

Why startups should lead the charge for a greener future

Consumer attitudes towards sustainability are changing. According to a 2022 survey, two-thirds of people in the UK now consider the environmental impact of what they buy. Nine in every ten believe it's important for companies to 'do social good' and have a reputation for doing so, making ethical practices a key ingredient for business success.

When we talk about *this trend*, we often focus on the big corporations. Take Coca Cola for example – one of COP27's major sponsors, yet one of the world's worst plastic polluters. But homing in on these global juggernauts risks overlooking a significant opportunity.

The green opportunity for startups

Big companies make a big impact on the world around them. Just 100 companies are responsible for 90% of the world's plastic waste, according to *The Plastic Waste Makers Index*, and in 2019 *a Guardian report* revealed that 20 companies emit over a third of the world's carbon and methane into the atmosphere. So focusing on these companies might seem the most logical approach to creating a greener economy.

But therein lies a problem. These large companies are often the slowest to adapt their business practices. Malpractice, delays, and poor leadership aside, this isn't always their fault. These companies have developed their operations over decades or longer. Their supply chains are enormous, complex, and unwieldy. Switching to more sustainable operations is a significant challenge that takes time to solve.

That's where startups come in. Despite producing less waste, startups have speed and agility on their side. They can build greener operations and adapt quickly. Many were founded when climate change was already front of mind, meaning sustainable practices are in their bloodstream, rather than the emergency infusion attempted by their giant counterparts. Startups are in the best position to pioneer sustainable business practices to be taken on board by the biggest businesses.

The Honest approach

Honest Mobile is an example of this in practice. I co-founded the company with Josh Mihill in 2019 to build a mobile network doing right by people and the planet. Frequent network failures, bad customer service, and a lack of sustainability efforts were – and remain – rife in the UK's telecoms industry. I want to change that.

For us, sustainable practice isn't a secondary aim; it's in our DNA and the reason we continue pushing the boundaries of ESG initiatives. Having become the UK's first B Corp mobile network in 2020, here are just some of the ways we're striving for a greener future:

Less waste and no carbon emissions with eSIMs: We've taken our plastic-free physical SIMs a step further with digital eSIMs which produce less waste and no carbon emissions. Rather than keep eSIMs quiet like the big mobile networks, we put them front and centre as another way our customers can help protect the planet.

Renewable energy: As a B Corp startup, we don't have huge offices and have always used energy-efficient equipment. The same goes for our providers. We've been with green electricity suppliers from the beginning and will stick with them as we continue to grow.

Offsetting: Despite its flaws, carbon offsetting remains a necessary part of any comprehensive sustainability strategy. Instead of seeing this as a box-ticking exercise to shout about, we see offsetting as a core element of our business that requires serious consideration. That's why we invest in a range of projects – from carbon capture to reforestation, biochar and blue

carbon buoys – to put the planet ahead of profit.

The fast-growing and agile nature of startups gives them the opportunity to pioneer a radical new approach to business. Instead of surface-level initiatives, they can build success with sustainable practices at their core. Large companies undoubtedly have their role to play, but startups are uniquely placed to lead the charge in the transition to a green economy.

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