Executive Summary

For businesses, sustainability is about more than saving trees. While reducing paper consumption is a big part of it, in 2018, environmental conservation is just one part of corporate sustainability. When a company is truly “sustainable,” every function operates in a way that enables the organization to continue doing business for years to come. Limiting waste and maximizing the output of all resources, human and otherwise, are the only way to achieve this.

For CIOs, driving sustainability through digitization presents a huge opportunity to strengthen business alignment while demonstrating strategic leadership, as the business begins to see improvements in efficiency, productivity, and the overall customer and employee experience.

This eBook articulates how digitization can help your organization redefine and, ultimately, achieve sustainability.

Sustainability: It’s not just about hugging trees.

(But still—please don’t print this, thanks!)
Sustainability’s New Role in the Enterprise

Within the context of Corporate Social Responsibility, sustainability has for decades been synonymous with “going green” and shrinking the business footprint. However, as the pressures to speed innovation and meet consumer expectations mount, sustainability has evolved into a more complex concept for the enterprise—and thus the CIO. Though subtle, the role of sustainability is now woven throughout the enterprise. Let’s break down these new roles.

**ROLE 1:**

**Proving Good Corporate Citizenship**

A traditional role for sustainability remains the ability to prove good corporate citizenship. From an environmental perspective, the “circular economy” wherein companies move from recycling to upcycling will continue raising the bar on what it means to be sustainable. In every region where a company operates around the world, simply reducing waste won’t get companies a gold star anymore—preventing it will. Finally, from a social perspective, transparency will continue driving the requirement for verifiable metrics in globalized sustainability reporting. Because nothing says greenwashing quite like a sustainability report that requires printing just to edit.
ROLE 2:

**Meeting Employee and Customer Expectations**

Employee and customer expectations around sustainability have never been so high. Today’s employees demand transparency, and the future workforce, Gen Z, is united around the world in making sustainability a priority. In fact, a full 93% say societal impact will affect where they choose to work. Imagine the disconnect if onboarding includes the need to print stacks of paper just to enroll in benefits.

Similarly, today’s customers choose to spend money with brands that align with their values. Increasingly, they voice those values through their discretionary income. With $30 to $40 trillion set to be transferred from the current spending generation to Millennials over the next few decades, companies must uphold a higher set of standards to gain traction in an evolving global market. What’s true for customers will ring true for investors as well. Sixty-nine percent of high-net Millennials place greater worth investing money in companies that show a high level of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Imagine the disconnect if a millennial board member receives a printed presentation.

ROLE 3:

**Propelling Growth**

Business growth requires enterprise process that scales rapidly, accounts for efficiency, and meets evolving requirements up and down the global supply chain. For example, Swiss Re, the world’s second-largest reinsurer has a long-standing commitment to corporate responsibility and strives to implement this...
ideal across the business. At the employee level, the organization brings this commitment to life by offering reimbursements for purchases of products that reduce CO2 emissions, such as vehicles or dual-pane windows. They took this commitment to a higher level in 2010 when they applied sustainability values to their process workflows and document management. Today, Swiss Re uses Nitro to digitize their entire insurance contract process and has since reduced waste, gained efficiency, and improved the way they serve their customers and employees.

**ROLE 4:**

**Mining for Insight**

The days of relying on intuition to make decisions are over. Business leaders need to identify patterns to spot problems, and they need to use insights to find solutions. A print process produces dead data. Conversely, digitization allows organizations to aggregate and mine the data that lives inside PDF documents, enabling insights into a variety of business challenges, from how to streamline a process to how to predict customer preferences.

For CIOs, driving digitization presents an opportunity to move sustainability from an aspirational concept to a strategic activity. In the next section, we discuss how sustainability through digitization supports the broader strategic goals for not only the business, but also the leadership team.
In order to understand how sustainability through digitization makes a strategic impact, we must first define it.

The most frequently cited definition of sustainability comes from the World Council on Economic Development, which explains that sustainability occurs when business operations “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In practice, business sustainability refers to managing the “Triple Bottom Line” of people, planet, and profit.

To build upon that, we clarify further by defining “sustainability through digitization” as the ability to reduce wasted energy, time, and resources through continually digitizing process at every possible interaction.

When we think about how sustainability through digitization can become strategic for business, it must start with CIOs identifying unsustainable processes and then articulating how digitization of these processes would directly reduce wasted energy, time, or resources.

For many organizations, unsustainable processes look like analog document management and non-digital workflows that risk both security and version control as users stop, print, edit, and sign paper documents, then scan and re-attach them to emails. This can happen anywhere: the sales process, the customer service process, or the new employee onboarding process.
When analog document management and non-digital workflows are the culprits, sustainability through digitization could be as simple as expanding access to basic PDF editing tools to keep an entire workflow digital from end to end. Given that over 50% of printing is for signing alone, expanding eSignature capabilities can prevent the need for printing in the first place. You can read more about how simple and cost effective it is to expand these digital toolsets across the enterprise [here](#).

