

Corporate Greenings



NIKE is Quietly Taking Greener Steps

by Carol Stoner

Corporate Greenings offer inspirations and insights about what people in organizations are doing to pursue the triple bottom line (i.e., people, planet, profit) of sustainability.



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Nike campus – Beaverton, Oregon

Nike is Quietly Taking Greener Steps

Mention the global athletic footwear giant, Nike, and most people would immediately think of the famous “swoosh” that adorns all of their gear. What is not so well known is that behind the scenes, Nike’s product design teams now focus on creating innovative and sustainable products before the “swoosh” goes on. Using sport as a tool for positive change, Nike believes that a strong corporate responsibility effort will be good for business.

Many corporations are reporting their sustainability efforts now that corporate responsibility (CR) reporting is gaining more press. Corporate stakeholders are also demanding more transparency. “Greenwashing” is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as the “the practice of promoting environmentally friendly programs to deflect attention from an organization’s environmentally unfriendly or less savory activities.” Some corporations may be accused of “greenwashing” when they attempt to present themselves in an environmentally responsible way but do not truly address their problems or challenges in a sustainable way.

Nike has remained relatively silent about their greener side to avoid accusations of using greenwashing to distract people from their battle with the dreaded “sweatshops” label. Just when Nike was seemingly putting that label behind them, a lawsuit was filed (*Kasky v. Nike*) alleging that the company’s claims were misleading and accusing Nike of misrepresenting working conditions under which Nike products are made. Although the case was settled out of court, it put Nike back in the unwanted labor-abuse spotlight again. As a result of this case, Nike remained largely silent about their Corporate Responsibility for three years.

Nike issued their 2004 Corporate Responsibility report in April, 2005. Included in the report is a complete listing of names and locations of contract factories manufacturing Nike’s primary product line, the first company in the global footwear and apparel industry to do so. Behind this effort at transparency is Nike’s hope that other companies will be encouraged to join their collaborative efforts. They believe that by disclosing this information in an open and transparent way, the industry will find ways to better share knowledge and learnings - despite the possibility that this transparency may serve to attract the wrath of advocacy groups who are skeptical of corporate efforts.

Nike’s corporate responsibility (CR) mission statement has also evolved since its first CR report and this latest. In 2001, its stated mission was:

Using sport as a tool for positive change, Nike believes that a strong corporate responsibility effort will be good for business.

“To be an innovative and inspirational corporate citizen in a world where our company participates. We seek to protect and enhance the Nike brand through responsible business practices that contribute to profitable and sustainable growth.”

Although Nike’s revised mission statement for the 2004 report is not vastly different, the current mission pushes its sights outward. Nike acknowledges that CR work should not be separate from the business, but should instead be fully integrated into it, using statements such as:

- “We must help the company achieve profitable and sustainable growth.”
- “We must protect and enhance the brand and company.”

Nike has undertaken a number of initiatives that demonstrate active support of their new corporate responsibility mission statement, and these initiatives deserve recognition. Some are highlighted below.

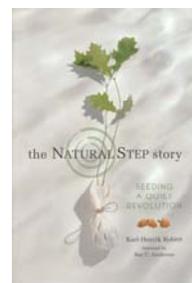
Design for Environment

Nike first became involved with The Natural Step in 1997. The Natural Step (TNS) is a framework grounded in natural science that serves as a guide for businesses, communities, educators, government entities, and individuals on the path toward sustainable development. In 1998, Nike adopted the TNS framework as the foundation for sustainability programs and goals.

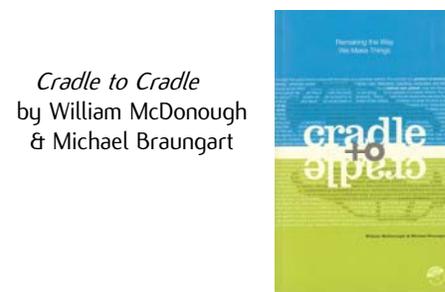
Also in 1998, Nike began working with McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC) to determine the chemical composition of its products. Both the materials and processes being used to manufacture their shoes were analyzed to assess their environmental effects. This analysis was then used to outline a plan to eliminate all dangerous chemicals from its manufacturing processes. This work furthered Nike’s steps toward a sustainable business model. Since then, Nike has continued to pursue goals which include a commitment to ecological intelligence and an awareness of the impact of their products on the natural world.

