The products and services that you purchase for your business can have a significant environmental and social impact. Sustainable purchasing, or responsible purchasing, involves taking into account environmental, social and ethical factors when making a purchasing decision.
What is Sustainable Purchasing?

Clearly, common considerations like price, quality and availability of a product are still important, but in addition, sustainability considerations can have a positive impact on the products and services you buy, benefiting your business and the environment.

The consumption of greener, more ethical products is increasing and becoming an everyday aspect of many people’s lives. Many of your customers expect to consume similar products during their visit as well.

Use your purchasing decisions to choose products that have less impact on the environment, benefit the local community, and enhance the quality of the experience provided to your customers.

Some basic considerations when purchasing products:

1. **Quality:** Opt for the highest quality you can afford, whether for furniture, appliances, or uniforms; have them repaired or serviced when necessary – it’s generally more cost effective than replacement and reduces the use of materials and waste.

2. **Energy efficiency:** Choose the most energy efficient lighting, heating, air-conditioning, and appliances and electronics. These may cost more initially, but will produce savings in the long term because of lower operating costs. Look out for energy rating labels on appliances or electronics you buy.

3. **Hazardous materials:** Avoid products containing toxic substances. Opt for non-harmful alternatives, including non-toxic, water-based, hypoallergenic and biodegradable cleaning products and toiletries, and zero VOC (volatile organic compound) paints for example.

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1: Green Hotelier Know How guides: Responsible Procurement, (February 2014) [www.greenhotelier.org/our-themes/responsible-procurement/](http://www.greenhotelier.org/our-themes/responsible-procurement/)

2: For domestic type appliances and electronics, you can look out for the EU Energy Rating labels (A+++ – G rating) to get a general indication of how efficient the appliances and electronics are. For more information [www.which.co.uk/energy/saving-money/guides/energy-labels-explained/eu-energy-efficiency-labels/](http://www.which.co.uk/energy/saving-money/guides/energy-labels-explained/eu-energy-efficiency-labels/)

For commercial size appliances you can check the Energy Technology List ([et.decc.gov.uk/let/site/let/browse-let.html](http://et.decc.gov.uk/let/site/let/browse-let.html))
4. Recycled or recyclable: Buy products made from recycled or reclaimed materials (for example 100% recycled paper products, recycled plastic garden furniture, recycled content carpet) and/or those products that can at least be recycled or reused. This helps to reduce the use of virgin materials and closes the loop with the materials that have been recycled.

5. Avoid disposable products: Unless they are biodegradable or can be recycled, they add to the accumulation of landfill so choose an alternative with a useful lifespan. Where this can not be avoided, high quality ranges of compostable food packaging and catering disposables are available, for example from companies like Vegware and Biopac.

6. Buy local: By buying food or arts and crafts produced in your local area or region, or using services provided by locally-owned businesses, you can help keep money in your local community, support specific skills and services and provide guests with an authentic and unique experience of your destination, as well as reduce carbon emissions through reduced transport.

7. Natural and organic: Choose certified organic food and drink products and cotton where possible.

The benefits of buying responsibly

Remember, there are a number of advantages of sustainable purchasing, such as:

- **Cost savings**: buying more durable and efficient products can help save money throughout their life time, by reducing the need to replace them and lower running costs

- **Increased customer satisfaction**: as you are providing customers with high quality, local products adding to their unique and memorable experience

- **Tax breaks and credits**: available on energy and water efficient products and technology

- **Staff engagement and retention**: people like working for companies that care and want to make a positive impact through their supply chain

- **Social benefits**: by buying local products and services you are contributing to a thriving community, which is an integral part of a good quality tourism destination

- **Maintain unique culture and skills**: like distinctive food varieties, and native breeds; or traditional crafts and local arts; fostering a local cultural identity

- **Environmental benefits**: reducing waste, pollution and carbon emissions related to the products and services you buy and use

- **Reputation management**: enhancing the image of your business with customers, suppliers and the local community
8. Choose Fairtrade products: These certified items, including tea, coffee, sugar and chocolate, promote sustainable development by ensuring producers around the world receive a fair price for their products, enabling them to trade their way out of poverty. For information on products and suppliers check out the Fair Trade Foundation and the Rainforest Alliance Group.

To make it easier to start considering environmental and social responsibility as a factor in your purchasing decisions start with small steps and progressively incorporate more where you can. Start with a few products and services where the environmental impacts are well known and alternatives are readily available, like recycled paper, non-toxic cleaners, local/regional food, energy efficient light bulbs.

Tip for bigger businesses:
You can develop your own plan to improve the sustainability of your procurement activity by setting up a Sustainable Procurement Policy. The aim of the Sustainable Procurement Policy is to prompt staff involved in the procurement of goods and services to use environmental responsibility as a factor in their purchasing decisions.

Zero Waste Scotland provides advice on Sustainable Procurement in Scotland; including a guide for Scottish SMEs.
Whether a quick snack or a gourmet meal, visitors are looking for a positive and memorable food experience when they dine out. VisitScotland’s 2011/12 visitor survey indicated that the second highest holiday activity for the visitor was to sample Scottish food.

