



HOW TO SELL SUSTAINABLE UX

Arguments and strategies to convince teams, managers, clients, and stakeholders of responsible design.





Hi, I am Stefanie, Sustainable Product Designer at reThink Product.

Besides helping impact startups and sustainable brands create great user experiences that drive results, I am passionate about advocating for Digital Sustainability in the design and product development communities.

In my talks about Sustainable UX and Product Design, there is always the same question: **“How do I convince my team, my product manager, my stakeholders, or my clients to do this?”**

In this eBook I want to answer exactly that question and give you the arguments and strategies to advocate for sustainable design practices in your work—especially for operative design work as part of a product team.

As someone with a product management background, I have plenty of practice aligning and convincing people with different roles and backgrounds and so I hope you’ll find some valuable insights here.

I am happy if you find the contents valuable and want to share them with your network.

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If you have any questions or feedback, you can find my contact data on the last page.

And now: Happy reading!



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CHEAT SHEET

An overview of all arguments and strategies in this eBook for quick reference.

ARGUMENTS

- 💡 Meet existing laws to avoid fines, law suits and reputation damage.
- 💡 Prepare for potential new regulations to avoid last-minute fixes while making use of a competitive advantage now.
- 💡 Improve CSR reporting and showcase sustainability commitments to customers, employees, and financial investors—continue to get external financing.
- 💡 Don't miss out on important target groups with relevant spending power by not being inclusive and sustainable.
- 💡 Remember the curb cut effect: Sustainable user experiences do not only benefit specific groups of people, but ultimately everyone.
- 💡 Improve trust and loyalty from customers and achieve better market performance in terms of growth and profitability.
- 💡 Improve product success metrics and business KPIs with sustainable UX improvements.
- 💡 Save time and resources in development by considering sustainability early in the design process.

STRATEGIES

- 💡 Step 1: Find out about the personal needs and goals of the people you want to convince.
- 💡 Step 2: Tie your argument to the things people care about and diversify your pitch depending on your audience.
- 💡 Step 3: Start by convincing the people around you and let them help you convince the higher-ups.
- 💡 Step 4: If possible, connect your initiative to things others want to put on the roadmap to have additional arguments for getting buy-in.
- 💡 Bonus tip: Start discussions around Sustainable UX and Digital Sustainability in your company to spread awareness and find more allies.



WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE UX?


First of all, let's start with the term Sustainable UX Design, which I like to define as **UX design that limits the negative impacts** (like resource consumption, carbon emissions, or inequalities) **and provides more positive impacts for people, societies, and the environment** (like eco-friendly solutions, fair labor, or better mental health).


I also like to use the **UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as a framework to become **aware of the different aspects of sustainability** on an ecological, social, and economic level.


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





Looking at the SDGs, we can easily imagine different ways how UX design can contribute to sustainability:


- 

Practicing light-weight & eco-friendly design that saves resources in data centers and on the consumer's devices and thus limits climate impact.
- 

Using sustainable defaults (like green shipping options) to support responsible consumption.
- 

Using accessible and inclusive design to reduce barriers and inequalities for our users.
- 

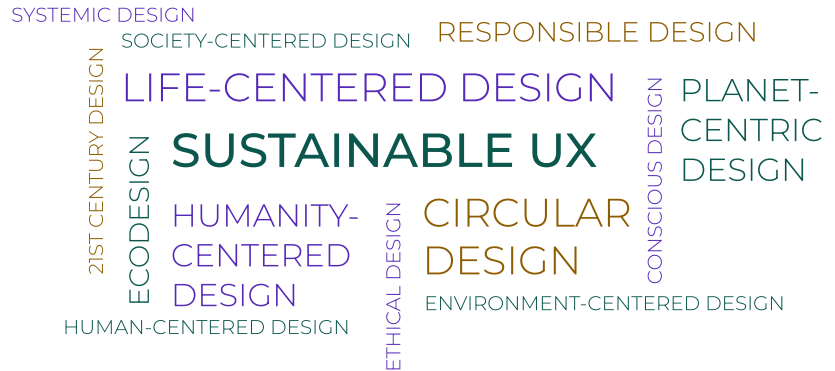
Using calm design to combat deceptive and pushy patterns to support mental health for our users.
- 

Making sure that data collection from our users is ethical, minimal, and in line with current legal requirements.
- 

Improving our product development processes with user research and product discovery to save time, money, and everyone's nerves.