In their FY01 CR report, Nike stated four long-term goals. By 2020 Nike would aim to:

- Eliminate the concept of waste in product design, using materials, energy and resources that can be readily recycled, renewed or reabsorbed back into nature.
- Eliminate all substances that are known or suspected to be harmful to human health or the health of natural systems.
- Close the loop and take full responsibility for its products at all stages of the life cycle, including the end of a product’s useful life when consumers are likely to dispose of it.



The Natural Step Story
by Karl-Henrik Robèrt



Cradle to Cradle
by William McDonough
& Michael Braungart

“Bill McDonough and Michael Braungart helped us ask the questions: “Do we fully understand the implications of the decisions we are making?” – Darcy Winslow, Nike

For FY04 and beyond, Nike's primary environmental goal is "to create innovative and sustainable products."

*"We set an aggressive target to eliminate 90% of petroleum-based solvents within 4-5 years. And then put a maniacal focus on the solvents goal. Once our chemists cracked the code (about shifting to water-based adhesives), we brought in our competitors and shared that information."
– Darcy Winslow, Nike*

- Develop financial structures to promote product stewardship in design, engineering and manufacturing, as well as create new financial models to reflect the full cost of doing business.

After reviewing and reassessing these long-term goals in preparation for their FY04 report, Nike simplified the statement to a single unifying goal. For FY04 and beyond, Nike's primary environmental goal is "to create innovative and sustainable products." This new approach, although more broadly stated, integrates sustainability into their business operations and serves as a guide in every stage of the life cycle of Nike products.

Nike has demonstrated their commitment to these goals, as evidenced by some of the initiatives they have undertaken:

- Nike reduced the amount of paper wrapping inside its shoeboxes from five sheets to one. Instead, they put an insert in the box, much like an egg carton, that protects the shoe's shape but is entirely compostable.
- Shoeboxes are made from 100% post-consumer recycled content, weigh 10% less, no longer use adhesives and use soy-based inks.
- They are exploring the possibility of using bags instead of boxes – bags made of cloth, beets, cornstarch or other dissolvable organic material.
- By 2010, Nike plans to use a minimum of 5% organically-grown cotton in all cotton apparel.
- Switching from petroleum-based adhesives to water-based for most shoe styles saves 1.6 million gallons of solvent per year (and \$4.5 million dollars). These innovations were shared with competitors in an effort to promote sustainable materials use in the shoe industry.
- Nike shoes no longer contain any toxic plastic polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Although Nike apparel still uses some PVC-based inks, they are working with suppliers to bring technically feasible replacements to market.
- Nike began testing a new clean rubber compound in 2001. Over the past 3 years, they have eliminated 96% of the chemicals in one of their most-used rubber formulations. Nike projects that 60% of their shoe models will use the new environmentally-preferred compound within the year. This innovation could have a revolutionary impact on many industrial sectors.
- Nike is developing an alternative for the leather-tanning process. The industry currently uses a toxic and non-sustainable material; Nike is working to find a compostable material. This initiative could transform many industries as leather tanning is used in a host of manufactured products.

- The *Marathon Singlet*, first worn in the Sydney Olympics, used post-consumer content from recycled plastic bottles, eliminated a high energy-use stage of production and used sonic welding instead of thread.
- They are developing a host of sustainable materials for *Nike Apparel*, such as biomass-based synthetics that are both biodegradable and compostable.
- The *World Shoe* design team was given a challenge to develop a range of affordable, durable and easy-to-manufacture sport shoes using sustainable design principles. A sandal was created using injection-molded foam manufactured in a rapid single-material process. The process was virtually waste-free, used no PVC, and needed no assembly. These sandals were made locally with locally-sourced materials.
- Nike's waste recycling programs include closing the loop on materials use, where factory waste from one product is collected and reprocessed for use in another. In some factories, up to 60% of manufacturing waste is now diverted from the landfill.
- Nike has just introduced their new *Considered* line of shoes. The outsole contains *Nike Grind*, made from recycled factory rubber waste, and uses no adhesives. This makes the shoe easier to separate and recycle at its end of life. This new line uses less than 20% of the solvents typically used in other Nike products. Materials are sourced within 200 miles of the factory, so less energy is used for transportation, and the shoe design itself significantly reduces materials waste.

