Salomon uses the Higg Index to Create Transparent and Collaborative Supply Chain Partnerships
“The key word to sustainability is transparency. That’s what we like about using the Higg Index tools. We hope that as an industry, we can move towards the same goal because the consumer at the end wants information that is true. If everyone doesn’t use the same tool, we won’t be able to achieve that.”

CÉLINE MAZARS
MATERIAL MANAGER OF FOOTWEAR, SALOMON
Driven by a love of the outdoors and a strong sense of community, French sportswear brand Salomon has built a pathway toward sustainability it hopes inspires others. With headquarters in Annecy, France, the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) brand member produces high-performance gear, apparel, and footwear for outdoor sports. Amer Sports, Salomon’s parent company, is also an SAC member and represents numerous internationally recognized sporting goods brands, like Arc’teryx, and Wilson. With a mission to inspire people to get outdoors and responsibly connect with nature, Salomon is driven by its commitment to sustainability.

Integrating Sustainability Into the Business

In 2016, Salomon began using the Higg Facility Environmental Module (Higg FEM) to assess the environmental performance of manufacturing its footwear, the company’s largest product category. For the past three years, all of Salomon’s tier 1 finished goods manufacturers in China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Cambodia, and India have posted and shared verified Higg FEM assessments. “They’re committed, engaged and really putting in the effort and energy in using this tool and improving every year,” says Céline Mazars, Salomon Material Manager of Footwear, of the facilities Salomon works with. “We tell our suppliers: Don’t do it for us. Do it for your facility, do it for your business, do it for your image. Really, do it for the planet.”
Salomon has used the Higg Index since 2016

Salomon is committed to traceability and collaborating with value chain partners deeper within the value chain. Despite the inherent difficulties of engaging with global suppliers, 64 percent of Salomon’s tier 2 manufacturers completed the Higg FEM and shared their results, putting it at the leadership level of SAC membership. Tier 2 manufacturers include fabric mills, dye houses, washing facilities, tanneries, outsole manufacturers, and packaging suppliers, among others. Salomon plans to engage 80 percent of tier 2 suppliers by 2020 and 100 percent of tier 2 suppliers by 2021.

At the product level, Salomon uses the Higg Materials Sustainability Index (Higg MSI) to track the impacts of the raw materials used in its footwear. To date, Salomon has entered more than 750 materials in the system, representing 54 percent of all materials it plans to include. “We entered materials from the past four seasons, Spring ‘19, Fall ’19, Spring ‘20 and Fall ‘20, knowing that some will be reused for seasons to come and there will be new ones as well.”

In 2019, Salomon held trainings in Asia to teach major suppliers how to enter information about materials into the Higg MSI and share it with Salomon, so they could collaborate to develop more sustainable products. Through these efforts, the company is building its own materials library with plans to integrate it into its product lifecycle management (PLM) system, helping reach its goal to give all new products an environmental performance score by 2025.
Transparent Partnerships

Apparel supply chains are complex global networks made up of many types of manufacturers, including fabric mills, dyeing facilities, and finished goods facilities. A pair of shoes may travel to seven different facilities in five different countries before it makes its way to a store and into the hands of a consumer. It is difficult to trace and manage the different impacts all the facilities have, but Salomon has found a way to break through these barriers and establish a strong community with its global value chain partners.

Since its founding, Salomon has fostered a sense of family in all aspects of business. Every other year, the company invites all its global suppliers and factories to a summit event at its headquarters in the French Alps. Salomon maintains this family relationship using the transparency established by the Higg Index.

“Our suppliers are part of our family,” says Mazars, “Using the standardized tools in the Higg Index allows us to speak the same language and be transparent.” The common vocabulary from the Higg Index has helped Salomon improve communication with suppliers, enabling them to work together towards performance improvements year after year. As a result, Salomon feels a true sense of partnership with its suppliers. “We have partners that are really dedicated and very motivated to work with us,” says Mazars.

When asked what advice she would give other companies starting their sustainability journey, Mazars had just one word. “The key word to all of this is transparency. Using the Higg Index gives us that,” she says. “Transparency is natural when we talk to our suppliers or factories. That’s what we like about using the Higg Index tools.” With strong and transparent relationships, Salomon has collaborated with its suppliers in an equal partnership to drive change.
A Common Language for Consumers

Salomon hopes that the industry continues adopting the Higg Index so brands can provide consumers with trustworthy information. “If everyone doesn’t use the same tool, we won’t be able to achieve that,” says Mazars. Ultimately, using one common language to share sustainability efforts will allow consumers to make more informed purchasing decisions. “We hope as an industry we can move towards the same goal because the consumer at the end wants information that is real and true.”