I personally like to use the term Sustainable UX but there are many other design frameworks and movements out there that include sustainability and/or try to improve design practices in one way or another. Some have a specific focus, others are broader and overlapping, but **all of them have some important principles and practices that inspire us to create better designs** that look beyond a narrow focus on “the user”.



Therefore, **I personally don't care much about how you call it**, and which of these ideas you identify most with—as long as we agree that we can do better than the current status-quo.

If you want to dive deeper into the different aspects of Sustainable UX and explore resources, tools, and communities, visit the [reThink Product resource collection](#). There you can find my personal collection of the resources I find most valuable to learn more and connect with others.



Responsible Tech Resources

Resources by Type

Communities

Get Connected: Here you'll find communities (mostly run via Slack) where you can connect

Books

Wanna go the old school route and read a book? Here you go! Many of these are

Podcasts

Of course there's also something for your ears. I personally love listening to inspiring



ARGUMENTS FOR YOUR PITCH

Ideally, we could just use everybody's intrinsic motivation of being a good human being and contributing positively to society to argue for our sustainable UX initiatives.

But the reality is that product roadmaps are full already and businesses need to decide where to invest their time, money and resources—so we often need to come up with other arguments that demonstrate the benefits of Sustainable UX to our development, product, and business counterparts as well as our clients.

Therefore, most of the arguments you'll find here have less to do with user experience or positive social and environmental impacts and more to do with product and business metrics or laws and policies. This is intentional, because

1. You want to speak the language of your audience. I'll go more into that in the strategies section.
2. There's already a lot of resources out there on the benefits of Sustainable UX on our users, our communities, and the environment. So this eBook has a slightly different focus.

In short: We will **talk less about UX and more about product and business**.

While this can be frustrating sometimes, we can also see it as an opportunity to widen our perspective as designers and get familiar with the way others think and make decisions. In my career, this broad perspective has often helped me to align different roles and interests around a common vision.

I also believe that “learning business speak” is necessary to get the proverbial “seat at the table” as a designer.

So let's start with the most boring of all topics:

REGULATIONS, FINES & LAW SUITS

💡 Meet existing laws to avoid fines, law suits and reputation damage.

Let's start with maybe one of the most unpopular arguments that nevertheless can be one of the highest leverage points to inspire change: the law. Sure, it would be better if organizations always acted responsibly without laws forcing them to—but again, we need to accept the way the world works

It can help you tremendously to get familiar with the laws that apply to your business and product specifically, even if this is the “last-resort argument” for your Sustainable UX initiative.

Note: The following section focuses on legal regulations in the EU (and specifically Germany) that apply to many industries. I recommend to check regulations in your country or region as well as additional ones that relate to the industry you're working in.



Especially in the EU, there is already some legislation in place that requires many organizations to implement some of the sustainable digital practices mentioned above, for example:

- The **2018 GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)** manifests concepts like **Privacy by Design** and Privacy by Default and forces companies worldwide to be more transparent and ethical in the collection of personal data from EU citizens. Fines for not complying with this law can be as high as €20 million or 4% of worldwide revenues. And this law is being enforced, as the [€1.2 billion fine against Meta](#) from 2023 shows.
- The **2023 Digital Markets Act (DMA)** aims to ensure fair and open digital markets and therefore regulates large online platforms (so-called gatekeepers).¹ In terms of UX, these platform need to rank products fairly and must not prevent consumers from leaving or track users without proper consent. Again, fines range up to 10% of the company's total worldwide annual turnover, or up to 20% in the event of repeated infringements and the first [non-compliance investigations](#) have been opened against Alphabet, Apple and Meta.
- The **2024 EU AI Act** is the first-ever legal framework to address the risks of AI. It prohibits AI practices with unacceptable risks and **regulates AI systems** in high-risk applications, for example in critical infrastructure, education, or law enforcement. This law requires organizations to think through the negative implications and risks of AI technology and meet strict obligations in terms of risk management, transparency, and security before being put on the market.
- In June **2025**, the **EU Accessibility Act and the German BFSG (Barrierefreiheitsstärkungsgesetz)** will come into force and complement existing [accessibility legislation](#) worldwide. Physical and digital products and services aimed at consumers need to meet existing accessibility standards, provided that the business sells in the EU and has at least 10 staff and a turnover above €2 million. Non-compliance with the new laws can not only lead to fines (of up to €100,000 in Germany) but authorities may also force businesses to stop selling their product or services.