NikeGO Places

Nike took a look at how they could be more responsible for their product's end of life, incorporating the cradle-to-cradle philosophy of "waste." They came up with an innovative program, originally called *Reuse-A-Shoe*, now called *NikeGO Places*, that was launched in 1993. They sought to collect worn-out athletic shoes, disassemble them into their material components, and recycle those materials. Nike then uses the resulting materials to create a new life for them as athletic surfaces.

This program also supports Nike's goal to "Get kids moving and give them the means to do it" through their *NikeGO* program. Partner recycling organizations collect and store shoes until they have enough to fill a 27-foot trailer (approximately 5,000 pairs). Nike then arranges for shipment to its facility, where it grinds the components separately. *Nike Grind Rubber* from outsoles and manufacturing byproduct goes into baseball and soccer fields as well as golf products, weight room flooring and running tracks. *Nike*



"Nike has 11 Maxims. #1 says 'It is our Nature to Innovate' and #5 is 'The Consumer Decides.' It's not a niche/fringe consumer anymore asking about labor practices or what we are doing. Therefore, we can take a stand. By asking questions about every aspect of the Considered line, we could get to a different place and redesign the entire value proposition. The Considered product is about sourcing, environmental performance of materials, and community engagement. We can tell consumers that they know the whole history of this product. And that is worth a premium." – Darcy Winslow, Nike



Grind Foam, from midsoles, is used in synthetic basketball courts, tennis courts and playground surfacing. *Nike Grind Upper Fabric* from textile and leather uppers is used for padding under hardwood basketball floors.

This program has prevented over 16 million pairs of shoes from ending up in landfills and has provided communities around the world with access to over 170 athletic courts, tracks, fields and playground surfaces. The National Recycling Coalition (NRC) has partnered with Nike in establishing drop-off points in every state in the continental U.S. and includes programs in the United Kingdom and Australia as well. Nike Japan will kick off the *Reuse-A-Shoe* program in 2006, and a European processing facility is being planned that would enable the *Reuse-A-Shoe* program to process 1 million pairs of shoes per year.

Climate Commitments

Nike has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions throughout its operations worldwide. As stated in their 2001 CR report in a Climate Savers agreement with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Center for Energy & Climate Solutions (CECS), Nike's goals were to:

- Reduce carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from business travel and Nike-owned facilities and services to 13 percent below 1998 levels by the end of 2005 by pursuing energy conservation projects, purchasing green power and investing in community energy efficiency projects.
- Create baselines for Nike's major subcontracted footwear and apparel manufacturing facilities by year-end 2003.
- Examine Nike's supply chain from packaging to modes of transportation for opportunities to improve logistics efficiency and reduce GHG from it.
- Completely eliminate the use of SF₆ (sulfur hexachloride) by June 2003.

According to their April 2004 CR report, Nike-owned facilities have grown by 8.5% but their current emissions have returned to 1998 levels through conservation and green power purchases. Although emissions from business travel are up 26% for the same period, they now purchase offsets to help reduce the impact of business travel. They have developed a CO₂ model that calculates the emissions for all international shipments of Nike products. Knowing this baseline will enable them to identify ways of reducing emissions from sea freight. Energy use from contract footwear factories can now be measured and reduction targets will be developed by the end of 2005.

Instead of SF₆, a greenhouse gas, they are now using nitrogen in the majority of shoes that have pressurized cushioning. For a few high-performance models, they currently use a more benign gas for this cushioning, with a goal of full transition to nitrogen use by 2006.

Corporate Responsibility

The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES) is a group of over 80 investor, environmental and public interest organizations that has developed a code of voluntary “beyond compliance” environmental conduct guidelines. Nike has joined the organization to endorse this community effort of continuous environmental improvement. The CERES Principles address issues such as sustainable use of natural resources, reduction and disposal of wastes, environmental restoration, transparency in reporting and information sharing, and a commitment by management for responsible environmental policies.

Because Nike has many contract manufacturing operations worldwide, it has been a challenge to integrate their corporate principles and ethical responsibilities throughout the supply chain. Nike has developed a balanced scorecard to address this challenge. Their *Strategic Sourcing Initiative* states that the company’s decisions about sourcing materials and labor will now include social issues such as labor management and environmental health and safety programs. Contractors will no longer be selected based only on price, quality and delivery services.

