

worldly

Maximize Supplier Engagement:

5 Proven Ways to Improve Primary Data Collection at Scale

With real-world examples from:

Dunelm

MARKS &
SPENCER



Key Takeaways

26x

Supplier engagement unlocks 26x greater impact and better data

74%

Clean, segmented facility lists enable 74% adoption rates

85%+

Early engagement drives 85%+ completion



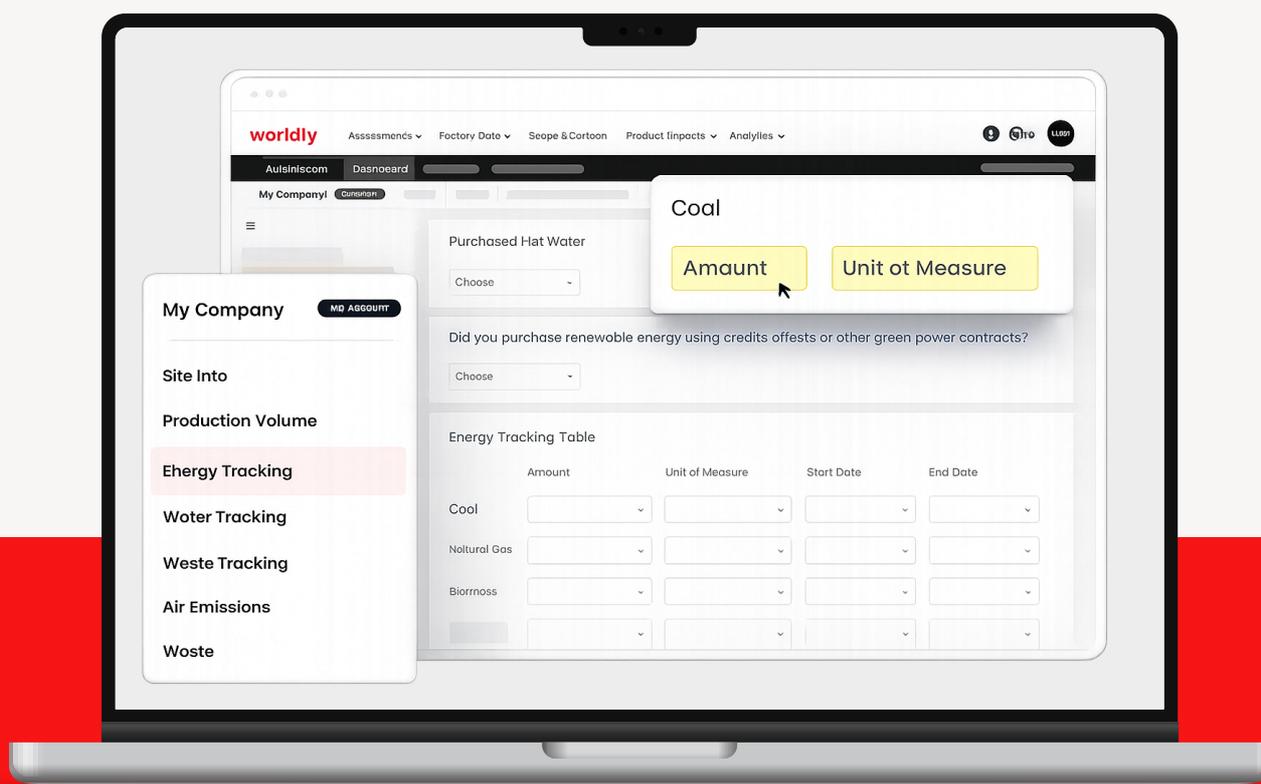
Multi-team, multi-language outreach drives faster supplier response



Top brands turn assessments into action year after year

Engage your supply chain. Get better data. Move faster.

Accurate sustainability data depends on supplier participation, but fragmented tools and siloed communication make engagement harder than it needs to be. Worldly centralizes the supplier journey so teams can drive participation, reduce friction for suppliers, and turn primary data into action—at scale.



