

# LIVING PAPER / DOSSIER

**Sustainability in the musical instrument and music equipment industry –  
A dossier and guide to managing environmental, economic and social issues**

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## Introduction

**Sustainability is becoming increasingly important in many industries, and the musical instrument (MI) industry is no exception. Faced with global challenges such as climate change, resource scarcity and pollution, more and more companies are recognising the need to integrate sustainable practices. Sustainable management aligns value creation with values, reflects these in the distribution of profits and also takes financial interests into account. Last but not least, more and more end-customers are demanding sustainable production methods, putting even more pressure on companies.**

In the following, the importance of sustainability in the musical instrument and music equipment industry (1) is highlighted, as well as the challenges (2) and opportunities (3), and concrete measures (4) that companies can take to produce and market more sustainably. The role of the Society of Music Merchants (SOMM) as a facilitator in this process is also highlighted (5).

Even if there are currently no joint approaches, campaigns or efforts in the MI industry - nationally or internationally - to make the processes in the industry completely climate-neutral, as the music industry is attempting to do with the "[Music Climate Pact](#)", for example, there are already many companies that show a strong commitment to sustainability and environmental awareness in the production of musical instruments and music equipment. Some inspiring examples of good practice can be found in Annex 1. These companies actively promote environmentally friendly production methods and prove that sustainability and innovation can go hand in hand.

In addition to the sustainable production of musical instruments and equipment, companies in the MI sector can also take many steps to promote sustainability directly within the organisation. Examples of such steps can be found in **Annex 2**.

## **1. The importance of sustainability in the musical instrument and music equipment industry**

The MI industry includes the manufacture, distribution and sale of musical instruments and equipment made from a variety of materials including wood, metal, animal products, plastics and electronic components. Sustainability is therefore particularly relevant in this industry, as the extraction of raw materials and production processes can have a significant impact on the environment. A sustainable approach to the production of musical instruments means that companies minimise the environmental impact of their activities while at the same time being socially responsible. This includes conserving natural resources, reducing waste and emissions, and maintaining ethical labour standards as well as economic efficiency. The main principles of sustainability can be summarised in three pillars: Environmental, Economic and Social.

Music retailers also have a crucial role to play. As a link between manufacturers and consumers, they can actively contribute to the promotion of sustainability by selecting environmentally friendly products, providing education and advice, promoting recycling and repair services, and actively implementing key sustainability goals themselves. Possible projects in the areas of sustainable energy and energy use, decent work, consumption and production, and climate change mitigation are examples of pioneering corporate action to help achieve sustainability goals. Finally, retailers help raise awareness of the importance of sustainable consumption and production patterns by educating customers. They inform consumers about the origin, quality and sustainability of the products they sell by using seals, labels or QR codes to increase transparency, provide useful information about sustainable production methods and, ultimately, contribute to raising awareness of the requirements for sustainable management. They also motivate customers to play an active role in shaping a sustainable future by offering them opportunities to participate in campaigns or share their experiences.

## 2. Sustainability challenges

There are several challenges to implementing sustainable practices in the musical instrument industry:

**Sourcing of raw materials:** A key challenge in the musical instrument industry is the sustainable sourcing of raw materials. Wood, for example, should be sourced from certified sources ([FSC, PEFC](#)) and comply with [CITES regulations](#), which restrict the use of rare and endangered species. Metals have a high environmental impact during mining and processing, so the use of recycled metals and working with certified, environmentally friendly suppliers is essential. However, there are significant challenges and costs associated with sustainable metal processing due to end-user quality requirements and standards. Plastics, which are often used for instrument parts and accessories, are often derived from environmentally damaging production processes, so the switch to bio-plastics and recycled materials is becoming more common. At the same time, there is a need for effective waste management. Ethical sourcing of animal products and the use of synthetic alternatives are necessary to maintain animal welfare standards and reduce dependence on animal-based raw materials. In addition, environmentally friendly adhesives and paints should be used to reduce health and environmental impacts. These measures are critical to minimising the industry's environmental impact and conserving natural resources.

**Manufacturing processes:** Traditional manufacturing processes can be harmful to the environment because they consume large amounts of energy and water and produce waste. Switching to greener production methods requires the introduction of energy-efficient machinery, the use of renewable energy and the adoption of recycling and waste minimisation strategies. These changes are often technically challenging and require extensive training and investment in new technologies.