NEAT (Nike Environmental Action Team) began in 1993 with 3 full time positions. It has morphed into many sustainability-oriented positions within the three major business units at Nike (i.e., Footwear, Apparel, and Equipment). A Sustainable Development Unit was created that included 4 women in top management positions directing Nike’s global sustainable business strategies. The Labor Compliance group started with 3 people and now has over 90 people overseeing operations to ensure that business and contract facilities are being managed in a sustainable way and that labor issues are addressed. Nearly 150 employees were engaged in CR activities for the company by the end of 2004.

Nike’s new structure reflects their desire to integrate and drive corporate responsibility into every part of the business. They have created the *Considered* team, which is focused on integrating sustainability principles into the design philosophy for all Nike products. There are now also regional CR teams that focus on labor compliance and local stakeholder engagement. A Corporate Responsibility Committee was established to ensure that corporate responsibility is embedded as a vital part of the Nike culture and that issues surrounding it are regularly reported to the board.

CERES Principles

- Protection of the Biosphere
- Sustainable Use of Natural Resources
- Reduction and Disposal of Wastes
- Energy Conservation
- Risk Reduction
- Safe Products and Services
- Environmental Restoration
- Informing the Public
- Management Commitment
- Audits and Reports

For more information see <http://www.ceres.org/>

A Portrait of 2 Sustainability Champions

Companies don't make decisions to shift toward Sustainability – people do. Two women (Sarah Severn and Darcy Winslow) have played major roles in influencing Nike's shift over the past ten years. On July 27, 2006, the Society for Organizational Learning (SOL) hosted a conversation with Peter Senge to explore the intersection between personal journeys and organizational action toward sustainability. Sarah and Darcy shared the following stories with Peter during the conference call. Visit SOL at www.solonline.org to obtain a copy of the recording.

Sarah Severn - Director of Corporate Responsibility Horizons

Sarah's journey to sustainability began in childhood where she felt connected to nature while playing in the woods. However, that was not her focus while working in the advertising business in London. She started getting interested again when one of her clients was removing CFCs from air fresheners. Then having kids really brought things into focus for Sarah. She didn't want them to experience a degraded environment or a diminished future.

Sarah began her Nike career by focusing on consumer insights in Europe. She was vocal about the idea that Nike should have an environmental program. Then in 1995, she became Director of Nike's Environmental Action Team – a group of 6 people focused on compliance, waste reduction, and the Reuse-a-Shoe program. She read *The Natural Step* and thought the framework made sense. The *Ecology of Commerce* also had a very deep impact. Sarah took on the role of an evangelist to bring this kind of thinking into Nike.

In 1996, she advocated for Bill McDonough to become the architect for Nike's European headquarters. She approached Mark Parker (then VP of Footwear, now Nike's CEO) to meet with Bill and others in Nike including Darcy Winslow. After that she worked with Joe Laur and Sara Schley (Seed Systems) to organize a sustainability action learning program in 1999. They put 60-100 people through an intense experience. Their vision was to set them free as change agents within the company – a little overambitious at the time.

Sarah is now serving as a thought leader on Darcy's virtual leadership team to bring sustainability into everyday conversations. They are also using Darcy's businesses as a launch-point for organizational action toward sustainability.

Darcy Winslow - General Manager, Global Women's Footwear, Apparel and Equipment

Darcy's journey began with a love of the outdoors in Indiana. When she came to Oregon in 1982, she saw how fragile the environment could be – and that became a catalyst for her thinking about our impact on the earth. In 1988, she started at Nike in biomechanics and exercise science. She worked with athletes on product testing and learned how to bring products to market. In 1991-92, Darcy made her first trip to visit manufacturing partners overseas. When she saw a pregnant woman working on the line in Thailand, she asked the factory GM to find out if the smell bothered her. The woman replied that she got headaches only on Sunday (when she wasn't in contact with solvents). That incident triggered Darcy's resolve to make some changes.

Her thinking was also influenced by hearing Bill McDonough and Michael Braungart speak. She saw her time at Nike becoming more than bringing the next new product to market. She could influence major decisions about product and technical investments.

When Darcy led global R&D for footwear, she told Mark Parker (then VP, now CEO) and Tom Clarke (then president) that "Sustainability must move from Corporate Responsibility into the heart of what we do: making product." She took on a new role in February 1999 as GM of Sustainable Business Strategies. She helped create 3 goals for 2020: Zero waste, Zero toxic chemicals, and 100% closed loop business practices. Three years later, Darcy started the women's footwear division, where she is trying to integrate all elements of the value chain to create an approach to the consumer in the market place.

