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Sustainability: the battle for better

Whilst thousands of protesters gathered at COP26 in Glasgow, certain global leaders attending the climate conference fell asleep. Boris having a casual doze during the world's most crucial discussions feels like a perfectly accurate reflection of the hard reality we're facing. It's time for businesses to wake up.

The alarm bells warning us about climate change have been ringing on high alert for a long time, but ironically – over time – many businesses have fallen into a lazy mindset snooze and allowed crucial issues to become background noise. It turns out that environmental matters are easy to ignore when you can simply close a news tab about another environmental nightmare – or just nod off. Forgive us.

But the deal is this: getting ahead in sustainability will give your company the competitive edge it needs to thrive in the coming years – so take note.

Organisations need to do more than share the occasional LinkedIn post to become a truly sustainable business. It involves a far more complete, holistic approach – with a focus on smaller changes for big, long-term benefits.

We grabbed some time with Sam Wood, Babble Marketing Director, to discuss how he sees the future of business – and hear his thoughts on the next steps leaders need to take to smash it in the battle for the better.

First up, let's define what 'becoming a sustainable business' means...

I think the main thing to emphasise here is that being a truly sustainable business runs much deeper than just reducing how much energy you're consuming in the office. It means balancing 'planet', 'people' and 'profit' to produce long-lasting success – and this will impact your employee experience, business partnerships and any financial investments you make in the future. It's also going to help you to attract new talent since people want to work in organisations that are more sustainable – ultimately giving you a huge competitive-edge with the current talent gap.

And what do you think is the first thing business leaders need to do right now to start their sustainability journey?

Less talking, more doing. Simple as. That nice social media post about World Earth Day might look alright for your organisation's feed/engagement rates – but when it comes to making a difference, it's doing nothing. Sustainability is not a trending buzz word, it's a global issue, and whether you like it or not – things are about to change in a seismic way. Companies need to cut out the fluffiness and focus their time on putting strong sustainability statements in place to show that they're being proactive in the climate change denial movement. Once they're seen to be doing their bit, they will instantly have a huge advantage over their competitors, as well as being more attractive to Gen Z and their endless talent offerings.

Moving on to the digital aspect, what sustainable workplace technologies do you predict will take off in 2022?

With employee flexibility now at the forefront of many organisations' business models – collaboration platforms will continue developing to become more and more innovative. What's interesting is that remote working initially stemmed from business continuity, but since businesses have realised the environmental benefits – it's now more sustainability driven.

Platforms that bring all efficiencies together and allow teams to work from wherever, whenever, may seem 'new', but communication tools have been consistently evolving for years. Think of MSN – back in the 2000's when your screen would shake if someone nudged you for not replying after 30 seconds, and you'd see your mate's screen name pop up whenever they signed in. Microsoft Teams is a far more developed, sophisticated version of the original IM applications – and it's exciting to think how the capabilities will evolve in the next year.

Do you think new talent (aka Gen Z) will be put off by companies that haven't adopted a remote way of working?

Absolutely. I think it says a lot about a company if they're not giving their employees more flexibility – and new talent see this as a huge red flag too. An unsurprising silver lining of lockdowns was the reduction of CO2 emissions, but with the return to work and the daily commute back on the agendas for many – it hasn't taken long for them to climb right back up to alarming levels yet again. Limiting your workforce's need to travel by cultivating co-working spaces in an agile environment, and also harnessing collaboration technology, significantly helps to generate carbon emission savings – as well as improving employee wellbeing. So not only does remote working bolster your sustainable responsibility, but it also results in a happier workforce with a better work life balance. It's a no-brainer.

Which workplace technologies would you say are using the most energy, and what would you replace them with?

On-premise technology is dead. Aside from the fact it endangers the continuity of your business, it uses an extremely high amount of energy. Of course, all data needs to be stored somewhere, but it's way more energy efficient when kept on the cloud.

How can businesses become more mindful of the way their technology is being delivered?

The demand for green consumerism is at its highest, and it will only continue to rise as environmental changes continue to be made. If you're planning on investing in some new technology that doesn't align with the need for decarbonising, you're seriously wasting your time... and money. If you make more conscious decisions now, you'll reduce the risk of being left with irrelevant equipment – whilst helping your organisation to be more resilient and profitable than most.