CASE STUDY

Reducing organisation-wide emissions by more than 40% within less than 5 years.

THE GUARDIAN

The Guardian's commitment : from covering the climate crisis to taking concrete climate actions.

The Guardian has long reported on the climate crisis, documenting both its causes and consequences. In 2019, the organisation extended this commitment to its own operations by **embedding environmental sustainability and decarbonisation across all departments.**

Its journey is an inspiring example of how a media organisation can **reduce emissions by over 40% across all scopes,** use its influence to advocate for climate action, and continue its core activities throughout this transformation.

RESULTS

43% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) between 2019/20 to 2023/24[1] across scopes 1, 2 and 3.

Since 2019/20, nearly **50% of print-related emissions have been reduced**[2] thanks to a shift to digital, improved forecasting and shift to newspapers' print sites using 100% renewable power.

As of 2024 nearly **96% of employees work in offices powered by renewable energy.**

Ban advertising from fossil fuel companies

SUCCESS CONDITIONS

- ***A strong organisational stand:*** through its Sustainability Pledge, the company has laid out 6 commitments including reducing its absolute emissions by 75% by 2030. These targets, which have been validated by the Science Based Target Initiative[3], are more ambitious than what is required by international standards.

- ***Certification from the B Corporation label since 2019[4] :*** the company has has to adjust its practices to meet high standards of social & environmental performance in order to validate the certification process as well as renewing its accreditation in 2023. The certification provides The Guardian with a rigorous framework to help assess (environmental) performance and is a testimony of the company's genuine commitment to reduce emissions & environmental impacts.

- ***A multi-faceted approach & mutually reinforcing measures :*** in addition to continuing to report on the climate crisis the company is working simultaneously to reduce its own carbon footprint, to phase out receiving advertising money from fossil fuel companies as well as to become a strong advocate on climate issues.

- ***Mobilisation of its suppliers through mandatory requirements :*** The Guardian has built environmental considerations into the core of its procurement and operational decisions, considering them as non-negociable criteria.The company has also shifted its selection of printing sites to more efficient locations powered by renwable energy.

- ***Involvement of everyone in the company :*** The Guardian's sustainability jouney involves all of its more than 1000 members of staff and board members, from journalists, engineers, procurement teams and event organisers, embedding environmental responsability in their daily decisions.

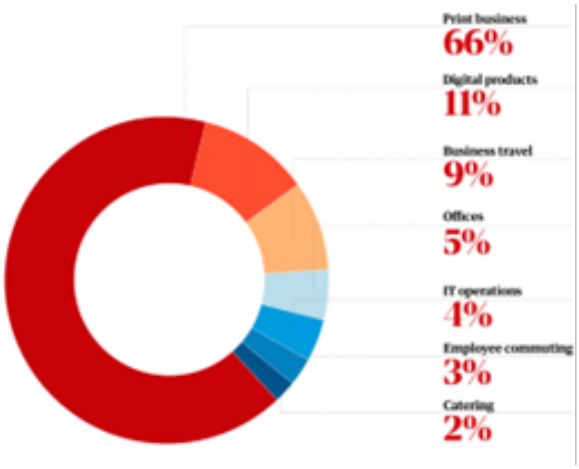
WHY THIS CASE STUDY ?

Similar to many organisations, the key source of greenhouse gas emissions of The Guardian lies in the supply chain. Even though The Guardian operates in a very specific sector, useful general lessons on how to successfully implement an organisation-wide decarbonisation roadmap can be learnt. The Guardian **has successfully implemented measures aimed at decarbonising its operations** without compromising its role as a leading newspaper agency. This case study demonstrates how sustainability can be mainstreamed and become an integral part of how an organisation functions.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM ?

In 2023/24, almost 98% of the Guardian 's measured greenhouse gas footprint originated from its supply chain. The print business – including paper manufacturing and use, printing, and distribution of newsprints and magazines – accounting for the largest share – 66% - of the footprint. Digital products, followed by business travel, represented 11% and 9% of the total footprint, respectively. [5]

Overview of The Guardian's Greenhouse gas emissions in 2023/24, in Tonne of CO2 equivalent



Complex geographical logistics

The Guardian operates across multiple countries, sourcing paper from various suppliers in the UK and Europe, and printing in UK and Ireland. This suggests high transportation distances and different national grids and renewable energy mixes both from suppliers and the audience which also affect print and digital emisisons.