Get better supply chain insights



Supplier engagement matters for sustainability impact

Brands and retailers sit at the most visible point of the value chain, giving them outsized influence over how products are made and how responsibly supply chains operate. Today, that influence comes with growing expectations from consumers, investors, and regulators who want clear evidence of environmental and social responsibility.

However, brands and retailers are not directly responsible for the majority of the emissions that are created while making their products.

Because most sustainability impact occurs upstream, visibility into your supply chain is no longer optional. Facility-level primary data enables brands to identify risk, prioritize action, and move beyond estimates toward measurable progress.



If you look at emissions reduction, water use reduction, everything we focus on, our targets are largely quantifiable. So, if you really want to quantify, you need to have that data from your supply chain. You can't quantify, and you can't run simulations for improvements, with only 50 percent of your supply chain data.

Dr. Thiwanka De Fonseka,
Chief Sustainability Officer, Komar

26X

Scope 3 supply chain emissions are responsible for 26X the amount of emissions produced in Scope 1 activities, across a wide range of industries¹.



¹ [Scope 3 Upstream: Big Challenges, Simple Remedies](#)

Everything that follows—risk reduction, resilience, and regulatory readiness—starts with supplier participation.

This guide outlines five practical ways leading brands increase supplier participation and improve primary data quality. These best practices apply regardless of your tools, maturity level, or assessment approach—and help turn engagement into measurable impact.

74%

Worldly's brand and retailer customers that follow these best practices through Worldly Impact Services see an average facility assessment adoption rate of 74 percent.



The Higg Index is the leading value chain environmental and social impact measurement methodology and suite of tools developed and owned by global nonprofit alliance Cascale (formerly the Sustainable Apparel Coalition) and exclusively available on Worldly, the most comprehensive sustainability data insights platform.



Develop comprehensive facility lists, with key contact segments

Your engagement strategy is only as strong as the list behind it. High-performing brands treat facility lists as strategic assets—not static spreadsheets. When creating and maintaining your facility list, consider the following questions:

✓ **Are you creating your list strategically?**

It's essential to approach this process thoughtfully, ensuring you engage with facilities at optimal times aligned with your specific goals and objectives, to maximize the effectiveness of your outreach.

✓ **How is your list segmented?**

Targeted communication drives better engagement, and segmenting suppliers by geography, tier, facility type, language, or business volume helps you deliver more relevant outreach and allocate training and support where it's needed most.

