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THE PERFECT BLEND OF INNOVATION, COLLABORATION & CONSERVATION

Innocent Drinks is on a mission to keep people healthy, help out the communities who need it the most and make sure our planet becomes healthier too.

That's why as well as giving 10% of profits to charity and becoming a certified B Corp, it has pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030 – if not before.

As part of that pledge, the business has embarked on a major transformation programme which includes building the world's most sustainable healthy drinks factory – dubbed 'The Blender'.

Sure b2b sat down with Group Supply Chain Director, Chris Fielden, to learn more.

What is the thinking behind Innocent's first-ever factory and why in the Netherlands?

Throughout Innocent's history, we've worked with and challenged our manufacturing partners and growers to reduce our environmental impact. The new factory is a great example of us putting our money where our mouth is.

We can now blend, fill and store in one site and do that in what we believe is the right way. Rather than simply asking suppliers to do something more responsibly for us, we can now show them how it can be done. I'm already working with several ingredient suppliers on how they can incorporate some of our factory technology into their own processing facilities.



Why we chose the Netherlands is very simple. We source ingredients from all around the world, and a lot of those goods come into the Port of Rotterdam. Locating our manufacturing home in the same area takes 25% of our transport miles off the road. That's an instant carbon reduction just by basing ourselves in the right place.

Given the perishable nature of goods in your supply chain, how do you balance consistency and immediacy of supply with transporting goods in the most carbon efficient way?

How we transport our orange juice, which still needs to go by road, is one example of how we're pushing supply chain innovation. We've just started using the world's first heavy duty zero emission electric truck to move the juice from the terminal to the factory.

We've worked with a Dutch company to produce a fantastic solution that enables fresh juice to arrive into the factory every day in a way that's both sustainable and commercial.

One of the barriers to entry around sustainable transformation is a lack of off-the-shelf solutions. That means businesses must do the hard work of finding equipment integrators and suppliers, and handle a lot of the upfront development themselves.


Something I'm very keen on is being completely transparent, collaborative and sharing knowledge. The factory is an open facility for anybody in any industry to visit. We want people to learn from us, to copy what we're doing, to improve upon it and be inspired.

Our apple suppliers saw our electric trucks, for example, and they're now in talks with the manufacturer to see how they could benefit their operation. That's fantastic because what we're trying to do as a supply chain is a collective endeavour. It's not just me saying, I want you all to be better.

What other sustainable innovations have been incorporated into the new production facility?

We went into volume production having never done it for ourselves, we'd always utilised third party partners. In some ways that was challenging, but equally it was liberating to not be constrained by ingrained ways of thinking and processes.





We didn't have all the answers, we just had this big ambition of becoming carbon neutral. So, we went out to suppliers and partners and said, can you help us bring this to life?

We've helped to develop lots of clever ways to reduce the amount of energy we need, including installing heat pumps to recover the energy used to cool the warehouse and using it for pasteurising juices. That negates the need for a separate gas boiler. Any energy we do need is generated onsite via our own solar panels and wind turbines.

We've also worked with a Dutch company who has designed this amazing piece of kit that mostly uses air to clear pipes, like a spinning mini tornado, rather than water.

Both are great individual solutions, but we paired the companies up and tasked them with combining forces to create an even better, ever more cost-effective solution. That unconstrained thinking is going to lead to some awesome innovations and help demonstrate the value of collaboration.

Was the factory built on a greenfield site?

Yes. It's quite a unique opportunity; greenfield sites don't come up very often. Something people often say is that we've only been able to do this because we had a greenfield site. That's true, I can't deny that.

However, I've been very cognizant throughout the design and build that the technologies and innovations used are all equally applicable to established facilities. It's about having the right mindset and desire, rather than having a greenfield site necessarily.

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What advice can you offer around starting your scope 3 emissions reporting journey?

Firstly, don't try and boil the ocean. I've seen lots of businesses make the mistake of trying to get right down to the minutiae of what their emissions are. It's very noble thing, but where you target your effort to reduce and eliminate those emissions is more important than understanding to the absolute exact degree.

We use a third party to help us set a benchmark for our supply chain. Will that figure be roughly correct? Yes. Will it be perfect? No. Does it directionally point us in the right areas? Absolutely. Get the data that's going to help you to make the right decision and just do something.

Secondly, don't believe you need to have all the answers. Don't narrow your field of thinking or innovation by going it alone. Truly engage with your suppliers and their suppliers. Set up innovation funds so that rather than paying for carbon offsets, you're paying for people to go experiment and come up with long-term solutions.

Collaborate with everyone and anyone you can. I'm a huge believer that sustainability shouldn't be something we compete on. It's a collective responsibility; so, how do you keep sharing what you're doing

so people can learn, copy, and improve? That's fundamental if we're going to deliver change at the pace that we need to.

How do organisations balance the need to generate immediate reductions versus the desire to fund long-term innovation?

If all you can do on day one is carbon offsetting, then do it because that's better than nothing. What's interesting is that taking that action also creates a currency to eliminate carbon. Being able to justify projects because saving carbon also saves money will help businesses start to get their head around this shift in mindset.

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When I talk about doing things more sustainably, people automatically assume it's going to be more expensive. That's quite an old-fashioned view now because technology has moved on dramatically. If I look at the solar panels on our factory roof, I'm glad I didn't buy them on at the start of the project because the price is constantly coming down as technology improves.

At the same time, some of the solutions available don't cost more and actually deliver a better outcome. Installing wind turbines and solar panels takes investment, but rising energy costs mean it's roughly equivalent to not acting sustainably.

My operating cost is the same. Therefore, it's not more expensive, it just requires longer-term thinking. It's probably the only business case I've ever written that will get better with age because the landscape is only going to become tougher and more expensive with carbon taxes and so on.

To hear from Chris and 100+ leading minds in
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What does the sustainable supply chain of the future look like?

I believe there will be a fundamental change throughout supply chains around how we think about energy. At the moment, energy is just one of those things that we all use without giving it any real thought.

The cost of energy is rising, we're all trying to use as little of it as possible, but it's like water, turn on the tap and out it comes right where you need it. We need to start thinking of energy as a precious, finite commodity that we all need to use as wisely as possible.

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Does that thinking equally apply to water?

Absolutely. Our factory will use around 70% less water than a standard factory, and that was an integral part of our design thinking. Initially, we said we wanted to use about 50% less and we just kept pushing ourselves to discover how we could use as little as possible.

Interestingly, the innovations we put in to reduce our water consumption created an unexpected challenge. The on-site water treatment plant was now going to be too big and we were going to underfeed it. That's a brilliant problem to have, by the way; but we had to redesign it halfway through construction to make it smaller.

Water conservation is clearly the right thing to do anywhere, but some of the water technology we've put in will be hugely applicable in much more water-deprived regions. It'd be great to see our set-up being replicated elsewhere.