Climate and biodiversity impacts

Forestry practices, water usage, and water pollution linked to paper production can affect biodiversity, while distribution and packaging contribute to waste generation. Addressing these issues requires coordination across suppliers and continuous monitoring of evolving methodologies.

WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS ?

A few years into the implementation of its decarbonisation roadmap, the organisation had already achieved a reduction in its global emissions by 43% [6] (compared with its 2019/20 baseline).

This progress is driven by the implementation of a wide variety of measures:

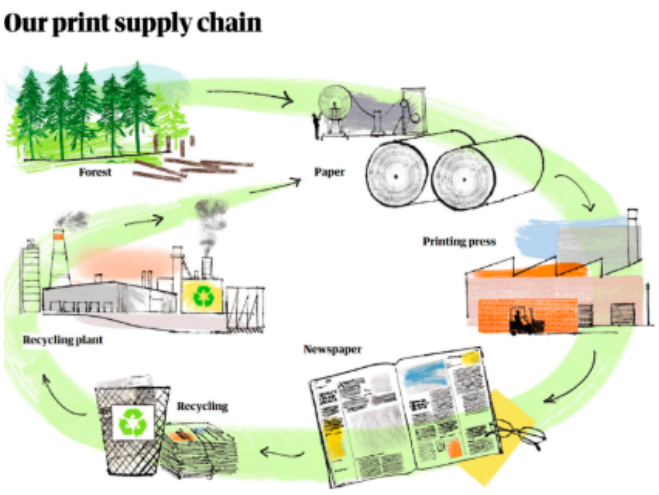
A targeted decarbonisation strategy aimed at *reducing print emissions*

With more than 100 000 copies of The Guardian printed every day and an estimated 25 000 tons of paper used per year [7], printing represents the biggest share of the company's emissions accounting for 66% of overall emissions[8]. These include emissions from the production of paper (energy is required for the pulping and production of newspaper), from the printing itself (inks and printing plates used and the energy used by print sites), and the distribution (transport to get raw materials to paper mills, paper to printer, and printed newspapers to wholesale distribution points and to local retailers and readers).

Since the beginning of its sustainability journey, The Guardian has attempted to tackle all these areas of the printing sector and has already reached a reduction of nearly 50% of these emissions from 2019/20 to 2023/2024.[9]

Choosing more *sustainable printing suppliers*

The Guardian has built environmental considerations into the core of its procurement and operational decisions, considering them as non-negociable criteria (rather than optional add-ons). All large procurement contracts now require suppliers to meet defined environmental performance standards with assessment of factors covering emission intensity, biodiversity protection and transparency of reporting. In addition to selecting sustainabe suppliers upstream, the company also regularly reviews the emission reduction plan of its suppliers.



The Guardian's supply chain organisation

For its largest emissions source, namely paper, the organisation uses a diversified supplier network across the UK and Europe, actively choosing mills that can demonstrate low average emissions per tonne and that are taking tangible steps to protect nature, such as biodiversity action plans and alignment with Science-Based Targets for Nature.This includes factors such as the use of green energy sources, the carbon footprint per tonne of paper and the distance of travel of the paper from the mills to the print sites.

In parrallel, The Guardian also relocated some of their printing sites to more efficient locations powered by renewable energy. All UK-based newspaper printing operations are now run ewclusively on renewable energy, thereby further shrinking the footprint of both production and logistic. This integrated approach not olny lowers direct emissions but also pushes environemntal progress upstream into the supply chain, with other clients of the suppliers also benefiting from sustainability progress. 99% of magazines are now printed in the UK which has allowed the company to reduce road miles.

Improved *forecasting*

Having put in place more efficient and smarter distriburion planning as well as having increased the number of suscription-based deliveries led to more precise print orders and fewer unsold newspaper copies (and associated waste). The organisation has also introduced advanced data modelling and close monitoring of sales trends, enabling more accurate print runs. This has enabled a decline in volume of paper bought, newspapers sold, and copies printed, reducing associated emissions and waste.

More *sustainable paper sources*

The progressive introduction of recycled paper fibres in the daily paper prints as well as The Guardian weekly has allowed the company to make significant emission savings (estimated to 1/3 for this category).[10]

In addition to the replacement of its packaging of the weekly magazine from plastic to by recycled paper, has generated significant savings of greenhouse gas emissions and waste (from October 2019 to December 2020, the company avoided more than 20 milion plastic wraps).[11]

Today, recycled fibres constitute 47% of the paper used for newspaper prints.[12] Virgin paper is maintained in the mix in order to ensure minimum quality standards, however it comes from sustainable-resourced forests (certified by the Forest Stewardship Council).