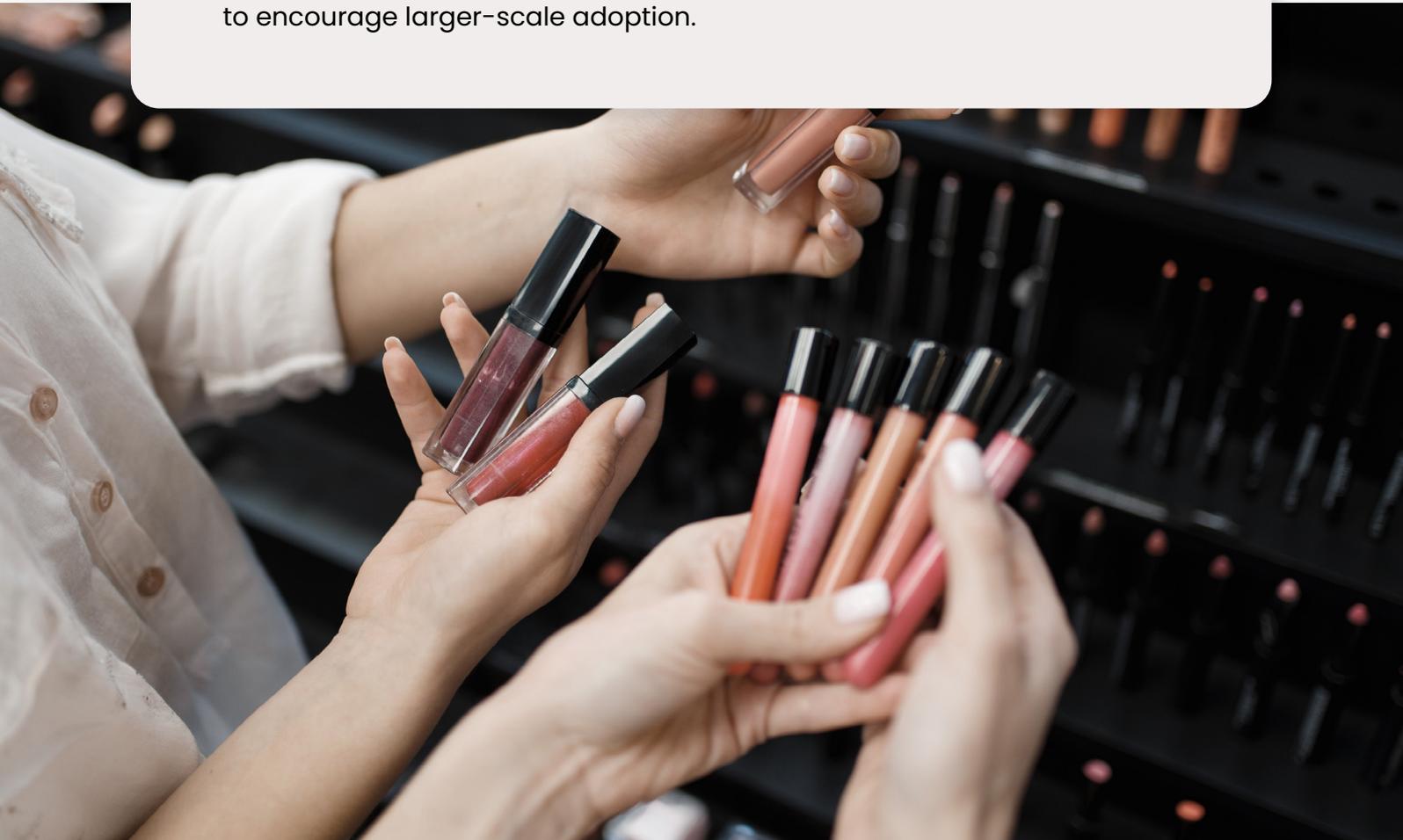


Curating your facility list isn't a one-time exercise. We recommend revisiting your list on a regular basis to confirm you're still doing business with each facility, that your point of contact is still correct, and that inclusion of the facility still aligns with your strategy. The specific cadence depends on your sourcing and design cycle, and many brands find that a monthly review is ideal. As engagement with your suppliers deepens, your outreach will also expand as you add new facilities to your list.

BRAND SPOTLIGHT:

European retailer achieves 100 percent compliance in year one

A European fashion, home, and beauty retailer took a strategic approach to list building and segmentation when it expanded sustainability assessments beyond apparel facilities. It strategically selected a small list of suppliers in categories adjacent to apparel, and asked them to complete and verify a Higg Index environment assessment for facilities. The retailer's facilities achieved 100 percent compliance in its first year. This success encouraged and inspired the company to expand its verification requirements to a larger list of suppliers in the second year, when it also achieved notable levels of compliance. With the learnings from its first two years of requiring data verification, the retailer has expanded the requirement even further across its supplier list and is focusing on providing additional support through webinars and e-learning to encourage larger-scale adoption.



Establish clear timelines

Establishing manageable timelines with clear deadlines and achievable milestones is essential to encouraging supplier participation in social and environmental assessments. This planning also opens the door for two-way communication, allowing facilities to share recommendations based on their expertise and creating space to build stronger partnerships. Many suppliers are already advancing their own sustainability work, so inviting their input strengthens rapport and leads to better outcomes.

Brands with the highest completion rates begin outreach early—ideally six months before the assessment deadline—giving suppliers time to prepare and access the necessary support and resources. From there, set deadlines that motivate progress without disrupting daily operations, striking the right balance between realistic expectations and a healthy sense of urgency.

When communicating these expectations, use progressive milestones that break the process into manageable steps. Celebrating incremental progress can reduce overwhelm and help facilities stay on track. Throughout the process, be clear about why you're requesting the data and how it will be used collaboratively. The exact milestones will vary based on your data-collection method and technology system. The timeline below reflects what Worldly customers commonly use for the Higg Facility Environmental Module (Higg FEM).