**Cost:** Sustainable materials and technologies are often associated with higher costs, which can increase the final price to the consumer. These cost increases come from the higher price of certified raw materials, the use of more environmentally friendly production methods and the investment in research and development of sustainable alternatives. Companies must find a way to manage these additional costs without losing their competitiveness in the marketplace, which is often a challenge. Often these additional costs are then passed on to intermediaries and/or the end customer.

True sustainability requires a systemic solution in line with the eco-social market economy. This can only be achieved if the three pillars of sustainability - environmental, economic and social - are harmonised. Concrete measures include greater transparency on the part of companies, which should disclose hidden environmental costs. These are so-called external costs that are not borne by the polluter. For example, substitutes and ecological raw materials lead to higher production costs, which society has to compensate for at a later stage. In an eco-social market economy, however, these external costs should be included directly in product prices, in line with the consumer principle, in order to encourage consumers to act and consume more sustainably. Sustainability in the cultural and creative industries means promoting high-quality, resource-conserving products and production processes, and passing on the additional costs resulting from the greater effort involved to the market.

**Market demand:** While awareness of sustainability is growing in society, demand for environmentally friendly musical instruments remains low compared to conventional products. Many consumers are unwilling to pay higher prices for sustainable products or are unaware of the environmentally friendly options available. Significant marketing and education efforts are needed to raise awareness of the benefits of sustainable musical instruments and increase market demand. Companies need to develop strategies to effectively communicate the benefits of their green products and convince potential (new) customers.

### 3. Opportunities for sustainability

Despite the challenges, sustainability offers numerous opportunities for companies in the MI sector:

**Innovation and competitiveness:** Companies that invest in sustainable technologies and materials can position themselves as innovative and responsible brands, which can give them a competitive advantage.

**Market expansion:** By focussing on sustainability, new target groups can be tapped into.

**Long-term cost savings:** Although initial costs can be high, sustainable practices often lead to long-term savings through increased efficiency and the reduction of waste and energy consumption.

**Employee motivation:** A sustainability strategy within a company can be beneficial in many ways. It is about greater efficiency, enhancing the company's image, employee satisfaction and also greater opportunities for recruiting young employees.

#### 4. Concrete measures for more sustainability in the production, distribution and sale of musical instruments

Companies in the musical-instrument industry can take a number of steps to become more sustainable:

**Sustainable materials:** Using FSC-certified wood, recycled metals and synthetic alternatives to animal products can reduce environmental impact. Compliance with CITES regulations ensures that endangered species are not used and promotes the protection of biodiversity.

**Production processes:** Investing in energy-efficient machinery and processes and using renewable energy can reduce the carbon footprint of production.

**Production locations:** Locating production in your own country can offer several sustainability benefits: shorter supply chains, better control over environmental standards, social responsibility and local economic development, as well as reduced risk of supply chain disruptions and knowledge transfer and innovation. Overall, domestic production can be a sustainable option with environmental, social and economic benefits. However, it is important to note that domestic production sites must also adopt environmentally friendly practices in order to achieve true sustainability goals.

**Durability and reusability:** Another aspect of sustainability is the longevity and reusability of musical instruments and equipment. Long-lasting products reduce the need for frequent replacement purchases and help reduce waste. In addition, repair and maintenance programmes can help extend the life of products and improve their environmental footprint.

**Waste reduction and recycling:** By implementing recycling programmes and minimising production waste, companies can further reduce their environmental impact.

**Transparent supply chains:** A transparent and ethical supply chain ensures that all materials used come from sustainable sources and that fair working conditions prevail.

**Awareness and education/transparency:** Companies can help raise awareness of sustainability in the industry by being transparent about their sustainability efforts and informing customers about environmentally friendly production practices. Transparent communication about material sourcing, production standards and environmental impact helps consumers make informed choices and supports the trend towards more sustainable consumer behaviour.

**Packaging and shipping:** Industry can also use sustainable packaging materials and efficient shipping methods to minimise resource consumption and negative environmental impacts. This includes using recyclable, biodegradable and/or reusable packaging, optimising packaging sizes and optimising delivery processes to reduce CO2 emissions.

**Efficient delivery and delivery cost management:** Optimising delivery processes is another important aspect of sustainability. This includes consolidating deliveries to reduce the number of journeys and minimise CO2 emissions. Companies can increase efficiency and reduce delivery costs through route planning and logistics optimisation. Businesses can also use alternative modes of transport such as rail, river or sea freight to reduce road traffic and minimise environmental impact. The use of low-emission or zero-emission transport, such as electric vehicles, bicycles or cargo bikes, can help reduce the carbon footprint of freight transport and improve air quality.