In summary, we can see that there are many existing laws that serve as an argument to improve your UX in order for businesses to **avoid fines and other sanction as well as lawsuits and the accompanying reputation damage.**

¹ As of September 2023, the European commission has designated Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Apple, ByteDance (TikTok), Meta (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp), and Microsoft as gatekeepers.



DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES



Prepare for potential new regulations to avoid last-minute fixes while making use of a competitive advantage now.

Looking at the EU's history of regulating businesses and digital services and their current policy programs, we might ask the question **“Will Digital Sustainability be next?”**

And the answer for the EU might very well be yes—I personally expect there to be legislation around limiting technology's environmental impact in the next 5 years. And here is why:

[According to European Commission](#), the **information and communication technology currently represents 3-5% of global greenhouse gas emissions** (as much as the aviation industry). The energy consumption of data centers is expected to rise 200% between 2020 and 2030.

The EU is well aware of that, so they put **sustainability** (in terms of environmental impact) as one pillar in their [European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles](#) (see below) and **mentioned specific actions** in their [Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030](#).

Article 3 (h) on the general objectives of the program states:

The European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the Member States shall cooperate to support and achieve the following general objectives at Union level [...]

[...] ensuring that digital infrastructure and technologies, including their supply chains, become more sustainable, resilient, and **energy- and resource-efficient, with a view to minimising their negative environmental and social impact**, and contributing to a sustainable circular and climate-neutral economy and society in line with the European Green Deal, including by promoting research and innovation which contribute to that end and by **developing methodologies for measuring the energy and resource efficiency of the digital space**.

EUROPEAN DECLARATION ON DIGITAL RIGHTS AND PRINCIPLES

PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE



Digital technologies should protect people's rights, support democracy, and ensure that all digital players act responsibly and safely. The EU promotes these values across the world.

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

People should benefit from a fair online environment, be safe from illegal and harmful content, and be empowered when they interact with new and evolving technologies like artificial intelligence.



SAFETY AND SECURITY

The digital environment should be safe and secure. All users, from childhood to old age, should be empowered and protected.



SOLIDARITY AND INCLUSION



Technology should unite, not divide, people. Everyone should have access to the internet, to digital skills, to digital public services and to fair working conditions.

PARTICIPATION

Citizens should be able to engage in the democratic process at all levels and have control over their own data.



SUSTAINABILITY

Digital devices should support sustainability and the green transition. People need to know about the environmental impact and energy consumption of their devices.



History has shown that most businesses will not start becoming more sustainable unless forced. In order to achieve their objectives, I fully expect the EU to pass legislation on measuring the environmental impact of digital products and services and limiting it in some way.

If you want to turn that into an argument for pitching Sustainable UX now, think about what happened when GDPR took effect: Businesses hectically tried to meet regulations last-minute or even after the fact.

Also, look at what's happening around accessibility in the EU right now: Many large corporations have hundreds of people spending months and years to retrofit their online shops or digital services to be accessible.

Now let's assume that there will be legislation on digital sustainability in a few years: **Wouldn't it be better for businesses to start preparing now?** Making sure that their digital products are improved gradually in terms of eco-friendliness and energy efficiency?

From my experience you can plan ahead and **include a little bit of sustainability in the feature building and maintenance work** you do anyway and it's not that big of a deal. If you leave it to the last minute, your team will get stuck retro-fitting the product to meet legislations and they won't be able to do anything else for months.

On the one hand, caring about digital sustainability now can **save businesses some messy last-minute work a few years from now.**

The second argument is this:

Becoming more sustainable *now* can still be a **powerful competitive advantage**. If in a few years, everyone is legally required to be more sustainable, it won't be anymore. (For more on that, see [Sustainability as a competitive advantage](#).)