Example milestones

Action Item	Deadline
Create a Worldly account	 Nov 30
Purchase a Standard Facility Subscription	 Dec 31
Complete, post & share Higg FEM self-assessment with customers	 Mar 31
Complete & post verification	 Apr 30

It's also important to provide a roadmap for your facilities that shows them what comes next. If you're setting smaller milestones along the way, it's very helpful to lay out what the entire journey looks like rather than keeping the next step hidden from view. Brands with the best adoption also think beyond a single year assessment cycle and build a long-term roadmap to share their vision and build year-over-year commitment with their suppliers.

BRAND SPOTLIGHT:

Luxury brand succeeds by starting early

A German luxury fashion brand achieved exceptional results by launching its Higg FEM program early with a kick-off in mid-November, shortly after the annual cadence opened, and communicating clear expectations throughout the process. It laid out multiple milestones, including an account creation deadline, a purchase deadline, an early completion deadline, and a verification deadline. These incremental milestones with attached deadlines have been successful because they provide clarity and support the facilities with clear targets to ensure they don't fall behind or run out of time.

They also allow for a communication strategy that enables the brand to engage meaningfully with its suppliers with reminders to support meeting deadlines and escalating language that encourages compliance in response to missed deadlines.



Train your internal stakeholders

When sustainability expectations are reinforced by sourcing, buying, and commercial teams, suppliers are far more likely to engage—and to prioritize completion. The most successful brands embed the importance of sustainability throughout their entire business. Educate and train your internal stakeholders as well as your business partners and vendors on the importance of aligning with your sustainability strategy. These stakeholders include your buyers and sales team, vendors, sourcing agents, and regional business units that have direct relationships with your facilities. They can help facilitate conversations with your manufacturing partners about the importance of completing social and environmental assessments and answer questions the facilities may have.

When it comes to training and enabling your internal stakeholders to be the best ambassadors they can be for your brand's sustainability efforts, you'll want to make sure to:

- ✓ **Emphasize a multi-touch approach:**
Ensure internal teams understand the value of communicating from multiple points of contact and are ready to participate.
- ✓ **Provide ready-to-use templates:**
Equip stakeholders with communication templates and links to Worldly's training and support resources.
- ✓ **Tailor communication for buy-in:**
Customize messages for each stakeholder group and clearly explain why primary data matters and how it benefits them and suppliers.
- ✓ **Clarify data expectations:**
Explain what data is being collected and how it will be used so teams can confidently answer supplier questions.
- ✓ **Set clear requirements and deadlines:**
Make it explicit whether assessments are mandatory, outline deadlines and consequences, and ensure all internal touchpoints reinforce the same message.





BRAND SPOTLIGHT:

M&S is aiming for net-zero emissions

For clothing, beauty, and home goods retailer Marks & Spencer, achieving net-zero emissions is an organization-wide goal. The sustainability team engages a lot of its stakeholders within the business to gain wider cross-functional interest in environmental impact projects. It leads quarterly webinars and also works very closely with colleagues across the production, technology, raw materials, and sourcing teams.

As part of its ongoing internal engagement program, M&S hosts an annual in-person meeting focused on sustainability where teams across the organization's various sectors including food and logistics share updates on key projects and initiatives. These meetings help spark ideas for other teams about how to better engage with suppliers in their own sectors.

Level up your facility communication methods

Consistent, clear communication—delivered early and reinforced often—is one of the strongest predictors of supplier participation.

✓ **Transparency is key:**

Prioritize clear, honest communication with your suppliers. Explain why meeting sustainability and primary data goals matters—not just for your brand, but for the industry and regional regulations. Maintaining an open, transparent dialogue throughout the process builds trust and strengthens long-term supplier engagement.

✓ **Send communications in your facilities' native languages:**

Don't let your important message get lost in translation. Make it as easy as possible for your facilities to understand what you're asking of them by translating communications into their native languages and adjusting for cultural context. Localization helps avoid confusion, increases clarity, and improves engagement across diverse facility networks.