Finally, when it’s time to connect the dots for leadership, the CIO must articulate how sustainability directly or indirectly impacts business growth and improves customer loyalty. CIOs can drive these points home by developing business cases that directly speak to what each leader truly cares about. Here are a few ideas on where to start.

**Why every member of your leadership team will care about sustainability through digitization. (Get ready to be a hero.)**

**Your CEO has to talk about it.**

Shareholders expect a sustainability report, and your CEO has an evolving set of guidelines to address when crafting that report. Sixty-five percent of companies use the Global Reporting Initiative. Its guidelines are growing to include value, integrity, transparency, and credibility - all of which require proof points. With 93% of CEOs seeing sustainability as important to their company’s future success¹, they value metrics that connect digital transformation efforts to the triple bottom line: people, profit, and planet.

Improving sustainability through digitization can provide reportable results, such as: reduced cost (through eliminating paper-related and IT-related expenses), improved user productivity (less time wasted on document challenges), and better customer experience (higher NPS or satisfaction scores).

¹ According to the 2010 UN Global Compact-accenture CeO Study “a New era of Sustainability”.

With 93% of CEOs seeing sustainability as important to their company’s future success.
Your CMO wants to talk about it.

Brand values count for a lot these days—and so does authenticity. Consumers and the media have never been paying more attention. Your CMO can’t pitch an authentic sustainability story without a strong public CSR stance they can prove. According to Forrester analyst Anjali Lai, “Consumers increasingly judge companies on the basis of their values — and while customers are skeptical of firms that stay silent, they open their wallets for those that champion appealing causes.” In addition, Lai notes that “52% of consumers now consider themselves environmentally conscious.” Further proof lies in a recent Unilever study, which revealed that 33% of consumers choose brands they believe are doing social or environmental good.

If your packaging is still non-recyclable or your customer interactions still require snail mail and a print/scan/fax scenario, you can bet a Twitter bird will fly out of the next tree you cut down and chirp about the #irony. If sustainability through digitization can help your CMO tell and prove a better brand story? Well that’s a win-win.

Your CFO can take it to the bank.

CFOs have spent enough time in the greenwashed proving grounds to understand the obvious savings associated with “going green.” Paper and printing are typically the third-highest business operating expense behind rent and payroll, and 51% of those printing costs at most enterprises result from printing documents just to sign them.

However, paper alone isn’t the only cost eliminated by going digital. The costs of ink and document storage also decrease, as does human inefficiency; which brings
us to the less obvious savings CIOs can articulate to CFOs—productivity.

For every $1 spent printing a page, the enterprise must spend another $9 just to manage it. Even scarier, the average worker spends 40% of their time just looking for information. Eliminating paper-based processes eliminates inefficiency costs by increasing employee productivity. Keeping workflows out of the printer queue saves employees time, prevents costly mistakes, and accelerates customer transactions—all of which translate into more revenue.

Enterprise companies waste millions on document- and print-related inefficiencies. If sustainability through digitization can help recapture revenue? Cha-ching.

Your CHRO could use the win.

The future success of every organization comes down to the talent; CEOs know it, and CHROs are responsible for it. (No pressure, right?)

From sharing company values with candidates and onboarding new hires to streamlining knowledge transfer and keeping teams engaged, the CHRO is grappling with huge cultural and demographic shifts, all of which require new strategy, technology, and process. A common intersection for their challenges lies in the organization’s ability to deliver a great employee experience (to not just new hires, but all employees) by improving communication and collaboration.

What if every part of your new hire onboarding process was digital, but the last step required the new hire to print, sign, and scan a form just to enroll in benefits? There goes your momentum. Even worse, what if every procurement manager and IT team member (or anyone else who plays a role in onboarding) has to collect a piece of paper to complete a task? There goes any productivity gains.

Every stakeholder involved in the ongoing employee experience benefits from sustainability through digitization—not just the CHRO.
Your IT team could use the break.

This one should be the most obvious. Printers are a nightmare for your IT team. Up to 23% of IT calls involve printer problems. Whether it is a connection problem, a paper jam, or just sourcing parts, IT teams end up squandering 40–60% of their time with such hardware maintenance. Those losses represent valuable time that could be allocated to focus on new innovation or to achieve high-priority initiatives that you’re responsible for.

Sustainability through digitization dramatically reduces the need to print and will pay off in the form of more time for creativity and meaningful productivity for an already stretched thin team.

Now that you have identified examples of how sustainability through digitization can help the organization (and your business partners) reach strategic goals, let’s pinpoint some of the common roadblocks that stall the transition to digitization.
Common Roadblocks to Achieving Sustainability Through Digitization

While everyone aspires to do the “right thing,” some common challenges stall the effort for many organizations. Here are three common roadblocks the strategic CIO must overcome:

**ROADBLOCK 1:**  
**The Accessibility Myth**

Many organizations still buy the myth that it’s cost prohibitive to offer lightweight digital tools, such as PDF management and eSigning, for everyone involved in a process or workflow. Under the assumption that a feature-heavy Adobe Document Cloud is the only way to provide the basics, many IT teams may only have the budget to purchase licenses for 10% of the workforce. This compromise leaves the other 90% ill equipped to participate in a fully digital workflow and forces them into the printer queue.