Labor Issues

As Nike continues to wrestle with charges of labor exploitation, its Labor Compliance group has devised a detailed program to handle these issues equitably. The *Fair Labor Association* (FLA) was founded in 1999 by Nike along with human rights groups and other large corporations who were also impacted by allegations of unfair labor practices in their overseas operations. The FLA is an independent monitoring organization which conducts random factory inspections to ensure that human rights are not being abused. The Global Alliance for Workers and Communities is another independent organization that conducts worker assessments

on workplace issues. Nike also has a staff of 46 who inspect their contract factories and grade the facilities on labor standards.

Nike's huge supply chain includes over 620,000 contract manufacturing workers in 800 factories in more than 50 countries, including the United States. Many of its contract factories are located in countries where governments view human rights differently than the standard rights we expect to receive in the United States. Working with these governments in setting baselines for labor compliance issues and assurances continues to be a challenge for not only Nike, but for many U.S.-based companies with contract labor facilities abroad.

There are no standards of measurement regarding labor compliance in contract factories that have been accepted industry-wide. Nor are there any solid reporting guidelines for a code of conduct aside from a company's own stated code of conduct which may or may not be enforceable in foreign locations. Nike currently relies on its own standards, programs and activities to help gauge their progress - as well as public reports from independent third parties they have partnered with such as the FLA and the Global Alliance. Developing a set of standardized measurements to enable clear and consistent reporting is Nike's top labor priority. The most effective way to proceed toward that goal is to work with others in the industry to begin outlining targets and objectives. By encouraging other companies to join the FLA and adopt unified guidelines, and by supporting independent monitoring organizations, Nike hopes to vastly improve their labor compliance and reporting.

Community Investment

In 2002, Nike established two priorities in community investment programs worldwide. First, through a program called *NikeGO*, they seek to "get kids moving and give them the means to do it." Since the company's mission statement is to "bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete* in the world (* if you have a body, you are an athlete)", Nike funding provides support for sports programs. They feel that sport can serve as a way for communities to come together and be a catalyst for social inclusion.

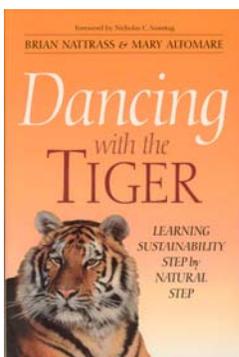
Nike's second community investment priority aims to address the challenge of globalization, and specifically focuses on challenges facing adolescent girls. By investing in human capital, Nike hopes to effectively address poverty alleviation and gender equality, two of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals. About seven years ago, Nike began a micro-enterprise initiative in its Southeast Asia contracted facilities. Micro-enterprise programs provide credit to those who do not have access to it through traditional banks and other financing institutions. These programs help stimulate

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Niketown in Rome, Italy

Nike Village helps enable those who had been forced to find work away in Bangkok, primarily women, to return to their families in rural Thai villages. Further plans are underway that will include a mobile AIDS unit, environmental reforestation projects, school lunch programs, mini-farms, sports facilities, organized sports activities, and development programs for women.



Dancing with the Tiger
by Brian Nattrass & Mary Altomare

economic development and improve the quality of life in rural areas by assisting in local entrepreneurial efforts.

A community development project called *Nike Village* was created in Thailand. Small stitching centers are established in rural communities as a central location for employment. This helps to ward off migration to nearby major cities by creating local income opportunities. These centers also include tree and vegetable banks, women's counseling programs, and education programs. *Nike Village* helps enable those who had been forced to find work away in Bangkok, primarily women, to return to their families in rural Thai villages. Further plans are underway that will include a mobile AIDS unit, environmental reforestation projects, school lunch programs, mini-farms, sports facilities, organized sports activities, and development programs for women.

Closer to home, Nike's *Air to Earth* Program provides environmental education for grades 4-9. The program encourages students to learn about "downcycling"; by experimenting with materials made from recycled athletic shoes, students create their own useful and effective recycled product.

Conclusion

This briefing is intended to outline many of the progressive steps Nike has taken to address sustainability. It is not an endorsement of their operations, manufacturing processes, and/or management activities. It simply serves to illustrate some of the ways they are attempting to reduce their environmental footprint and increase awareness of their social responsibilities. As Brian Nattrass and Mary Altomare noted in their book, *Dancing with the Tiger*, "Nike has become a symbol of globalization and this unwanted prominence has made them much more visible in all the controversies surrounding globalization."