✓ **Create targeted resources for different facility types, sizes, and locations:**

Not all suppliers have the same needs or maturity level. Provide tailored resources, introductory materials for newer facilities, deeper guidance for returning partners, and region- or category-specific support where helpful. Matching support to each facility's stage boosts completion and quality of primary data.



✓ **Offer facilities support through multiple communication channels:**

Your facilities may be across town or across the globe, so make it simple for them to get help when they need it by offering multiple support channels, from email and live chat to webinars and newsletters. Combining live and self-serve options ensures suppliers across time zones and schedules can stay engaged and complete required actions., which yields higher engagement!

✓ **Communicate the consequences of non-compliance:**

If assessments or primary data submissions are required, be explicit about expectations, deadlines, and consequences. Reinforce these consistently to ensure suppliers understand the importance and urgency of meeting requirements.





BRAND SPOTLIGHT:

Dunelm achieves exceptional results its first year, with Worldly's Adoption Services

UK-based home furnishings retailer Dunelm achieved impressive Higg FEM completion rates in its first year introducing the assessment to its suppliers. The sustainability team found that involving its commercial teams in sustainability conversations with suppliers was key to success. It also kicked off engagement efforts with an initial educational webinar covering goals, requirements, and timelines, and following up with one-on-one sessions with each key supplier to go deeper into their specific situation.

Dunelm also provided its suppliers with a clear roadmap for what they should be doing, when, and what the next step would be. As a result, it saw 85 percent of its Tier 1 facilities completing the Higg FEM and nearly 90 percent of key Tier 1s validating their data.

[Read the full Case Study](#)



Set up strategic performance improvement programs

Sustainability is an ongoing journey that requires consistent follow-up with facilities—not just initial engagement. Once facilities complete their social and environmental assessments, verify their data, and identify areas for improvement, brands must maintain structured, strategic processes to support continuous progress.

The most successful programs include the following components:

- ✓ **Create a clear strategy and timeline for follow-up:**
Define how and when you'll check in with facilities during and after the assessment phase. This may include prioritizing key Tier 1 or Tier 2 partners, or giving extra attention to non-responsive or lagging facilities. Communicate your follow-up timeline and expectations upfront as part of your broader transparency strategy.
- ✓ **Use data to pinpoint engagement gaps and challenges:**
As you review assessment results, look for patterns in the questions or sections facilities struggle to complete. Use these insights to guide targeted conversations, resources, and future training so facilities get support where they need it most.
- ✓ **Create and communicate escalation protocols for non-responsive facilities:**
Set expectations early for what will happen if a facility fails to engage, rather than waiting until issues arise. Clear protocols—and open, ongoing communication—can surface challenges sooner and reduce unexpected non-responses as deadlines approach.



✓ **Implement recognition programs for high-performing facilities:**

Incentivize strong participation by acknowledging facilities that complete assessments early, provide high-quality data, or demonstrate progress in priority areas. Define which metrics matter most—such as participation, validation, or improvement—and celebrate facilities that excel.

✓ **Incorporate assessment results into supplier scorecards:**

Strengthen accountability by ensuring social and environmental performance is considered alongside pricing, delivery, and quality. When sustainability assessments are reflected in vendor evaluations, suppliers better understand their importance and are more motivated to participate and improve.



We found that involving our sales teams in sustainability conversations with suppliers was key to our success. It helped our supplier partners understand that sustainability is central to our business strategy and a key part of working with Dunelm.

Lisa Ly,

Senior Sustainability Manager, Dunelm

A European Worldly Impact Customer worked alongside the Worldly team to review its previous year's assessment results and identify areas and data points that facilities often struggled to complete.

Armed with those insights, the retailer's customer success manager created targeted training tools to use at the next year's Higg FEM kickoff. Using past data to inform future training helped the retailer empower its suppliers to complete their Higg FEM even better in subsequent years.



Measuring success in your facility engagement practices

To sustain supplier engagement over time, brands need clear success metrics—not just participation goals. The most successful brands incorporate the following practices into their sustainability strategies.

✓ **Track key metrics:**

It is important to track how your engagement efforts are going. Supplier engagement is a prerequisite to impact when dealing with social and environmental assessments.