**ROADBLOCK 2:**  
**The Culture Gap**

For many organizations, perception vs. reality contributes to a frustrating culture gap and a weaker sense of urgency. While company executives believe they are encouraging a digital culture that enables collaboration to run smoothly across the enterprise, the employee’s reality proves otherwise. For leadership, this disparity creates a dangerous perception that digital transformation is further along than it really is. For the workforce, this creates a daily reminder of broader culture misalignment.
According to a recent survey from Capgemini and Brian Solis, “The Digital Culture Challenge: Closing the Employee-Leadership Gap,” cultural issues create the biggest hurdle to digital transformation:

- **85% of company leaders say the workforce easily collaborates across business units and functions, yet only 41% of employees agree.**

- **60% of business leaders say the company invests in building their employees capabilities, yet only 33% of employees agree.**

**ROADBLOCK 3:**

**Employee Habit**

For many organizations, user adoption is a roadblock to achieving sustainability through digitization. When it comes to keeping workflow and process out of the printing queue, not all generations are created equal. Boomers and much of Gen X still remember a time when legal signatures required printing and training came in the form of giant three ring binders. Here is the bad news: for these employees, printing a PDF to mark it up or printing a document just to sign it is merely a hard habit to break.

Ready for the good news? Gen X is where the print habit stops. According to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce study, Millennials are 2.5 times more likely to be early adopters of technology than other generations. As the first digital natives in the workforce, they expect to keep their world entirely digital, oftentimes becoming frustrated if they have to waste time looking for a digital document, let alone a piece of paper.

With these common roadblocks in mind, let’s turn our attention to what CIOs can do to drive sustainability through digitization forward.
Driving Sustainability Through Digitization - Three Simple Steps to Get Started.

With so many complex challenges facing strategic CIOs, there is something to be said for embracing the simple wins that make an impact quickly. Driving sustainability through digitization can be one of those wins. Here are three simple steps for getting started in 2018:

The best solution is often the simplest.”

Sam Chandler
CEO

STEP 1:
Audit the Workforce. Bust the Myth.

Take an honest look at the availability of digital tools across the entire workforce. When you identify the who/what/when associated with the print/sign/scan bottlenecks, you will likely find that 90% of the team simply don’t have the tools they need to keep workflows and process truly digital.

Now what?
Understand the cost vs. value of your current digital toolset. You may be spending extra money on feature bloat you could reinvest; expanding access to lightweight tools that handle 90% of the most common work - PDF management and eSigning. On average, customers who replace feature heavy tools with lightweight alternatives, regularly experience savings of 50%.

**STEP 2:**

**Connect the dots for your leadership team. Close the Gaps**

Help each stakeholder on the leadership team understand how sustainability through digitization aligns with their SPECIFIC business goals. Whether it is internal priorities such as cost reduction, productivity improvement, and the employee experience or external priorities such as customer expectations, supply chain requirements, or shareholder oversight - connect the dots - explicitly.

**How do you do this effectively? Tell stories!**

If you are connecting the dots for the CEO, articulate the impact of improved employee satisfaction. People like to feel productive! When digital workflows and streamlined processes help employees become more productive, and they spend more time doing what they love, they will be happier at work. Companies with happy employees outperform the competition - why? Happier employees, happier customers.

If you are connecting the dots for the CMO, focus on consumer’s perception when interactions include printing and signing a document just to execute a contract. Look at their customer journey map and highlight the touchpoints where your organization can eliminate an existing paper process.
If you are connecting the dots for the CHRO, focus on how digitization not only meets the growing technology expectations of the future workforce, but also helps deliver faster, and more accurate knowledge transfer.

By connecting the unique dots for each leader, you not only close culture gaps but you also reinforce your value as a true business partner who understands their goals at a deeper level.

**STEP 3:**

**Incentivize sustainable behavior. Break the Habits**

Like all sustainability efforts; recycling, upcycling, etc., basic human behavior is at play. Beyond simply feeling better about doing the right thing, employees may need constant reinforcement to keep sustainability through digitization top of mind.

One way to reinforce positive behavior is through incentives. Consider partnering with your CHRO and introducing internal programs that inspire more sustainable behaviors. For example, create a program that rewards the business units with the lowest prints per employee with a team lunch or happy hour.
Conclusion

In 2021, businesses are accountable for more than just what they do today; they are accountable for their environmental footprint into the future as well. In addition to answering to more stakeholders than ever before, they must not only limit waste but prevent it. They must not only maximize resources, but upcycle for the creation of new ones.

Sustainability is no longer an aspirational concept; it is a strategic imperative. The line of business goals is tied to it and business growth now and in the future depends on it.

Driving “sustainability through digitization” presents a low investment, high return opportunity for strategic CIOs to lead the way, reducing wasted energy, time, and resources by providing basic tools to everyone and enabling the digitization of processes at every possible interaction.

Kickstart sustainability through digitization today!