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A Buyer's Guide

How to choose an Enterprise Sustainability Solution

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Introduction

Using this Buyer's Guide

Sustainability is the most challenging business transformation of our generation. Getting it right matters greatly. This guide will help you to identify the critical factors you should consider to ensure a successful transformation.

Business leaders are under mounting pressure to respond to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) challenges – legal directives, business risks, and increasing stakeholder pressures – whilst also maintaining an economic and commercial balance. These leaders view sustainability as critical to their company's success.

Companies that step up and use technology to make sustainability part of their business operations gain a competitive advantage and create positive impact for customers, suppliers, and employees.

Use this Buyer's Guide to help you to select a software solution that will assist you in developing your sustainability strategy, establishing material topics for your business across environmental, social and governance areas, operationalising change, collecting and managing data, and tracking your progress against action plans and targets.

(A) Understanding: Prioritising risks, opportunities and impact (IROs) with a sustainable business strategy

Progressive boardrooms must develop strategies to address complex sustainability challenges. The critical question is where do we begin? Applying industry benchmark data and strategic frameworks such as the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB), and the Task Force for Climate Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) into your Double Materiality Assessment (DMA) should show you how to integrate sustainability into your business strategy, and help you prepare for the Corporate Reporting Sustainability Directive (CSRD).

Materiality/Strategy	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Discover materiality issues with market insight, sector benchmarks, and ESG framework data.	• You need to understand and prioritise material topics in organisations like yours. What's the benchmark?	• The solution should interpret the data of entities like yours and link to materiality maps from ESG frameworks to recommend material topics.		
• Select a double or single materiality assessment.	• Materiality assessments are required for compliance with current and impending regulation.	• The solution should follow the CSRD/ESRS process, recording annual progress and comparative information.		
• Consider material impacts, risks and opportunities (IROs) for your company.	• There are specific impacts, risks and opportunities (IROs), short term and long term, that are necessary to consider to prioritise your material topics.	• The solution should assess the company's perspective and stakeholders' perspectives to handle single or double materiality.		
• Align all internal views on materiality and strategy.	• Each materiality topic can have a positive and/or negative impact, a material financial risk, or a material opportunity requiring leadership input.	• The solution should have the ability to have broad representation involved as necessary to collaborate on direction.		
• Consider the importance and impact on your stakeholders	• Stakeholders affected by the company's activities, products or services, should have their say about how you impact their future. You need to capture their view.	• The solution should easily record both the qualitative and quantitative outcomes, and reduce administrative effort.		
• Create a materiality map of priority sustainable topics.	• Everyone's perspective matters and it helps to set priorities for the business and your stakeholders.	• The solution should have a materiality map generator that dynamically represents sustainability priorities in an insight-driven materiality map.		
• Publish materiality assessment as first pillar of strategy.	• All of the topic assessments, impact and materiality analysis needs to form part of your strategy document.	• Producing this report can be a considerable effort. The solution should automate the report production.		
		Section A total:		

(B) Getting Started: Establishing a common baseline and a way forward for sustainability in your company

Everyone knows that getting a good start is half the battle. In sustainability that is particularly true. Even the most experienced sustainability practitioners know that establishing and recording a baseline is critical to getting everyone on the same page, with a common vision, and purpose. Whether this is your first sustainability journey, or a very deep dive on a specific topic, establishing a baseline with priorities is a critical first step.

Maturity Assessment	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Baseline assessment per materiality, or material topic.	• For each and every journey, everyone needs to have a common baseline, a known starting point and gap.	• The solution needs to cover E, S and G, not just emissions. Also consider waste, circular, social etc.		
• Smart maturity assessment, per issue.	• The quality of assessment is linked to the quality of questions and answer options to interrogate and educate simultaneously.	• The solution should include graduated questions with embedded knowledge across E, S and G, with associated smart scoring.		
• Scoring, analysis, and advice.	• You need to measure to identify gaps, and understand risk and impact. 'What now?' advice is needed to make it actionable.	• The solution should include an online report to uncover critical deficiencies, numeric scores to measure, and text commentary to understand.		
• Maturity reports and gap analysis.	• Reports of current state and future vision shared across stakeholders increases internal and external alignment.	• The solution should include an online and downloadable report to share.		
• Link to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	• Sustainability doesn't stop at Scope 1,2,3. Don't forget people, governance, or circularity, waste, water etc.	• The solution needs to cover E, S and G, not just emissions. Also consider waste, water, circular, social etc.		
• Declarative sustainability knowledge.	• Embedded knowledge helps novice users to understand the subtleties of materiality or maturity assessments.	• The solution should include embedded sustainability knowledge linked to each materiality, maturity assessment, or journey.		
• Collaborative environment.	• Teams collaborate on the assessment, alignment improves, and everyone participates and feels involved.	• The solution should be an easy-to-use, cloud-based platform, that is also accessible on mobile devices for maximum access.		
		Section B total:		

(C) Making Sustainability Operational: A connected way to work, and linked actions to KPI metrics to targets

Strategy without execution is hallucination *(Thomas Edison)*. Sustainability is a business transformation involving all stakeholders; employees, suppliers, customers and the community. A tailored transformation action plan is the only way to make sustainability operational in your business and achieve your ESG goals while growing your business responsibly.