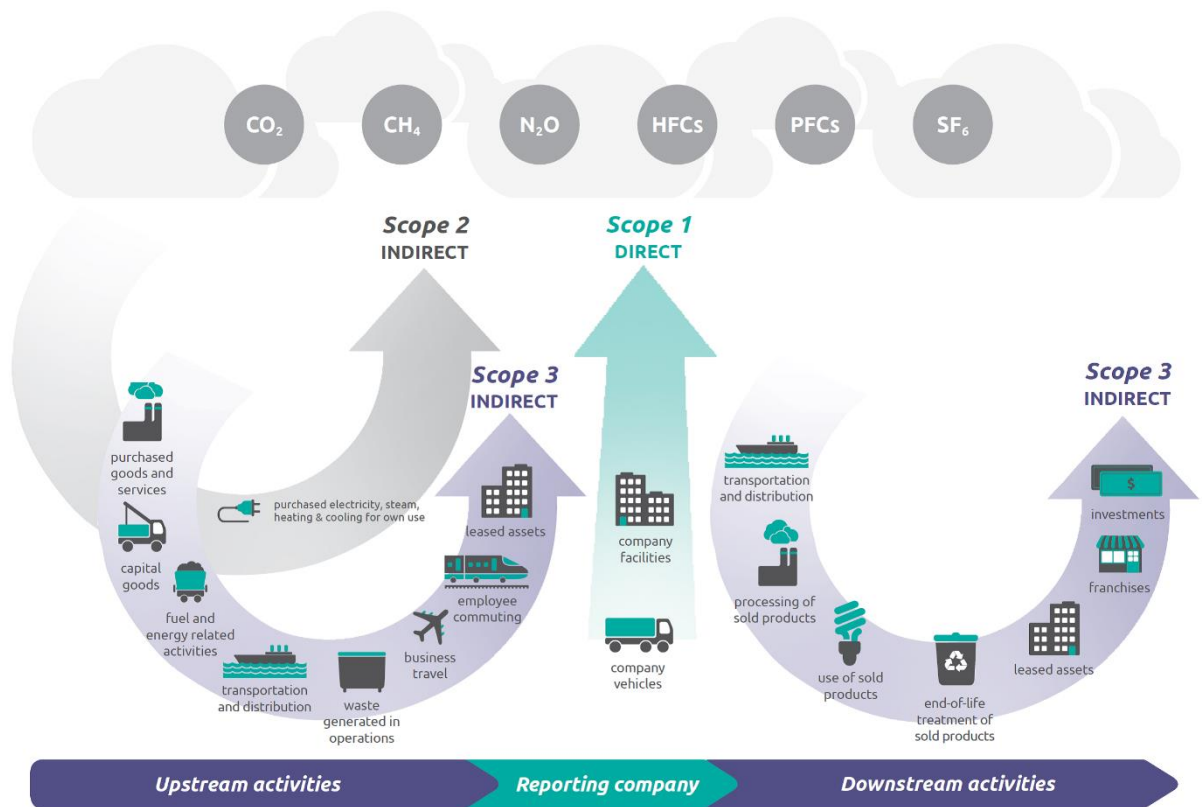


SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

💡 Improve CSR reporting and showcase sustainability commitments to customers, employees, and financial investors—continue to get external financing.

The EU has the aim to become a front-runner in global sustainability reporting standards and thus in 2022 passed the [Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive](#) (CSRD) which will make large businesses more publicly accountable and **disclose information on their societal and environmental impact**. Large public-interest companies already have to hand in their sustainability reports in 2025 and medium-sized companies will follow until 2027.

In terms of climate specifically, affected businesses will have to disclose their greenhouse gas emissions across scopes 1, 2, and 3—so the **emissions of their digital activities are also covered**. Going even further, scope 3 emissions also cover all upstream and downstream activities in an organization's value chain, such as the **production, use, and the end-of-life treatment of sold products and services**.



Source: [Corporate Value Chain \(Scope 3\) Accounting and Reporting Standard](#), page 5.

If an online shop sells you a cheap electronic device or a piece of clothing that consumes a lot of resources and becomes waste quickly, they will have to account for these emissions as well.

Hence, selling more climate-friendly products and even promoting sustainable consumption behavior in consumers with Sustainable UX practices will have a positive impact on emission reporting.



With these reports becoming public, stakeholders of a company will have the chance to compare the sustainability of businesses:

- **sustainability-minded consumers will have more transparency** when making their purchase decisions,
- business customers who fall under the CSRD will be incentivized to **buy products and services from more sustainable suppliers** (because they have to account for their supplier's emissions),
- **sustainability-minded employees** will have transparency around their (potential) employers' efforts around social and environmental standards,
- **financial investors** will better be able to compare sustainability risks.