**Music retailers can also play an active role in promoting sustainability in the industry:**

**Product range:** Music retailers can make their product range more environmentally friendly and appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

**Education and advice:** Music retailers can educate and advise customers about sustainable options and practices.

**Sustainable delivery options:** Retailers can advocate for more environmentally friendly delivery options.

**Recycling and take-back schemes:** Music retailers can introduce recycling programmes or organise take-back schemes for used products.

**Encourage repair and maintenance services:** By offering on-site repair and maintenance services, music retailers can help extend the life of instruments.

**Selling responsibly in stores:** Music retailers can and must play their part. As society moves towards greater environmental awareness and social responsibility in bricks-and-mortar retail, four approaches are at the forefront. More and more customers expect sustainable business concepts and take sustainability into account in their purchasing decisions. In particular, sustainable logistics is becoming increasingly important in the retail sector.

The issue of sustainability automatically draws attention to resource-conserving transport chains, as goods need to be transported efficiently to stores. While large retailers require their logistics partners to be more sustainable, retailers often have fewer options. However, they can use creative approaches to reduce their carbon footprint, such as carbon-neutral shipping, regional logistics networks and the use of cargo bikes for deliveries. Sustainable purchasing also requires the bundling of orders to reduce emissions and additional costs. Planning and bundling orders with suppliers is a prerequisite for sustainable and environmentally conscious ordering and purchasing - also in the interest of the end customer. Orders placed with suppliers are less climate-damaging if they are consolidated only once a day or two to three times a week. Each parcel delivered causes emissions and additional costs, which are increasingly being passed on to customers to encourage sustainable ordering.

## 5. The role of SOMM - Society Of Music Merchants e. V. in promoting sustainability in the musical instrument and music equipment industry

Associations such as SOMM - Society Of Music Merchants e. V. play a crucial role in helping their member companies to implement sustainable practices and comply with legal requirements.

**Providing information and education:** SOMM offers training programmes (workshops, webinars, seminars, etc.) on sustainability and compliance issues. It also publishes guides and handbooks containing best practices and guidelines for implementing sustainable and compliant practices.

**Fostering collaboration and exchange:** SOMM regularly creates platforms where companies can share best practices and experiences. This promotes collaboration and knowledge transfer within the industry. The establishment of working groups or committees on specific topics such as sustainability, supply chain management or compliance has also helped to develop and implement specialised solutions in the past.



**Support in meeting legal requirements:** SOMM provides legal advice to help member companies comply with national and international regulations, including CITES and other relevant environmental legislation. Where appropriate, it can also develop audit and certification programmes to ensure that member companies meet the required standards.

**Lobbying and advocacy:** SOMM lobbies on behalf of its members. It acts as the voice of the industry and represents its interests to policy makers. Where appropriate, SOMM also works to ensure that government funding programmes and subsidies are made available for sustainable projects and innovations.

**Initiatives and projects to promote sustainability:** SOMM can also initiate projects that pursue common sustainability goals, such as developing more sustainable materials or optimising supply chains. On behalf of its members, SOMM can also support research and development initiatives aimed at improving sustainability in the industry. (see [„Climate Action in the Music Industry guide“](#)).

**Public relations and awareness-raising:** SOMM can conduct information campaigns to raise public and consumer awareness of sustainability and compliance. This can help to increase demand for sustainable products. SOMM also encourages and supports its members to adopt transparent reporting practices and to regularly publicise their progress in sustainability and compliance.

Sustainability today requires investment in people, training, materials, buildings and more. These investments are necessary. After all, we have known for a long time that the costs of not embarking on the path to sustainability will be much higher.

## Conclusion

Integrating sustainability into the musical instrument and equipment industry is both a challenge and an opportunity. By implementing sustainable practices, companies can not only reduce their environmental impact, but also increase their competitiveness and open up new markets. It requires a comprehensive commitment and innovative approaches to strike a balance between environmental, economic and social aspects. Ultimately, the sustainable development of the musical instrument industry helps to ensure that future generations can continue to experience the joy of music and the preservation of our natural resources. Efficient supply methods, fair distribution of supply costs and compliance with CITES are essential steps in creating a more sustainable and responsible industry. Associations play a central role in this process by providing information and training, fostering cooperation, providing legal support, lobbying, promoting initiatives and projects, and raising public awareness.