CSR Can Be Playful

In April 2019, Salomon launched its Play Minded Program, an initiative that makes sustainability and social responsibility accessible to employees and value chain partners through the lighthearted concept of play. The four pillars, including toys (products), playmakers (people who create products), players (sports community), and playground (natural environment), encompass Salomon’s nine objectives for 2025. For example, in accordance with the 2018 UN Fashion Charter for Climate Action, Salomon committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent by 2025. It will be able to track progress towards this ambitious goal using the Higg FEM.

To some, Salomon’s goals may seem unattainable. Salomon sees them as simply necessary to protect nature’s playground. Its ambitious approach is paving the way for other types of products and brands within Amer Sports.
Outdoor Spirit

Salomon’s outdoor spirit and family values are infused into every aspect of the company. The Play Minded Program is a conscious effort to make sustainability and social responsibility accessible to everyone. The program encourages participants to take small steps every day to preserve the environment and support the outdoor sports community.

In the 2025 objectives for the Play Minded Program, Salomon committed to invest one percent of annual revenue to support individuals who use the mountains as their playground. Through the Salomon Foundation, established in 1999, Salomon provides financial support to people from the outdoor community — like mountain guides and ski instructors — when they get injured. To date, the foundation has donated 1 million euros to 300 individuals, covering the cost of things like school expenses and medical equipment. “It’s a really neat foundation that shows the heart and spirit of Salomon,” Mazars says.
Cutting Edge Innovation

The Salomon sustainability approach is underscored by a willingness to explore new, cutting-edge ideas and evaluate their potential. This is in part inspired by learnings from the SAC’s global member meeting in Barcelona in June 2019. Mazars left the meeting with a new perspective on sustainability, which she took back with her to Salomon. “Sustainability is not perfect at once, it’s a long journey,” she says. “As long as we’re telling the truth and continuing to get to perfection, it’s okay. That’s what the Higg Index brings to me, our team, and our partners.”

The concept of presenting something that’s not yet perfect was originally disconcerting for the communication and brand team, Mazars divulged. “I try to tell our communication and brand team that it’s O.K. to talk about something even when it’s not perfect. Just be honest and transparent and it will be okay.” She continually encourages her colleagues to not feel held back by the idea of perfection. Sustainability is a journey; the important part is continuous improvement.

To continue integrating sustainability into every aspect of the business, Salomon is exploring new and exciting ideas in the upcoming year. Amer Sports, Salomon’s parent company, has defined five circular economy principles for all brands within the group to follow. Salomon plans to design all new products around at least one circular economy principle and feature it to market each product in the Fall/Winter 2021 season.
Salomon is also exploring smaller, consumer-focused actions that have the potential to make a large environmental impact when scaled. For example, the company is considering removing the paper stuffing from shoes to reduce waste and decrease the use of natural resources for paper production. It’s also exploring removing hang tags from products. While there is still some work that needs to be done to make both of these concepts a reality, Salomon isn’t shying away from groundbreaking ideas.

In November 2019, Salomon announced a concept for an innovative running shoe that would be fully recycled into ski boots.

“Ninety to ninety-five percent of shoes are landfilled or burnt,” says Salomon Footwear Sustainability Manager Olivier Mouzin. The difficulty in recycling shoes stems from the number of different materials and glues used to produce just one pair. For the past year and a half, Mouzin’s team worked to solve this problem by developing a design featuring only one material. The new shoe is made of 100 percent thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU). By using a single material in the shoe, Salomon can easily break it down and create a new valuable product, which extends the life of the original material up to ten times. Salomon plans to offer a product based on this concept in 2021.
Scaling Industry Change

The Salomon team is excited about where it’s headed with its sustainability work, but also realizes it can’t take on the challenge of climate change alone.

“If we are doing this work on our own, it’s not going to be a big impact,” Mazars says. “It needs to be an industry movement.” Salomon values the opportunity to collaborate with industry peers through the Sustainable Apparel Coalition. As a sustainability leader, it sees an advantage in being able to test, provide input, and co-develop Higg Index tools.

In an industry known for its secrecy, the SAC and Higg Index can help companies break through some of these barriers. Salomon has also been able to speak openly about sustainability with other SAC members and develop new relationships. “In other situations, the communication might not be as easy or open,” says Mazars. With the Higg Index providing the common language, Salomon can leverage these relationships to scale impacts and make lasting changes.
Advice from the Salomon team for other brands and Higg Index users starting their sustainability journey.

- Lean into transparency. Use the Higg Index to speak the same language with value chain partners and openly communicate with consumers.

- Don’t let the idea of perfection hold your team back. Sustainability is not perfect at once, it’s a long journey.

- Make sustainability fun and accessible for your team and value chain partners.

- Collaborate with industry peers to support collective industry action.