The transparency for financial investors is of high importance for businesses that depend on outside financing:

Financial investors are increasingly looking to take into account ESG criteria (environmental, social, and governance criteria) in their portfolio risk assessments. If for example, a company has a very bad climate impact, the risk of investing in this company rises. Thus, less investors would be willing to do so and at the same time the business has to pay a bigger premium to get fresh capital.

In the end, **less sustainable businesses will have a harder time getting outside money.**



REACH NEW MARKET SEGMENTS



Don't miss out on important target groups with relevant spending power by not being inclusive and sustainable.

Apart from all the regulations that can sometimes feel restrictive and bureaucratic, there is also a relevant business *upside* on implementing Sustainable UX.

The biggest argument here is that by *not* being inclusive and sustainable, businesses miss out on important target groups:

- According to the [WHO](#), **15% of people worldwide have a disability**. If they cannot use your product due to accessibility issues, they will go to the competition. You are likely to lose out on the [6 to 7 trillion USD of annual spending](#) from disabled people and their families (which is equivalent to the [market size of China](#)).
- With **rising age**, people increasingly encounter problems that are not technically a disability, but that can make using digital products a lot harder, like arthritis, back pain, or Parkinson's. Keep in mind that **45% of purchasing power in the EU** belongs to people aged 50+ (and yes, [95% of them are online](#)).
- **More and more consumers care about sustainability**: [79% of consumers change purchase preferences](#) based on social and environmental impact, which might explain that sustainable products now make up over 17% of market share while delivering 30% of market growth according to the [Sustainable MarketShare Index™](#).

These are just a few examples and I highly recommend doing a little research based on the specific Sustainable UX initiative you are proposing, for example how many people have to rely on a slow internet connection (when you want to pitch light-weight design) or how many people care so deeply about data privacy that they say no to certain services (when you want to limit data collection).

WITHOUT ACCESSIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY,
BUSINESS MISS OUT ON RELEVANT TARGET GROUPS.

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THE CURB CUT EFFECT



Remember the curb cut effect: Sustainable user experiences do not only benefit specific groups of people, but ultimately everyone.

Apart from the specific target groups mentioned above, **every one of us can encounter a situation where we benefit from more accessible and sustainable user experiences** (also known as the [curb cut effect](#)):

- You are sitting outside with a heavy sun glare (and the website you're browsing better have good contrast).
- You are stressed or tired from a lack of sleep (so you will be grateful for short click-paths and calm design).
- Or you are using your phone on the train with bad internet connection (hooray to a light-weight web page that still loads in under 20 seconds).

When you encounter resistance to the target group argument above (like “we don't build a feature for only 15% of users”), highlighting these cases can convince people that accessibility and sustainability do not only benefit a small percentage of users, but ultimately everyone.

SUSTAINABILITY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE



Improve trust and loyalty from customers and achieve better market performance in terms of growth and profitability.

There is an interesting [article in the Harvard Business Review](#) that summarizes the relationship between sustainable brands, trust, and business outcomes like this: Being **transparent about sustainability promotes trust** (especially in younger consumers) which in turn **leads to loyalty and better market performance**.

Seen another way, *not* being sustainable may as well make these people go to the competition.

When talking to business people, it can be helpful to showcase numbers of business growth and profitability, to show that sustainability not only sells better but doesn't cost the world (no pun intended). This is a very important step to **changing the narrative that everything sustainable is automatically more costly and less profitable** than “business as usual”.

While it will be hard to calculate numbers for your own product or company in advance, you can use **positive examples of companies that combine sustainability and business success**, for example:



- **Patagonia** has an estimated value of \$3 billion. It sells more than \$1 billion in sustainable outdoor clothing and gear and brings in \$100 million in revenue a year, according to founder Yvon Chouinard.²
- **Schneider Electric**s commits to climate positivity, efficient resource and DEI. In 2023, they have reached €36 billion in revenues and €4 billion in net income which represents continuous growth.³
- **Dr. Bronner**, all-in-one soap manufacturer and certified B Corp sources ingredients responsibly and promotes equitable worker compensation. In 2023, their revenues reached almost \$170 million, growing from \$4 million in 1998.⁴

Depending on what kind of initiative you are proposing, it can make sense to look up success stories from your specific industry or from a similar initiative—for example, sharing [Apple's "Mother Nature" campaign](#) to get people interested in the idea of non-human personas. "Apple does it, too." can be a powerful argument.