## Outlook

By 2030, seventeen global sustainability goals are to be implemented worldwide at the national level, in civil society, the private sector and academia to promote socially, economically and environmentally sustainable development. Retailers have been making their contribution for years and have achieved considerable success. The goals for the coming years are also ambitious: a strong commitment to energy saving, sustainability in as many areas of the business as possible and further steps towards greater climate protection.

Together with our member companies, we are working to make our contribution to achieving these goals. This requires a regulatory environment that allows companies to set their own targets and leaves enough room for innovation. Moderate requirements at national and European level help companies to make their contribution and remain at the forefront of sustainability and environmental protection. To this end, we as an association will continue to represent the interests of our members in the political arena in the coming years and to advocate for political guidelines with a sense of proportion. The MI sector is aware of its responsibilities and will continue to set an example in the years to come.

## **ANNEX 1**

### **Good practices for sustainability in the musical instrument and music equipment industry**

(Note: This is a non-exhaustive collection of links. The respective company websites have been used as sources).

- [Adam Audio](#)
- [Adam Hall](#)
- [Coridal](#)
- [GEWA](#)
- [Hal Leonard](#)
- [Kawai](#)
- [König & Meyer](#)
- [Lakewood](#)
- [Meinl](#)
- [Musikinstrumente Karl Danner](#)
- [Reinhardt GmbH](#)
- [Session](#)
- [Shure](#)
- [Sonor](#)
- [Yamaha](#)

## **ANNEX 2**

### **Concrete measures to promote sustainability directly within the company**

There are a number of concrete actions that can be taken directly within a company to promote sustainability in the musical instrument industry. Some examples are listed below:

#### **Climate protection programme:**

- Set climate protection goals: Put climate protection on the agenda and set clear targets and measures to reduce CO2 emissions.
- Appoint a team leader: Appoint one person in the team to coordinate all climate change activities and take responsibility for implementation. This person can also be responsible for monitoring the actions.
- Get an overview: Get an overview of your consumption, identify measures that are already having an effect and analyse what adjustments can still be made. This should be an ongoing process.
- Support campaigns and events: Support climate change campaigns, events and organisations that are relevant to you.

#### **Mobility:**

- Avoid business travel: Assess whether business travel can be avoided and, if so, choose digital meeting alternatives.
- Green travel options: Avoid domestic flights, take the train where possible and use public transport. If flying is unavoidable, offset the CO2 emissions.
- Incentivise green mobility: Consider incentives for employees to make the switch to green mobility, such as a car-sharing scheme, job tickets or the option to work from home.

#### **Electricity, heating and energy use**

- Use green electricity: Switch to green electricity from renewable sources and use the green electricity label as a guide.
- Heating efficiently: Check the efficiency of your heating system and investigate the possibility of installing solar panels.
- Monitor energy use: Keep an eye on potential energy guzzlers and implement measures to reduce energy consumption.

#### **Digital footprint and gadgets**

- Go green on the Internet: Use green search engines like Ecosia and choose a green hosting provider for your website.
- Reduce technology consumption: Take a critical look at your technology consumption and favour second-hand alternatives. Have old equipment recycled or donate it.
- Share equipment: Share technology devices such as printers to save resources.

### **Büroorganisation und -ausstattung**

- Separate waste: Consistently separate and recycle waste.
- Sustainable procurement: Buy fair trade and organic coffee and tea. Use reusable packaging and refillable soap dispensers.

### **Paper, Cardboard and Filling**

- Use recycled paper: Use recycled paper with environmental labels such as the Blue Angel or FSC.
- Reduce paper consumption: Think about how much paper you use and print as little as possible. Reuse envelopes, cardboard and single-sided printed paper.

### **Your own events and meetings**

- Eco-friendly venues: Choose venues that are easily accessible by public transport and provide directions.
- Avoid disposable tableware: Avoid disposable crockery and try to use as much reusable crockery as possible. Use local organic products for catering and avoid packaging waste where possible.

Implementing these measures can help promote sustainability in musical instrument companies and make a positive contribution to environmental protection.

For more information, visit <https://www.somm.eu/somm-leistungen/klimaschutz-leitfaden>

## **ANNEX 3**

Read more about national and international climate initiatives in the music section:

- [Green Music Initiative](#)
- [Aktionsnetzwerk Nachhaltigkeit in Kultur und Medien](#)
- [Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung](#)
- [Nachhaltigkeit in Kunst und Kultur](#)
- [Culture4Climate](#)
  
- [Julie's Bicycle](#)
- [Music Declares Emergency](#)