Switching to *digital*

One of the company's strategies to reduce its overall emissions has been progressively switch to digital products, which are overall more environmentally friendly than printed newspapers.[7]

However, the growing consumption of digital products and services also generates climate and environmental impacts which need to be miniminised. These include emissions from servers, data transmission networks and the erngy used by readers' devices.

Emissions linked to digital products constitute 11% of the company's global carbon footprint. In 2023/24. the company had already achieved a 16% reduction in emissions related to digital products as compared to 2019/20.

This has been made possible by transitioning to :

- More energy-efficient cloud systems.
- Network efficiencies.
- Testing low-emission advertising methods such as adaptative streaming.

As national energy electricity grids decarbonise aross the world, emissions from readers accessing digital content are also expected to decline the coming years. Moreover, with concerns about the high emission intensity of Generative AI, The Guardian has also developed Artificial Intelligence principles in 2023 promoting responsible and reasonable use of this new technology for the purpose of journalism.

Switching to *renewable energy* across offices worldwide

Although purchased energy constitutes a small share of The Guardian's overall carbon footprint (less than 1%), reducing energy constituted a low hanging fruit for the company as wall as a visible way to sensitize staff accross offices and demonstrates the company's sustainability journey.

- By 2024, 96% of staff worldwide were already working from offices powered by renewable energyn following major transitions in London, Sydney, Melbourne and New York office in 2023 was a significant milestone, helping deliver a 31% reduction in office emissions compared to the previous year.[13]

In the London headquarters, the company has upgraded its building management systems, reduced gas consumption and introduced retrofits to LED lighting. This comprehensive energy strategy reduces emissions accross operations and improves resulience against energy price volatility.

Reducing emissions related to *business travel*

Similarly to many organisations, travelling is a key component of reporting and journalism. In 2024, business travel emission constituted 9% of The Guardian's overall emissions.[1] In order to reduce travel emissions, the company introduced updates to its travel policy to include measures such as:

- Using the train as a default travel mode for European destinations. A 'Rail-first' policy for UK and Eurostar destinations was introduced reducing reliance on short-haul flights.
- The adoption of an emissions calculation tool in travel booking systems displaying greenhouse gas emissions of various travelling options, making staff more aware of their travel-related emissions and enabling them to make informed decisions and choose flights with lower climate impact.
- Prioritising taxi companies with a larger fleet which includes hybrid and electric vehicles.

Adressing *environmental and nature impacts*

The Guardian recognises the importance of not only addressing greenhouse gas emissions, but also tackling its impact on nature and biodiversity. In 2023, it carried out its first biodiversity audit which highlighted some of the main hotspots for reducing its environmental impact (e.g. 28% of its biodiversity impact is associated with paper). Measures such as reducing the amount of paper and inks, shifting to more sustainable inks, as well as engaging with paper suppliers on sustainability issues are some of the steps the company is currently undertaking.

A shift towards a *cleaner advertising strategy*

Beyond its core journalism work, the company also aims to have a positive impact through the way it engages with advertising clients. While advertising is key to funding the company's journalism work, The Guardian has decided to incorporate sustainability issues in their advertising strategy. Since 2020, the company has taken a strong stance to ban the use of fossil fuel money for their advertising, leading the way to promoting sustainable

initiatives and companies. The Guardian has for instance introduced a 10% discount for B Corp certified companies advertising job vacancies through the Guardian. Another example includes the use of an internal solution (Guardian Advertising Light) to deliver ads without using cookies, tracking or auction technology, thereby limiting greenhouse gas emissions linked with advertisement.

CONCLUSIONS

The Guardian's experience provides valuable lessons for large organisations seeking to **reduce emissions while maintaining their core mission.** Its transition to low-carbon energy and sustainable suppliers, staff engagement, and holistic approach to sustainability offer a replicable model across sectors. The organisation's commitment to "walking the talk", combined with transparent reporting on both progress and challenges, reinforces its credibility as a climate leader.

On track to meet its 2030 targets, **The Guardian continues to improve in areas** such as paper sourcing, energy use and digital efficiency. Looking ahead, its key challenge will be balancing its print and digital footprint while expanding its influence beyond its own operations. By moving from incremental improvements to deeper structural change - rethinking formats and investing in low carbon digital infrastructure - it can further drive systemic transformation across the media industry.

RESSOURCES

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[11] Guardian Media Group, Sustainability Report 2023 - 2024

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[13] Guardian Media Group, Sustainability Report 2023 - 2024