Using Scottish products and dishes in your menu provides you with a competitive advantage, meeting this customer demand. Apart from providing fresh, quality food, you can also support local producers, which helps to economically benefit the local area.

Why not follow some of these tips:

• Use local farmers markets and farm shops and promote them to your visitors.
• Make sure to clearly promote the source of your Scottish produce.

You can use the Good Fish Guide from the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) to help you identify more sustainably sourced fish.

Try their downloadable pocket guide or smartphone app.

Enjoying Scottish produce

• Buy what is in season where possible for increased freshness and flavour.
• If you have a shop as part of your business you can source and sell local and seasonal products.
• Buy sustainably sourced seafood. Where possible buy fish and seafood from well managed fisheries and try alternatives to overfished stocks. Look out for the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) logo.
• Promote what is available locally to your customers. See ‘The Larder’ guide for Scotland, with several regional editions available.
• If you’re a self-catering accommodation provider, leave a nice hamper of local food for your guests and provide information on where they can buy more. Maybe guests could pre-order a veg box for their stay from a supplier in your area. Promote what great local food is on offer so guests can include that in their planning.

You can use the Good Fish Guide from the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) to help you identify more sustainably sourced fish.

Try their downloadable pocket guide or smartphone app.
Taste Our Best:
Do your customers know about all the great Scottish ingredients you are using?

Taste Our Best, VisitScotland’s new Quality Assurance food and drink award scheme, can help you clearly promote your quality food provision and commitment to using Scottish produce. In addition to recognising and raising quality standards, the scheme has been designed to stimulate the use and promotion of Scottish produce. The recognition is available to a growing range of businesses, including restaurants, cafes, hotels, B&Bs and visitor attractions. For members of VisitScotland’s relevant Quality Assurance schemes, you will be assessed for the Taste Our Best award as part of your Quality Assurance visit, at no extra cost to you. Find out more www.visitscotland.org.
Local arts and crafts

Local sourcing goes beyond food and can also apply to furniture, ceramics and artwork. Scottish arts and crafts can add to the unique and authentic experience your customers are looking for.

You can support Scottish arts and crafts people by:

• Using local arts and crafts in your business to make it distinctive; make sure to promote this clearly to your customers; if they like a piece they may want to buy one to take home.
• Promoting arts and crafts trails in your area.
• Working with artists to offer your customers demonstration sessions or even classes. As an accommodation provider you could work together to create a weekend break package to promote in the quiet season for example.

Visit Craft Scotland to find out more about Scottish crafts.

Like a broken tap, money slowly drips out of the local economy with every purchase you make that isn’t local. Fix the leak and support your local businesses; a thriving community is an integral part of a good quality tourism destination. With a bit of research or simply asking around you can find a wealth of local treasures.
Human trafficking is a crime more often associated with other parts of the world; however, cases have been investigated and prosecuted in Scotland. Businesses in the hospitality industry can pro-actively work to reduce the risks and ensure they are not unwittingly facilitating the crime of trafficking.

Human trafficking can impact a hotel or hospitality business in a variety of ways: the use of a hotel for the sexual exploitation of adults and children, or staff recruited via unscrupulous agencies, being victims of forced or bonded labour.

The Green Hotelier’s latest know-how guide has been developed to help hoteliers understand human trafficking and forced labour: what it is, how it may affect them and what actions they can take to reduce the risk of trafficking in their business.

You can also check out the Police Scotland website for more information on potential signs of human trafficking.

Further information

Scotland’s larder is an irresistible draw to any visitor. By offering quality, regional food on your menus, you can satisfy your visitors’ desire for an authentic Scottish experience and make more money.

The Tourism Intelligence Scotland (TIS) Food and Drink guide is packed with practical insights, top tips and case studies that have been gathered from the industry.

Check out Experiencing Scotland for support to provide and promote the high quality food and drink produce Scotland offers. One-to-one business advice is available. They also have a seasonality calendar, making it easy to find what is best right now. www.scotlandfoodanddrink.org

Slow Food UK works for food, which is good, clean and fair and promotes the greater enjoyment of food through a better understanding of its taste, quality and production.

A host of other products are fairly traded, ethically sourced and kind to the environment. With a bit of research you never know what you might find. Visit Ethical Consumer.

An easy way to source sustainable products and services is to opt for those that carry an eco-label or are certified by a third-party environmental, social or ethical scheme. See the Eco Label index for a range of labels available.

Responsible employment

If you are a bigger business, like a hotel, visitor attraction or event venue, another way you can consider the social impact of your procurement decisions is with regards to agency staff you may be using. For example, ensure employment agencies you use are complying with legislative requirements, including paying employees the minimum wage and awarding statutory sick pay and holiday entitlements.

Ensure staff agencies you use are complying with legislative requirements, including paying employees the minimum wage and awarding statutory sick pay and holiday entitlements.

Combating human trafficking
The Better Business Series has been produced by VisitScotland in conjunction with Resource Efficient Scotland.

First published July 2014

Photography credits: thinkstock, istockphoto and Scottish Viewpoint

To receive this publication in an alternative format, please contact the Communications Team on 0131 472 2222 or email advicelink@visitscotland.com

You can download, or view online, the whole Better Business Series by visiting: www.visitscotland.org/sustainable-business-series.aspx

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