

SGP Case Study:

Desigtex: Improving Profitability by Halving Solid Waste Output



Desigtex, a leader in the design and manufacture of applied materials, is no stranger to sustainability. The organization first achieved SGP certification in 2009, and has maintained that certification through continuous improvement projects for nearly a decade. The company's current catalog includes more than 8,000 materials, all of which have been selected with their sustainability objectives in mind, and the firm supports eleven emissions reduction projects to operate as carbon neutral.

In 2017, Desigtex made a commitment to eliminate waste from its production facilities. After spending all of 2017 preparing for the initiative, the company was able to see a tremendous reduction in solid waste and tangible profits every month of 2018.

How did Desigtex turn waste into profit in 2018?

Paul Glynn, Desigtex Manager of Materials and Digital Technology R&D and ambassador for sustainability, says employee buy-in is key to the success of any sustainability initiative. When employees from every department get involved, they can share insights that streamline processes and improve sustainability practices throughout the company.

Recycling and repurposing are key components of Desigtex's waste reduction efforts. The company has achieved great success diverting waste streams to organizations that turn waste into new products. In several cases, Desigtex is compensated by companies that use the waste to produce new materials.

Partnerships are key to reusing and repurposing success

Desigtex works with many partners to achieve its waste reduction goals.

Garbage to Garden, a local composting company, assists in the composting of all food waste, coffee grounds, tea bags, and paper towels. Garbage to Garden turns waste into soil which is then used in the employee garden. The garden itself has been a tremendous team-building activity for employees, yielding healthy food and boosting morale across the organization's various departments.

Reducing Packaging Waste

When Desigtex discovered that a particular type of hybrid plastic packing materials, including 8" diameter roll caps were being discarded, it approached their vendor with an offer to return those materials for reuse. The vendor was happy to accept the returns and has since begun compensating Desigtex for the reusable materials. As a result, Desigtex receives credits for the return of three gaylords (approximately 525lbs) of waste for reuse, keeping that waste out of the trash and extending its lifecycle.

Eliminating HDPE Waste

Similar trade-back agreements have been implemented for HDPE (High Density Polyethylene) waste. After successfully receiving several gaylords of material, the vendor has been happy to pay for shipping and has asked Designtex to return not only their own HDPE packaging material but also the material Designtex accumulates from other vendors. Designtex has eliminated 100% of its HDPE waste with this program, and the vendor has been able to reduce the costs associated with purchasing new materials.

LDPE Recycling

Designtex has also been able to eliminate its LDPE (Low Density Polyethylene) waste through a partnership with CLYNK and Trex. Trex, a manufacturer of composite decking, uses LDPE packaging waste as a key component of its product. While Designtex does not produce enough waste to partner directly with Trex, Trex introduced the company to CLYNK, a local Trex supplier that was able to accept all of Designtex's LDPE waste along with that of other local producers.

Organizing the 3R's at Designtex

While it might sound like a significant challenge to incorporate such intensive recycling, repurposing, and reuse initiatives, Designtex reports that with some planning and a central location, these efforts have been relatively easy to maintain. Glynn says, "Design your flow around the program, and it will fit right in."

This is a great example of why it's so important to invite employees from all departments to weigh in on sustainability initiatives. Setting up a large-scale recycling and repurposing program will involve many people across an organization, and each department can contribute a unique perspective on efficiency in its own space.



Tips for Getting Started

It took years of planning and cultivating partnerships for Designtex to achieve its many sustainability successes. If your sustainability journey is just beginning, start small. That might mean implementing a simple program to recycle office waste. Learn from that initiative and then expand.

And don't forget to reach out to your suppliers – they might already have a sustainability initiative that can help reduce your waste and your costs and if not, they might be open to collaborating to create one. Being asked to consider sustainability can light a spark that generates a positive solution for everyone!

Do you want to grow profits through sustainability? Working toward SGP certification is an excellent way to begin. Contact info@sgppartnership.org to learn more about getting certified and putting industry best practices to work for you.