over-year prevention plan that helps you focus on reusing elements. Reusing some or all of your booth materials and structures across three or more years helps maximize savings. Because who wants to start over for each event?

It's also helpful to consider annual incremental improvements, such as replacing custom pieces with rentals wherever possible and swapping single-use graphics with more sustainable, reusable materials or digital signs. Each step, no matter how small, brings you closer to achieving net zero.

The bottom line? Mapping out a multiyear plan for hitting your ultimate green goals helps you get the process started (and allows for additions and adjustments along the way).

## Find an eco-friendly ecosystem

When planning, look for partners that support your sustainability goals — for example, those that take part in the [Net Zero Carbon Events \(NZCE\) initiative](#). Consider choosing:

- Suppliers that offer sustainable rental solutions
- Products that utilize natural materials like wood and metal
- Travel partners that allow you to offset your trip

**Pro Tip:** Have a removal plan for everything you bring into the event, whether it's the exhibit itself, furniture, promotional materials, giveaways, etc. Ensure that items are returned to the rental company, stored for reuse, donated, or recycled.





# Build your exhibit

## Select sustainable structures

Your booth structure is a great way to make a big impact without a big footprint. Choosing a build that can be reused (such as Freeman Flex) means you're able to customize your booth rental or select from predesigned options. Then, after the show, the structures are returned to inventory for future use — not sent to landfills.

The Freeman Flex system works with many types of graphics. But we recommend fabric panels, because they're lightweight and fold to fit in compact spaces for efficient storage and transit.

Extend the life of your fabric graphics with evergreen marketing content such as the brand story, mission statement, values, etc. Exclude dates, locations, or seasonal campaign elements to make reusing that much easier.

Need a single-use build? Check out smart, paper-based structures such as Freeman SmartBuild Eco, which is lightweight but strong enough to easily support lighting, monitors, shelving, and signage.

SmartBuild Eco can also be used to create signage walls, props, furniture, and more. And it's 100% recyclable!

**Pro Tip:** If you prefer to build custom versus rent, opt for FSC-certified materials and low-VOC paints, coatings, and glue wherever possible.





## Getting your booth (show) on the road ... and into a crate.

Sustainability doesn't end with your booth build. Consider enviro-friendly ways to pack and ship:

- Remember to order crates! These stackable, protective carriers fit better in trucks and help consolidate shipments. And fewer trucks saves emissions. Look for partners and vendors who use stackable crates that are reusable and collapsible — the most efficient, eco-friendly way to safely ship your materials.
- Use an EPA SmartWay-certified transportation provider such as Freeman Transportation.
- Talk to your exhibit partner about transportation options that help reduce emissions. For example, caravanning allows you to easily bounce from event to event with little turnaround time, and in a more sustainable way.

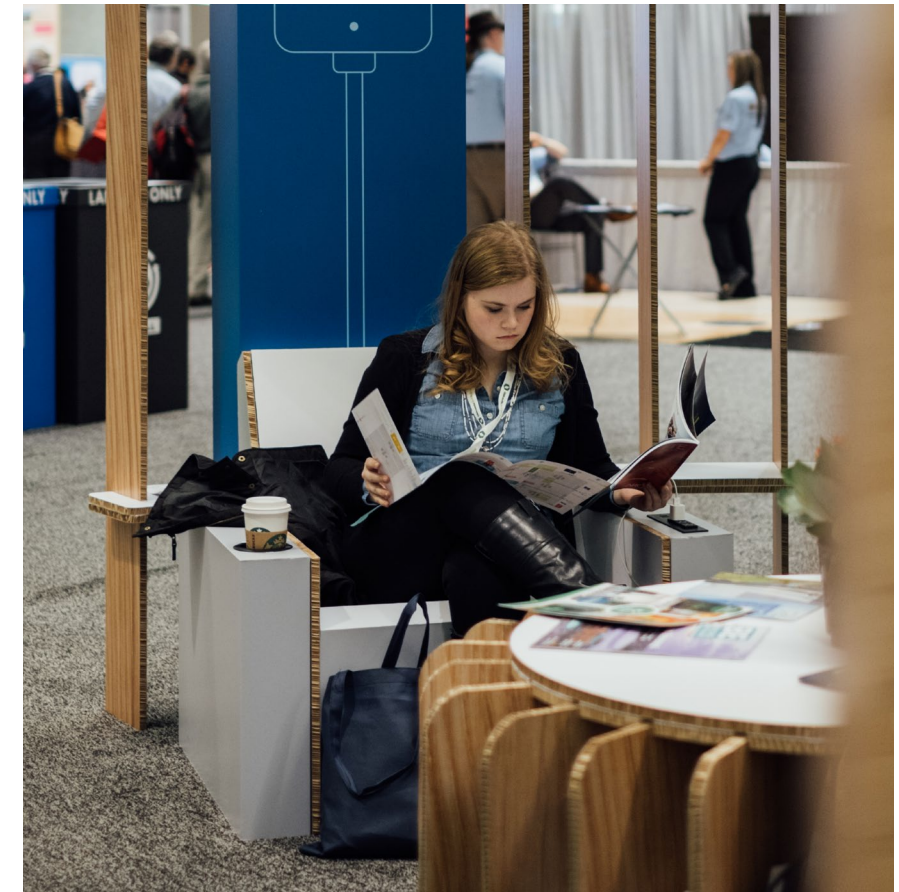
## Sign up for better signage

For multiple events or changing messages on the fly, digital is the easiest way to be more sustainable and flexible with your signage.

Light the way to your exhibit with LEDs or with digital signage that allows for rotating messages, including speaker info, branding, product details, and sponsored messages.