Measure & Improve	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Smart Transformation Plan.	• Once a sustainability gap or target is identified, a plan should be devised to close the gap and meet the target.	• The solution should include an autogenerated action plan that can be assigned to team members.		
• Link to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).	• The UN SDGs are the main reference for most people. Transformations connected to SDGs gain more traction.	• The solution should include smart linkage between SDGs and sustainability journeys.		
• Metrics.	• To progress, you have to track lagging indicators (already achieved) and leading indicators (your improvement actions).	• The solution should allow measurement of initiatives and actions to predict future outcomes, and track ESG metrics that record achievements.		
• Team engagement.	• To make a sustainability journey operational requires many team members with discrete yet related initiatives and actions.	• The solution should include a method to manage teams (including external participants) and assign and track sustainability initiatives and actions.		
• Company engagement and communication.	• Sustainability is not just about the sustainability team. To make is operational requires the whole company.	• The solution should allow for maximum access, where possible, across the company.		
• Sustainability project management.	• Effective project management increases probability of a successful sustainable transformation, if easy to implement.	• The solution should include a one click availability of transformation status, initiatives, actions, owner ESG metrics, and due date.		
• Embedded sustainability knowledge.	• Not all users will know how to execute on the actions required to complete a transformation journey.	• The solution should include embedded sustainability knowledge.		
• Collaborative environment.	• Teams collaborate on the transformation, so everyone knows the current status, improving productivity.	• The solution should allow a view of initiatives and actions through an easy-to-use platform.		
		Section C total:		

(D) Enabling ESG Data: Collecting the right ESG data to monitor progress across multiple topics and per ESG framework

The ability to efficiently collect and analyse Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) data is critical to many businesses today. Software as a Service (SaaS) platforms offer a powerful and cost-effective solution to this data management issue. To maximise the benefits of a SaaS platform for ESG data, there are some core capabilities you must consider.

Data	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Flexible data collection (multiple sites and multiple topics).	• Not all the material topics are critical or important to your business. You need to focus on the ones that matter to your business or the environment in each location.	• The solution should allow users to have the ability to select topical or ESG standard-related data, with contributions from individuals in multiple locations or sites.		
• Framework-ready data integration.	• ESG reporting will require structured data mapped to the needs of the various ESG standards.	• The solution should support ESG-aware data models to accommodate multiple frameworks, including ESRS, ISSB, SASB, GRI, TCFD, CDP, and SDGs.		
• Track record of data entry and relevant comment.	• Evidencing becomes more and more important in EU legislation. The ESG data should be recorded and tracked for verification and assurance.	• The solution should have an automatic audit trail of revisions with traceability for data.		
• Data aggregation.	• Data can exist in multiple sources and different formats. Where data already exists, or where large volumes of data is processed, multiple data entry methods are needed.	• The solution roadmap should support manual data entry, API support, and file upload.		
• Security.	• A SaaS platform for ESG data must be secure. This is a particular concern given the regular collection and storage of sensitive data.	• The solution should provide industrial strength security in both the application and the infrastructure.		
		Section D total:		

(E) ESG Reporting: Reporting progress of sustainability initiatives against targets and ESG frameworks

ESG reporting is important because it helps stakeholders understand an entity's impact on the environment, society, and governance practices. It can provide insights into values, risk profile, and potential for long-term success. However, because of the multiple standards and factors to consider it is almost impossible without intelligent automation.

Reporting	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Integrated reporting engine.	• ESG data needs to make its way into multiple disclosures from across the business, so integrating data is critical.	• The solution should ensure its reporting engine can autogenerate at least one of the ESG standard reports, and can be configured for others.		
• Smart metrics (links to ESRS, GRI, SASB etc.)	• Progress to targets needs to be reported or disclosed against a myriad of ESG frameworks. Impossible to manage manually.	• The solution should remove manual effort with a system that links all the pertinent ESG metrics to your data.		
• Access to compliant standard templates.	• You need to meet the disclosure requirements set forth by relevant governing bodies, as well as voluntary or mandatory reporting standards.	• The solution should include embedded standard ESG reports (e.g. ESRS, GRI etc).		
• Customisations of reports.	• You only want to report on the data that matters to your organisation, but include topics that might be specific to your organisation.	• The solution should be a flexible (ideally data driven) reporting system to generate ESG reports.		
		Section E total:		

(F) Enterprise Sustainability Platform: Your sustainability operating system

An Enterprise Sustainability Management (ESM) platform must guide you to include sustainability (assessment, transformation, measurement, reports) as part of the operational day-to-day business of your company. By definition, your ESM platform must 'know' a lot about ESG, the underlying metrics, best practices, the requisite data source linkages, and reporting requirements to help a company to respond to the impact of climate change as it considers the 'triple bottom line' of people, profit and, prosperity.