POSITIVE IMPACT ON SUCCESS METRICS

💡 Improve product success metrics and business KPIs with sustainable UX improvements.

Oftentimes, you can **relate sustainability improvements directly to the success metrics of your product and the business**:

- Making a checkout flow accessible, inclusive and requiring only minimal data will reduce friction for everyone and hence positively affect **conversion rates** and **sales**.
- Implementing a light-weight design on your landing page will reduce **bounce rates**, improve **site performance** and hence **SEO rankings** which in turn again drives conversion and sales.

It is often helpful to **argue with direct product metrics (such as conversion rates) instead of indirect business KPIs (such as revenue growth)** because it's easier for people to make the connection between a UX improvement and conversion rate as compared to thinking through the logic of improvement → conversion rate → number of orders → revenue growth.

Also, it will be easier and faster to measure these improvements in your product once you have implemented something.

² [Is Patagonia Profitable?](#), The Business Model Analyst (2023)

³ [Key Figures](#), Schneider Electric, accessed 17.04.2024

⁴ [Dr. Bronner's website](#) and [2023 report](#)



TIME & RESOURCE SAVINGS



Save time and resources in development by considering sustainability early in the design process.

Here's another argument that developers, product managers, project managers and everybody involved in managing or paying a development team usually cares about: development time and costs.

Doing proper UX research and product discovery to manage product risks (value, viability, usability, and feasibility) before starting to write production-grade code is a great argument for UX in general, but you can adapt this argument for Sustainable UX as well.

- There is the saying that **“the best feature is the feature not built.”** Meaning that everyone can save time, nerves and money if you can already find out in the design phase that a feature shouldn't be built, for example due to ethical or sustainability concern. This is sustainability at its best because you're effectively reducing waste in the development process.
- Especially when it comes to accessibility and code sustainability, it makes a lot of sense to include these qualities early in the design phase to avoid complications, bugs and rework in the development phase. In the words of Dirk Ginader, Accessibility Engineering Lead at Google: **“For every hour a designer spends considering accessibility, you save 4 hours of engineering time.”**



STRATEGIES TO SELL YOUR INITIATIVE

Apart from collecting your arguments you need to think about how you can best get them across to the people you want to get on board.

Fortunately, as designers you are well equipped to make your case in a way that inspires people.

1. USE YOUR EMPATHY SUPERPOWERS

💡 Step 1: Find out about the personal needs and goals of the people you want to convince.

Sometimes I have the feeling that designers care a lot more about empathizing with their users than with the needs of the people they work with. On the one hand, I understand it because someone needs to be the user's advocate; on the other hand, I believe it helps tremendously to **flex the empathy muscle around your peers and stakeholders** as well.

The truth is: Everyone you work with, **everyone who has influence and decision-making power** around your product or project is also a human being. And we are all **driven by the same needs and emotions**: This can be a need for acceptance and recognition, a fear of doing something wrong, being blamed or worse: getting fired.

And for better or worse this means that a lot of product decisions are not made around the merits of the idea but around what makes the decision-maker look good.

As someone who's been fired over mis-judging personal sensitivities for a factual discussion, I wish that wasn't the case. But knowing about this annoying little fact of life, we can make use of it, if we like it or not.

Take some time to get to know the people around you and what they care about—personally. Here a few real-world examples from my own work:

- Your startup's founder may personally care about the user experience in onboarding because it's literally their life's saving on the line if nobody uses your app.
- Your product manager may care about that certain KPI because their bonus is tied to improving it.
- Your developer may hate spending too much time in meetings because their ADHD makes it hard for them to follow and stay present.
- Your Design Lead may want to sell your good ideas as theirs to look great because of a personal battle with the Head of Marketing over who gets to be promoted to C-Level.

The good news is: as someone in the UX field you have probably honed your empathy skills from talking to users—so just use them with the people around you.

And if like me, you don't feel that empathy is your superpower: **Read [“How to Win Friends and Influence People” by Dale Carnegie](#)** and start practicing. I promise, it works.



2. SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR AUDIENCE



Step 2: Tie your argument to the things people care about and diversify your pitch depending on your audience.

Now that you know what the people you need to sell your ideas to care about, **make sure to tie your arguments to exactly those things**. Oftentimes, you're not talking to other designers, but to developers, product and project managers or business people.

So that means, **talking less about UX and more about performance, processes, and metrics**. (I know that sucks—but we're doing it for the good cause, remember?)

