

Why B Corp is still vital for startups

With COP 27 underway, it's time for the annual spike in conversation about sustainability.

While it's good that attention is focused on such matters, it has obviously moved past discussion. It is now a situation that requires governments and businesses to take tangible action rather than talk.

Sustainability is an ongoing commitment and should be taken seriously by everyone. We recently achieved B Corp Certification and wanted to share our experiences and outline why other startups should do so too.

B Corp – what's it all about?

Certified B Corporations – known commonly as B Corps – are companies verified by B Lab to meet its environmental performance standards. The *B Corp Community* is a global movement of businesses that provide leadership by demonstrating their commitment to people and the planet. There are now more than 5,000 B Corps in 86 countries, *including around 900 in the UK*.

To achieve and maintain certification, all B Corps must complete the rigorous B Impact Assessment and earn a verified score of more than 80 points. They must also meet the B Corp legal requirement, sign the B Corp Agreement and the Declaration of Interdependence, publicly list their impact score on the B Lab Directory, and recertify every three years.

It's all based on the (correct) assumption that the world's most challenging problems cannot be solved by governments and non-profits alone – they also need to harness the power of business. It's a public and transparent declaration of intent, and once certified, a business must sign a legal agreement to confirm board members will always consider the impact on stakeholders when making decisions.

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Wazoku and B Corp

As an Open Innovation company, we help businesses, NGOs and governments solve complex challenges that are increasingly focused on sustainability. Recent campaigns have provided options for clean drinking water and sanitation in Central America, improved biosecurity in New Zealand, and generated ideas for more sustainable smart city solutions.

With our technology used to help organisations meet UN SDGs, it was becoming the elephant in the room that we could do more. We have always been a for-purpose business and aimed to make a difference and impact meaningful change in our work.

In 2020, we became one of the world's first innovation companies to be officially carbon neutral. It was a lengthy process – conducted against a backdrop of a global pandemic – but a source of immense pride when we achieved it. It made you think about your supply chain in a different light and proved to be a key staging post on our sustainability journey.

In 2021 we joined Tech Zero, a group of technology companies working together to fight climate change and accelerate progress to net zero. This involved a commitment to measuring scope 1-3 emissions, including the public reporting of results and setting a net zero target by the end of 2030. From this point, B Corp Certification was the next natural step.

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This shouldn't need stating – but I will. Climate change is one of the biggest threats to our future. The warming of the planet will cause sea levels to rise, which has potentially devastating consequences – destructive erosion, wetland flooding, soil contamination, and lost habitat for fish, birds, and plants. It will also threaten the homes of millions of people, communications infrastructures, transport, and much more. For this reason alone, startups should look to achieve B Corp Certification.

But there are other reasons. Attracting and retaining talent is a challenge most founders can relate to. Part of meeting that challenge involves creating a workplace in which people take pride and which matches their personal values. How a company behaves matters, and any startup should want to show that its company values are reflected in its actions and are appealing to prospective candidates.

This also applies to winning new customers. Demonstrating sustainable business is increasingly on the agenda for prospects and is something that nearly always gets asked about in pitches, referrals and procurement processes. The future of business is sustainable, and any organisation that ignores this will struggle to find its place in the modern world.

A collective response to climate change requires individual action. For startups, this means B Corp Certification – taking a stand and making a genuine difference in the world in which we live. Everyone would agree that greenwashing is a problem, which is why it's even more important to try and do something tangible.

Simon Hill is the founder and CEO of Wazoku, the innovation scale-up that achieved B Corp Certification in October 2022.