

Tackling sustainability in a tech-hungry world

By [Nick Durrant](#), issued by [Bluegrass Digital](#)

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The digital world is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. But technologies also hold the key to solving the world's climate crisis. We unpack the dual role these innovations play in conversations about sustainability.



Nick Durrant, co-founder and MD of Bluegrass Digital

If you're reading this article right now, you're almost certainly using some sort of electronic device connected to the internet. Earlier in the day, you may have replied to a few emails, watched a YouTube clip and liked several posts on social media.

While these activities may seem harmless enough from an environmental impact perspective, it turns out that our browsing, posting and streaming habits, and our extensive usage of digital services/platforms and apps, isn't anywhere near as green as we think.

Sure, the carbon cost of many of the activities we perform online is minimal but when you consider how widespread digital technology is, and when you think about how much time we all spend using these tools and solutions, our carbon impact adds up. Fast.

Our digital tools may not have exhaust pipes but the collective digital world contributes around 4% of all greenhouse gas emissions, according to [experts](#). In context, this is similar to the amount produced by the global airline industry. And the state of play is only going to get worse – with emissions set to double by 2025.

Our data hungry activities have driven brands like Meta (Facebook) to put together a proposal to build the largest data centre in the Netherlands. This particular data centre, the size of 1,300 Olympic swimming pools, will consume around 1,380 gigawatt-hours of electricity, which is equivalent to 10% of the country's wind energy production.

But technology companies can also help the business world deal with environmental problems when they understand what sustainability is all about. A recent [survey](#) by Capgemini shows that very few CIOs and tech executives had any real idea of the state of their carbon footprint.

About one-third noted that sustainable IT was on the board-level agenda but only 6% of companies had a sustainable policy in place to limit their environmental impact and fewer than one in five (18%) firms surveyed had a comprehensive sustainable IT strategy, with clear goals and targets.

Smart tech for sustainability

The major irony is that while tech is a big part of the problem, it also plays a critical role in the solution. One mustn't forget about all of the technologies being used – across a broad range of industries – to up efficiency and streamline processes so that businesses can minimise their use of natural resources, can reduce their energy consumption and decrease their carbon footprint.

By leveraging emerging technology solutions like artificial intelligence (AI), it is possible to deliver improvements such as logistics efficiency and more streamlined manufacturing operations. One can even map rain forests to combat deforestation.

In action, these smart sustainability [solutions](#) can dramatically reduce the environmental impact of massive building and infrastructure construction projects. Something like building information modelling (BIM) enables construction firms to see

their projects before they're even been built, which makes it possible to reduce time, material use, fuel, as well as overall energy consumption on site.

Similarly, across agricultural supply chains, technology can be utilised to reduce the amount of water and chemicals needed to run modern farms. The knock-on effect of this is a reduced impact on natural ecosystems. More advanced solutions like robots, drones and various sensors can also help agricultural businesses become more environmentally friendly.

Sustainability needs to be front of mind for business

As a solutions business, we are working with customers across various industries to help them streamline business processes and promote automation across both B2B and B2C.

Some examples include our work with [PayJustNow](#), a South African payment solution that allows merchants to onboard new customers and accept payments via a mobile solution, without any need for hardware and physical print solutions, all having an impact on the environment through different sources. Working in this way, PayJustNow eliminates the need for paper and shipping, which contributes to a business' carbon footprint.

Similarly, our work helping clients create various mobility solutions, as well as self-service and customer order automation offerings, promotes business efficiencies by reducing the need for sales reps to travel as much as they did in the past. For example, [Numbersense](#), a mathematics-focused education platform, launched a customer self-service portal to enable customers to order products and directly integrated this process with the brand's logistics partner so that we could reduce the carbon footprint of their sales/order workflow.

ABOUT NICK DURRANT

Nick Durrant is MD at Bluegrass Digital, a digital solutions company with offices in Cape Town, Johannesburg and London. We are experts in crafting web and mobile products and platforms. After spending 17 years in working the tech industry in the UK and setting up the Bluegrass in London in 1999, Nicholas now runs the company from Cape Town, developing the business into Africa and Europe offering world class digital solutions.

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