Nike's position as a global giant means that their decisions can have a huge impact. When they make a decision in favor of sustainable design principles, they can positively influence choices made further down their supply chain. Then potentially their suppliers can effect choices made upstream as well. Entire industries could be transformed by Nike's choice to switch to a water-based adhesive instead of a petroleum-based one, or their search for a new clean rubber compound. Nike's decision to increase the percentage of organically-grown cotton in their garments (along with other garment manufacturers who have joined the Organic Exchange) will result in the growth of this industry by creating a strong market for the material. It will also have a profound impact on agricultural practices globally.

We agree with Joel Makower (founder of Greenbiz.com) when he says: “One thing the environmental movement could do better is giving credit to companies for things they're doing right, even if they're imperfect. Change is hard – for individuals and institutions alike – and companies often struggle to make what, for them, are significant changes in their operations, even though those changes may represent only a fraction of their environmental impacts. When companies don't get support for their efforts, they get frustrated – and it becomes increasingly harder for them to take on the next, more-ambitious innovation or change.”

Some readers may question the rosy picture we have painted of Nike. It was not our goal to document every injustice or wrongdoing. Instead, we wanted to give some visibility to Nike's sustainability and corporate responsibility efforts. Corporations need to hear encouragement for the positive steps they are taking, else they may abandon their efforts in the false belief that whatever they do won't matter to pressure groups and activists. We should pat them on the back for their efforts while advocating and encouraging them to do even more.

Inspiring Action

It is clear from Nike's story that companies can take steps to promote environmental and social sustainability which may also ensure their longer-term economic survival. Here are 11 actions you can take to help your organization act more sustainably, based on Nike's example:

1. Integrate sustainability directly into your vision and mission statements. This requires and ensures commitment from senior executives.
2. Operate with as much transparency as possible, so your stakeholders will know what is being done and why; invite stakeholder groups to engage in dialogue with you about the challenges you are facing.
3. Provide educational opportunities for employees to learn more about sustainability.
4. Approach product design, manufacturing and materials use/reuse from a cradle-to-cradle, life-cycle perspective. Where possible, use by-product synergies in design and manufacture, where wastes from one process become a resource input to the next.
5. Eliminate toxic materials from your products by finding natural, non-toxic substitutes with help from “green chemistry” and other research.
6. Eliminate unnecessary packaging and reduce what is necessary, substituting recyclable materials whenever possible.

Entire industries could be transformed by Nike's choice to switch to a water-based adhesive instead of a petroleum-based one, or their search for a new clean rubber compound.

“We need prospectors on the cutting edge. It's lonely and hard work, but rewarding. This is the right work that needs to be done, and there will be a payoff.”
– Darcy Winslow, Nike

7. Reduce energy consumption and consider using renewable energy sources wherever possible; for example, decrease business travel and purchase carbon offsets to help minimize impacts of necessary travel.
8. Integrate sustainable principles throughout your supply chain; this may involve seeking suppliers with sustainability-oriented values and practices, setting standards for suppliers and developing a balanced scorecard.
9. Collaborate with local partners to develop innovative solutions; for example, find local solutions for materials sourcing.
10. Improve global working conditions and join the FLA (if appropriate for your business).

For bonus points:

11. Find generous and creative ways to give back to the communities in which you operate.

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About the author



Carol Stoner's interest in sustainability stems from a childhood appreciation for nature and the outdoors. She is a strong advocate for environmental stewardship at work and at home. She tries to nurture this value in her kids so it will take root and grow, generation by generation.

Carol believes that businesses have an enormous potential to positively impact the way we live on this earth. She recently sought out a NikeTown and tried on a pair of Nike's new *Considered* shoes. She was impressed with the fit (like a glove) and feel (light & speedy). Knowing that the shoes represented Nike's greatest effort yet, she purchased them and felt

good about supporting their effort to create a sustainable shoe.

Carol obtained her B.S. in Forestry at the University of Nevada - Reno, and was certified as a ZERI Systems Design Professional in 2005. She is employed by Peakinsight LLC, a global consulting firm founded in 2000. Peakinsight LLC fosters catalytic connections between people, organizations, and the environment to impact how business will operate profitably and evolve sustainably in the future.