Key metrics to help determine your supplier engagement's current state and progress over time include:



Percentage of suppliers that create an account with your assessment provider



Percentage of suppliers that complete their self assessment before your company's deadline



Percentage of suppliers that complete data verification

✓ **Set reasonable expectations based on facility type:**

Facilities differ based on their size, location, local laws and regulations, their tier in the supply chain, the products they manufacture, and many other factors. Define what success looks like for each facility type and context to set achievable goals, support progress, and motivate year-over-year improvement.

✓ **Aim for progressive improvement:**

The most successful social and environmental assessment initiatives take a long-term and progressive approach to their vendors' performance. Start by targeting strong participation in year one, aim for full participation the following year, and then focus on deeper improvements over time—such as carbon and water reduction, worker well-being, and professional development.

✓ **Recognize and reward facilities for their achievements:**

Completing primary data requests or any social or environmental assessment requires real commitment from suppliers. Even when participation is driven by their own goals or regulatory needs, recognizing and rewarding strong engagement reinforces the behaviors you want to encourage and helps sustain long-term progress.

Top performing facilities

Some common ways to recognize top performing facilities include:



Better payment terms



Establishing larger orders



Committing to longer term partnerships



You can't give the same target to everyone. If you take two suppliers, one in China, one in Bangladesh, giving them the same target isn't equitable because there are specific issues in these different countries—for example, one whose power grid is set up for renewable energy generation systems and net metering, and one that's not. This impacts what they can truly change.

Dr. Thiwanka De Fonseka,
Chief Sustainability Officer, Komar



BRAND SPOTLIGHT:

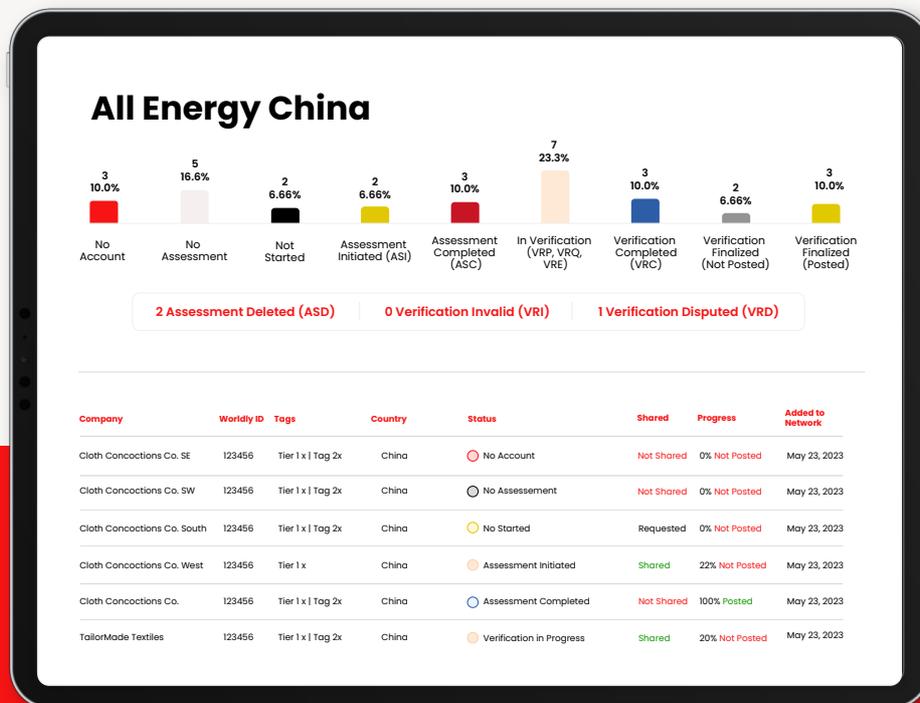
M&S demonstrates how starting small achieves big results over time.