Here are some things different groups of people often care about:

- **Developers:** Performance and efficiency, writing good code to avoid bugs and maintenance efforts down the line, avoiding repeat work.
- **Product Managers:** Performance KPIs of their product (e.g., conversion rates, daily active users—highly dependent on the product), development time and complexity, sometimes also good UX
- **Project Managers:** Development time and costs, sometimes also infrastructure costs.
- **Business People:** Business KPIs like sales, revenue, market share; brand image and competitive advantage, keeping costs down (for customer service, development, etc.), not getting sued or fined.

Just remember to take this list as a starting point and do your research from point 1.

Make sure to adapt the level of detail of your argument to something appropriate for your conversation partner. Talking to your developers about improving brand image and attracting sustainability-minded customers will help you as little as talking to the Chief Marketing Officer about code performance and maintenance efforts.

Instead, if I wanted to make a checkout flow more accessible and inclusive and stop collecting unnecessary data, here's what I would pitch:

- To my product manager: Reducing friction in the checkout will lower checkout abandonment rate by about 25% based on these research articles.
- To my developers: Removing these fields from the checkout flow will mean you have less logic in the code and less maintenance work in the future—even if you have to invest a little bit more time in accessibility now.
- To the Head of Marketing (an important stakeholder on the project): With these improvements, we can better serve people with disabilities and non-binary gender who currently may abandon checkout. These people represent a 15% share of our market, which would translate to as much of €200,000 in additional revenues.



3. FIND ALLIES ON YOUR TEAM FIRST



Step 3: Start by convincing the people around you and let them help you convince the higher-ups.

For me, the easiest way to sell a sustainable initiative was to start at my team level. For two reasons: Firstly, I know these people a lot better than the manager I see for one hour a month. Secondly, they often cared as much as I did about making a positive impact with their work.

I truly believe that UXers benefit from becoming more fluent in business speak, but at the same time, I acknowledge that it might not be everyone's cup of tea.

Especially **if you hate talking about business metrics, make friends with your product manager**. In the best case, they care about UX too, so you can convince them with whatever convinced you. And they in turn can translate the initiative into KPIs and business speak—after all, that's their job.

There's strength in numbers: Once you have your team on your side or even convinced the product manager to put the initiative on the roadmap, they will help you make the argument from their perspective.

From my experience, if a whole team argues for a certain initiative, the managers above may not even ask about the details.



4. COMBINE YOUR INITIATIVES



Step 4: If possible, connect your initiative to things others want to put on the roadmap to have additional arguments for getting buy-in.

Talking with your team about a Sustainable UX initiative can sometimes **connect the initiative to other things that are on the roadmap already** or should go there.

Here are two examples from my recent work:

- In preparation for the EU Accessibility Act, a developer on my team wanted to make **accessibility improvements** to an app that had been developed by an agency (who unfortunately did not have accessibility on their requirement list).
We sat together as a team and discovered that at the same time, the Android development team needed to migrate frontend code to a newer technology (basically rewriting most of the code and using frontend components), the UX designer wanted to **introduce a design system** that harmonized design across web and app platforms and the product manager came up with the news that the Head of Marketing had a **rebranding** in mind that would have us touch many of the components anyway.
Combining these things, we could argue with technical improvements, maintainability and the rebranding initiative on top of the accessibility requirements.
In addition, making sure that every feature improvement we make would use new components that were not only accessible but in line with the new brand prepared the team **to integrate accessibility into ongoing feature development** and make everybody happy.
- Another development team for an online shop had to **make performance improvements** to the site to meet the performance and quality standards of the company that ultimately drove sales.
We decided to optimize product images with better compression and modern image formats as well as selecting images that displayed products on a uniform gray background.
This had a significant positive **impact on file size, page weight, and therefore CO₂ emissions** but at the same time improved performance, comparability of products and thus conversion rate, and even the shop's **brand perception** based on a study the marketing team had done.



BONUS: PUT SUSTAINABILITY ON THE AGENDA



Start discussions around Sustainable UX and Digital Sustainability in your company to spread awareness and find more allies.