Platform Capability	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Cloud-based software platform.	• Cloud systems from leading providers deliver reliability and resilience so you don't have to worry about it.	• The solution should be a cloud-based platform that has an industrial-strength infrastructure.		
• Secure Infrastructure.	• You care about the security of your data, availability of the system, and GDPR-related privacy considerations.	• The solution should have enterprise grade access management and intrusion selection system.		
• Mobile and browser access.	• Users expect to be able to access systems everywhere, all the time, at their desks, in their homes or on the go.	• The solution should be a web-based application that is mobile responsive.		
• Integration ready.	• Data may come from many sources (e.g. financial, ERP systems etc) so you need to have the option of bi-directional data exchange.	• The solution should include industry standards such as Rest API architecture to enable integration.		
• Easy deployment.	• You don't want to have to involve your IT team or external IT consultants to deploy the system.	• The solution should be live in hours or days, not weeks or months.		
• Easy to use.	• Modern systems with elegant user-interfaces means users need little or no training to use the software.	• Test the solution yourself or ask other users how long it takes to become familiar with the software.		
• Collaborative environment.	• A single destination for all sustainability activity and communication drives dramatic velocity.	• The solution should include a central hub for email, other notifications, dashboard of actions, metrics, cloud and mobile access etc.		
• Knowledge Hub.	• Sustainability is a broad topic and hard to be an expert in everything, so ideally you want a system to guide you.	• The solution should have embedded knowledge, ideally with eLearning, but more importantly with links to external knowledge sources.		
		Section F total:		

(G) Carbon Emissions Management: Supporting your transformation

Incorporating carbon emissions management into your enterprise sustainability software allows your organisation to quickly gain meaningful insights into your carbon footprint, effectively manage your decarbonisation journey and simplify your regulatory reporting. By providing real-time visibility into emissions data, you can scrutinise your emissions profile across your business units, products and services, and emissions scopes. This helps users understand the impact of their activities in a standardised way, making sustainability goals more measurable and achievable.

Platform Capability	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Scope 1, 2 and 3 GHG emissions calculations	• Companies need to understand their emissions profile before deciding on how to prioritise decarbonisation actions/initiatives.	• The solution should be capable of calculating your organisations' scope 1, 2 and 3 GHG emissions.		
• Emissions factors.	• You want to focus your efforts on collecting relevant activity data and not worry about managing emissions factors.	• The solution should be capable of supporting and managing emission factors relevant to your business' activities, extendable over time and for new products/services.		
• Visualise your carbon footprint.	• You want to see your different sources of emissions across scopes, business units and product/service types.	• The solutions should include dashboard functionality to effectively visualise your organisation's emissions.		
• Decarbonisation management.	• Users will want to know how actions/initiatives they implement are effecting efforts to reduce the organisation's emissions.	• The solution should facilitate setting science-based emissions reduction targets, provide you with tailored decarbonisation actions, and track emissions reduction progress.		
• Smart metrics (links to ESRS, GRI, etc).	• Emissions data needs to be easily linked to ESG frameworks.	• The solution should remove manual effort with a system that links all pertinent disclosure requirements in ESG frameworks.		
		Section G total:		

(H) Can you count on your partner for your sustained success?

All of the capabilities listed in the previous pages are very important. However, who you work with on your sustainability journey is important too. Sustainability is the defining business problem for this generation's progressive business leaders, and the partner you select will have a significant impact on the outcome. You should ensure that they have the experience, background and expertise to make you successful, and a defined methodology to work with you to develop and execute on your own success charter.

Customer Success Capability	Why it matters?	What do you need?	Partner 1	Partner 2
			0-10	0-10
• Partner credentials and proven stability.	• Sustainability is a long journey and your partner should be a source of support and expertise in all phases of the journey.	• The right partner must have strong finances, with expertise in sustainability, SaaS software, and business transformation.		
• Customer Success Charter.	• A shared understanding of ‘what good looks like’, or successful outcomes is a very positive indicator.	• The right partner should have a proven Customer Success Charter model.		
• Custom configurations.	• Custom configurations let you shape your solution to use business for greater acceptance in the company.	• The right partner should have a robust standard solution for robustness, and configurable capability for personality.		
• Customer Support.	• You need access to customer support for help when you need an answer to a sustainability question.	• The right partner should have a designated Customer Support.		
• Executive engagement or executive sponsor.	• If your partner's executives are aligned with your executives, strategic alignment and greater success is more likely.	• The right partner should have a formal Executive Sponsor program to support your strategic sustainability initiatives.		
• Partner vision and values.	• If your partner is guiding you on sustainability, you want them to walk the sustainability walk.	• The right partner should have alliances with some of the leading advisory firms, or equivalent.		
		Section H total:		
		Overall Total (A+B+C+D+E+F+G+H):		

Contact Us

Contact us to learn how Future Planet can transform your business, making it more sustainable, efficient, and compliant with ever evolving regulations.

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