Clothing, beauty, and home goods retailer Marks & Spencer originally piloted the Higg FEM in 2018, and has since expanded its program to encompass over 90 percent of its Tier 1 suppliers and more than 500 Tier 2 suppliers. M&S serves as a prime example of a brand that has successfully tracked and improved its supplier engagement over time by using many of the methods outlined in this guide. To ensure effective implementation as it expands further into its supply chain, M&S offers both in-person and online training to all participating suppliers; collaborates with strategic suppliers to implement best practices in environmental management systems at the facility level; and focuses on six key impact areas rather than hundreds of metrics. M&S also leverages data from its suppliers' Higg FEMs to identify areas for improvement, and then supports suppliers in making measurable progress.

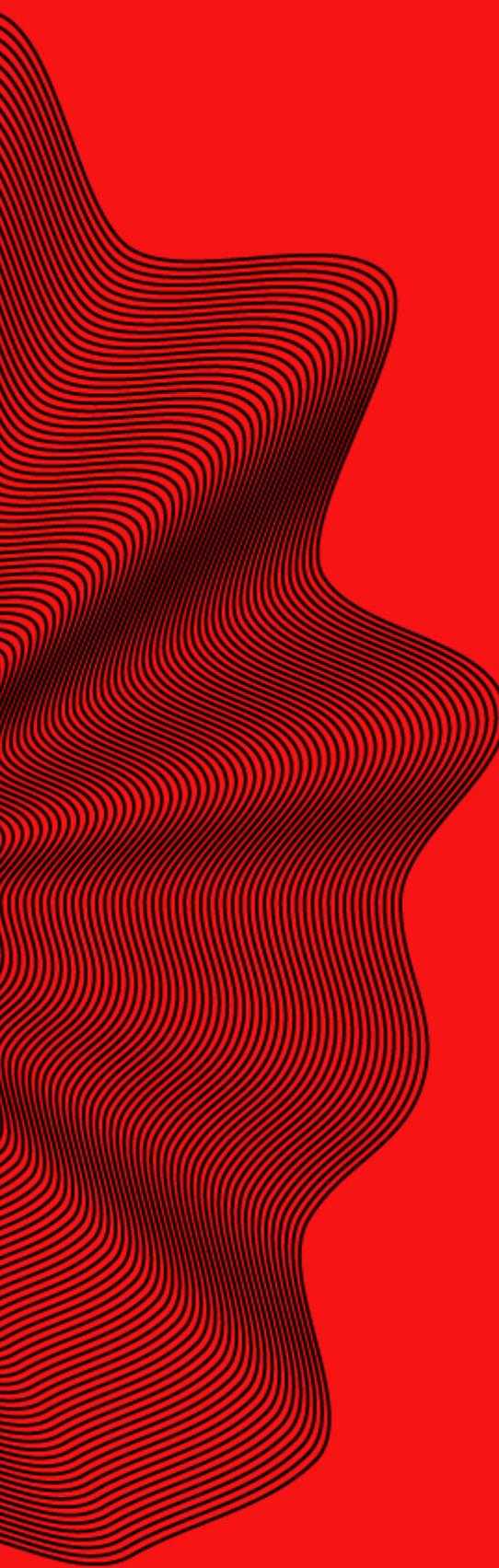
A smarter way to engage suppliers and scale primary data collection

Scaling supplier engagement and improving primary data collection is hard to do manually. Worldly gives you the tools and support to do it faster, more consistently, and with better results.

- ✓ Get high-quality primary data at scale from 40,000+ global suppliers
- ✓ Benchmark facility performance with industry-aligned KPIs for smarter, comparable insights.
- ✓ Combine facility data with predictive risk intelligence to spot risks and guide decisions.
- ✓ Automate supplier engagement and data collection across thousands of facilities—no manual follow-up needed.



Speak with an expert →



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About Worldly

Worldly is the leading sustainability and supply chain intelligence platform for the consumer goods industry, empowering brands, retailers, and manufacturers to turn primary data into strategic action. Trusted by a network of over 40,000 companies across apparel, footwear, home furnishings, and sporting goods, Worldly provides deep visibility into environmental and social impact — from carbon and water to chemicals and labor — at the product, facility, and value-chain levels.

Built on the industry's leading standards, including Cascale's Higg Index tools, Worldly transforms raw data into actionable intelligence that helps businesses reduce risk, meet evolving regulations, and accelerate measurable impact.

www.worldly.io