From my own experience, talking about digital sustainability is not only rewarding for yourself, but usually a huge eye-opener for people. Many are easy to motivate and inspire—just because people *like* to do good. The bigger issue is that **often people feel like they are the only one in their company or project who cares.**

I had discussions with a UX designer who complained about developers never wanting to implement more sustainable designs “because it is more effort.” I also talked to a developer with the impression that Green IT is purely a developer thing and designers never agree to it “because it looks bad.” Just think about the magic of getting those two people in a room together discovering that they actually want the same thing.

(In the end they’ll probably agree that it’s the product managers fault. ;-)

But that’s why I covered all the business arguments to get your PM on board first.)

Invite people on your team and in your company to learn about digital sustainability and Sustainable UX. **Give a talk, do a workshop, try out a tool or method**, start an employee resource group around sustainability, ask questions and find common ground.

Soon, you’ll not be alone and there’s so much more impact you can have together!



In case you can use support with this: I also **offer talks and workshops around accessibility and sustainability for companies and product teams.**

- With a keynote on the business benefits of Sustainable UX or accessibility I can help you **get your company decision-makers on board** for your digital sustainability initiatives.
- In a workshop on Sustainability or Accessibility for your product team, we can not only cover the basics, but **practice using helpful tools and methods** on your specific product or project to inspire sustained action.

Of course, I tailor my talks and workshop to your team’s or company’s needs.

Check out the offers on my website and get in touch to discuss your ideas and requirements:

WORKSHOPS

KEYNOTES



AND IF YOU CAN'T SELL IT ...

The truth is, not every pitch for Sustainable UX will be successful. The more your initiative conflicts with the current business model and “the way we have always done things”, the harder it gets.

Do not despair and keep in mind what you can do in these cases:

JUST DO IT ANYWAY

The good news is: **you have a lot of agency as a designer when it comes to your own work and small improvements.**

Designing an accessible component or a light-weight landing page is often something you don't need anyone's permission for. In fact, that's what people expect you to do.

Cleaning up your SVG illustrations or compressing images before handing them over to the development team? Nobody will ever ask you about it even if it takes you 5 minutes longer.

Small steps can add up, even if you're not in a position to change the company's whole business model (yet).

GO ON THE RECORD WITH YOUR CONCERNS

This is important when it comes to **product decisions that you find unethical or that you know are against the law.** For example, this could be a request to include a deceptive pattern in your design to boost sales.

Make your case in writing. If you write it down, people take you more seriously and it might even make them rethink their decision. Of course, you do it politely and ideally pointing to facts and independent sources, so you don't get branded as the unruly rebel.

In the worst case, you will at least have a clearer conscience (even if they make you design the bad thing). In the best case, it covers your proverbial ass:

Do you know James Liang? No? But you should. Here's an excerpt from [Mike Monteiro's book “Ruined by Design”](#) where I learned about James' case:

James Liang was an engineer at Volkswagen. He designed the software that lied about Volkswagen's diesel emissions. During the subsequent trial, a group of experts reverse-engineered James' software and concluded that it couldn't have been designed to do what it did without James being aware.

On August 25, 2017, **James Liang was sentenced to forty months in prison for bad design.**

James was a middleman. He accepted orders and he fulfilled them, like most of us. James Liang was following the orders of unethical leaders and in doing so, he became unethical himself.



AND IF YOU CAN'T SELL IT ...

What this means for you:

1. [Get Mike's book](#) and read it. Seriously, there's much more good stuff in there.
2. Don't do unethical stuff. If they make you do it, go on the record instead of going to prison.

THE LAST RESORT: GO SOMEWHERE ELSE WHERE THEY CARE

There are many companies out there who genuinely care for sustainability, inclusion and ethics. If you repeatedly meet resistance or you have the feeling that Sustainable UX seriously conflicts with the business model:

Maybe it's time to move on?

I realize that I'm writing this from a very privileged standpoint where I can say no to certain work. Many of us cannot, especially in an economic situation where UXers get laid off by the thousands. So if you're currently worrying about job security, paying rent, and feeding your kids, this advice might not be right for you and that's okay. 💜



THANK YOU!

THANK YOU FOR READING!

I hope you found something valuable in this that will help you implement Sustainable UX practices in your work. **I'd love to hear your feedback on this work—both positive and negative.** Just reach out via any of my channels.



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And don't forget: If you want to share this content with your network, please be aware of the copyright and share this sign-up link:

<https://rethink-product.com/how-to-sell-sustainable-ux-ebook>



Let's reThink Product Development and make the world a better place!

♥ Stefanie

