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## Measuring Green

**The latest sustainability audit goes beyond the basics for a fuller picture -- and checks in on the competition.**

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Beth Kormanik



Consider this: The first image viewers see on Valley Forge Fabrics' Web site isn't a textile -- it's a green footprint.

It's a strong and consistent message across the site. Valley Forge Fabrics, a leading supplier of decorative textiles for the hospitality industry, has not only measured its carbon footprint, but have taken steps to reduce it by 35 percent over 18 months. It purchases carbon offsets for every yard of fabric it ships. Its FRESH line of fabrics are made from synthetic yarns derived from recycled products and are themselves recyclable.

Still, the company wanted to go further. So it turned to sustainability consulting firm MindClick SGM for a 360-degree Green Audit. The results came in a Sustainability Scorecard.

"They were asking themselves, 'What do we do next?'" said JoAnna Abrams, MindClick's managing partner for business and marketing strategy. "How do we really measure our performance relative to the leading standards that are out there? Ultimately, how do we make our choices as to what kinds of investments we make going forward?"

Manufacturers, as well as end users in hotels, are realizing that sustainability can be a key business driver. They also recognize the increasing customer demand for sustainable products. But often consumers are asked to take claims at face value. With the proliferation of green measurement firms, MindClick hopes it can rise above by offering manufacturers a common language for talking about green beyond LEED or carbon emissions.

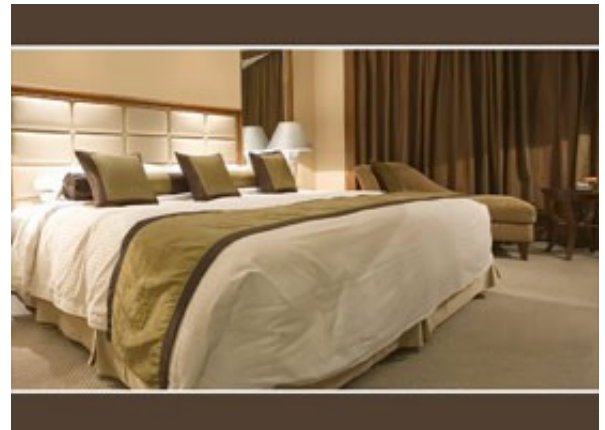
Abrams said the scorecard measures the sustainability performance of company products, operations, corporate social responsibility initiatives and brand, along with employee and customer engagement and satisfaction. It also includes the traditional measures of energy, water and waste. The work is done through substantiating the company's data -- much like an accounting audit would do for financials -- as well as original research.

The result is an overall evaluation of a company's performance, along with a look at competitors within their category.

With a comprehensive sustainability perspective, companies "have greater control over how their customers are making decisions," Abrams said.

One component of the survey asked hospitality buyers to evaluate the players within the category on a variety of attributes, including sustainability. The results confirmed the importance of green to hospitality buyers.

"What we were all very pleasantly surprised by is how important sustainability is in the overall purchasing decisions customers are making," she said. "Relative to other key drivers of product -- meeting critical timelines, delivering on



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value and price, quality, service -- it's way up there. What was very valuable for Valley Forge Fabrics was it confirmed their own beliefs and hunches."

Valley Forge Fabrics scored a 3.9 out of MindClick's 5-point scale. The score reflected a commitment to sustainability but left room for improvement.

"There is no perfect score that is achievable today. There's always follow-up," Abrams said. "The value of this is they have an understanding now of where their strengths are and where their weaknesses are. They know them relative to what's most important to their market and in terms of their employees. The beauty of being able to aggregate this and provide a score card is they see where they make their investments and how to get their return. Whether it's based on cost savings or growing their business and overall profitability. The way companies use this is to make strategic decisions on investments and track results over time."

Sharing the results with potential clients has its risks when the score is not perfect, but it does demonstrate the company's openness and transparency. As long as the results are paired with a commitment to improve, Abrams said buyers understand and appreciate the effort.

"An argument can be made [that] if Valley Forge Fabrics waited, they would come out of the blocks with an even greater score and have an even greater story to tell," she said. "Market forces are such that companies are recognizing they need to start talking more about what they're doing, even if they're not perfect. Sustainability isn't about perfection, it's about a journey and improvements."

Abrams said an audit can also show companies how to commit to sustainability while increasing revenue at the same time.

"They're recognizing that they are able to still deliver on key drivers of why customers chose them in the first place," she said. "Most companies are very concerned about the cost. Once you realize the cost savings associated with efficiency, that frees the capital. You are starting to tell a better story."

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### Credit



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**Bio:** Beth Kormanik is managing editor of Buyer Interactive and editor of Hotel Interactive. She previously covered politics, government and higher education for the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville, Fla. While at the Times-Union she won several state and regional awards, including the 2008 Freedom of Information award from the Florida Society of News Editors and the top honor in the 2007 Florida Bar media awards for large newspapers. Beth also was a ... [more](#)