**Pro Tip:** Remember to turn off digital signs and any other equipment after show hours.

But if you need to print, choose biodegradable options, i.e., avoid foam and PVC-based materials that sit in landfills.



## Stick to these for event-specific messaging

For single-event signage — especially smaller signs — choose a sweeter solution: Honeycomb. Or, for medium-sized graphics, ask us about Freeman Paperboard. Both options are paper-based and recyclable.

To avoid printing materials that are often thrown out, try using a QR code on signage that points to digital marketing, which allows you to update materials online and reuse the same code for multiple events.



## Step into environmentally friendly exhibits

More cities and venues are pulling the rug out on event landfill fillers like non-rental carpet and padding — and leaving items behind could have cost implications on your budget.

When you need carpet, rental is the way to go. Freeman's Classic Booth Carpet is the most sustainable option. Choose darker colors such as Black, Tuxedo, or Midnight Blue, that are easier to clean for reuse after any spills.

Looking to add some sustainable comfort? Roll out Freeman Standard Carpet Padding (EPAD) that's made from 95% recycled materials and is recycled again after use.

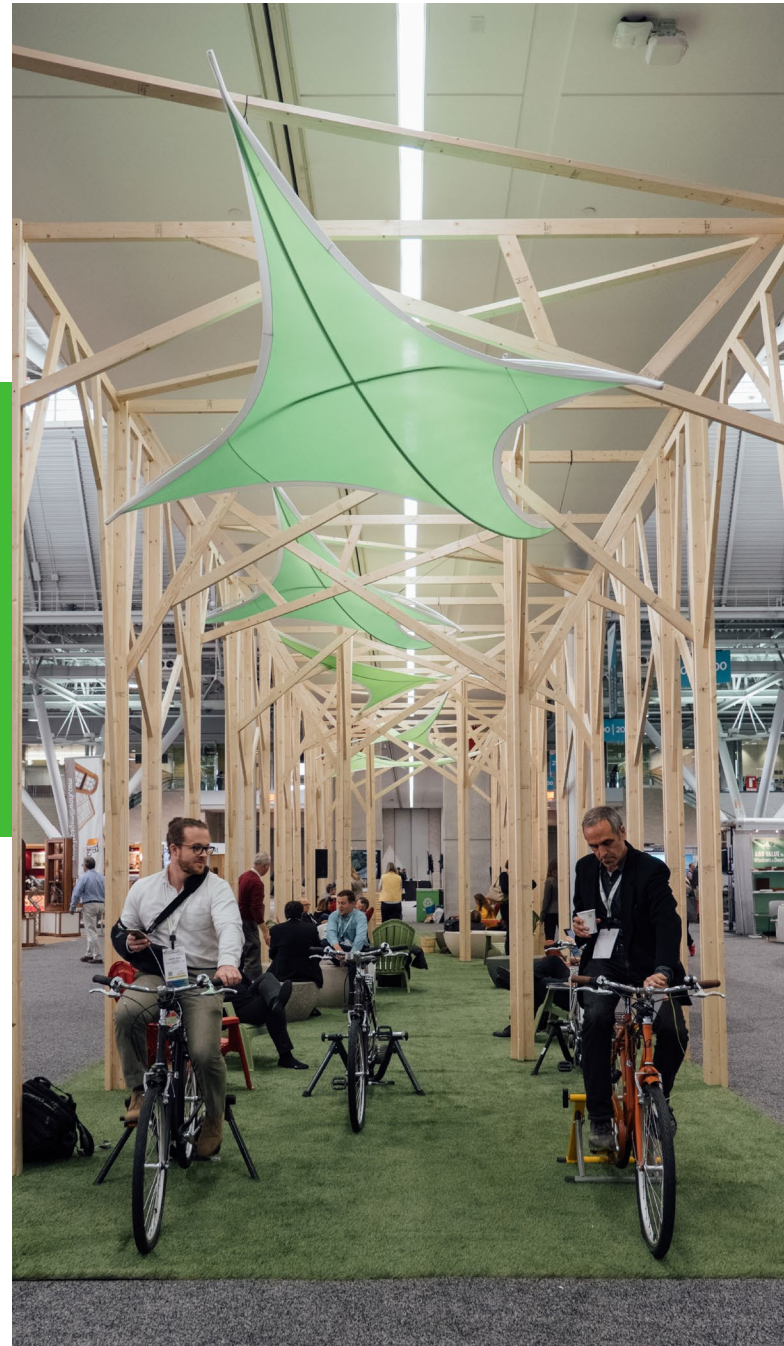
**Pro Tip:** Give greater access to your exhibit by avoiding raised flooring or overly plush carpet to ensure your space is accessibility friendly.

## Replace wasteful with purposeful

When planning your promotional materials, strive to bring just enough printed items for the attendees you are pre-scheduled to meet, and rely on digital marketing materials for the rest (remember those easy-to-use QR codes?).

But if you DO end up with leftovers, take them with you to use at a future event. Make the most of the money you've invested, and avoid adding to landfills.

Nix the knickknacks, and opt out of giveaways — or consider reusable, functional items such as water bottles, and turn your old fabric graphics into tote bags.






# Beyond your exhibit

## Get a feel for attendee feedback

Consider adding a question to your post-event survey to find out what attendees noticed about your efforts — and how much those efforts impact decision making.

Analyze and apply the data to determine how and when you'll implement the next steps of your sustainability strategy.

Planning early, setting goals, and taking the process step by step are essential for reaching sustainability objectives and making the most of your investment.



Ready to plan an eco exhibit  
that's easy on the earth and  
good for your ROI?

Let's talk.