



**FDRA + FFANY**

# 2022 Shoe Box & Packaging Sustainability Survey Snapshot

Assessing and benchmarking the footwear industry's overall efforts on packaging—materials, components, size & designs, waste, and remaining challenges



powered by  
**NORDSTROM**

This survey was conducted by



As the footwear industry’s business and trade association, FDRA and its members have a responsibility to make strides for the environment. In all, FDRA supports nearly 500 companies and brands worldwide, representing 95% of total U.S. footwear sales, making it by far the largest and most respected American footwear trade and business association. Contact us at [info@fdra.org](mailto:info@fdra.org) if we can assist with your business and sustainability efforts.

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### About

This one-of-a-kind report analyzes industry-wide data on shoe box and packaging practices and efforts. The goal of this survey is to help benchmark those efforts, as well as find common challenges to build collective efforts around, through FDRA, in order to help the industry reduce packaging waste and increase its sustainability efforts.

This survey was conducted April–May 2022. It consists of only responses from footwear retailers and brands to ensure an accurate assessment.

### Special Thanks

A special thanks to the footwear team at Nordstrom who partnered with FDRA to develop this survey and is helping lead efforts to build programs and training to reduce packaging waste across the footwear industry.

Also, thanks to the packaging experts at L&E and BillerudKorsnäs for their help in ensuring this survey covers critical topics and their willingness to help guide future deliberations helpful to the industry.

Thanks to our annual shoe sustainability program sponsors for their support in this and other key projects.

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Looking for more information on the footwear industry? Visit **FDRA.org** to find a range of stats, data and analysis and subscribe to Shoe-in Show to hear industry leaders discuss business insights and trends!

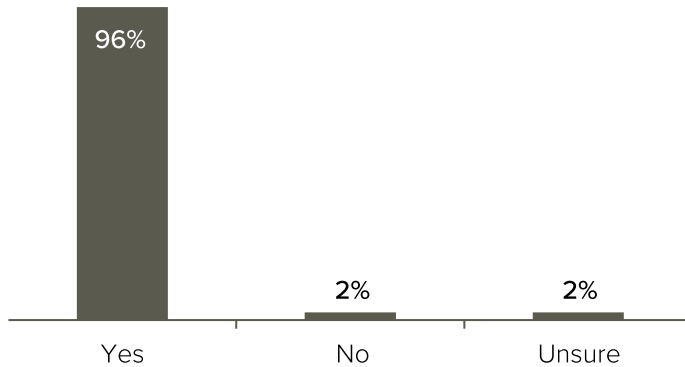
Questions about this survey should be directed to [info@fdra.org](mailto:info@fdra.org). Any portion of this survey used for any purpose without written consent of FDRA is strictly prohibited.

## Annual Shoe Sustainability Sponsors



# Sustainability temperature reading

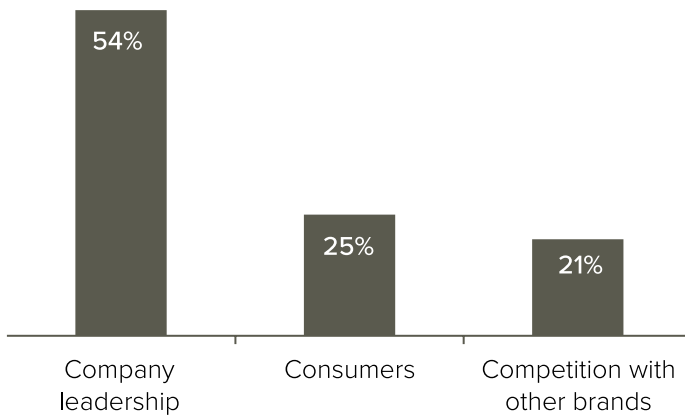
## Are leaders in your company talking about sustainability more now than last year?



### ANALYSIS

- One would think this number would be lower due to continued supply chain challenges, but sustainability is clearly top of mind for footwear executives.
- Beyond a buzzword, we have seen this percent slowly increase over the last few years. Clearly there are both internal needs (innovation) combined with growing external pressures (consumers, competition) to consider.

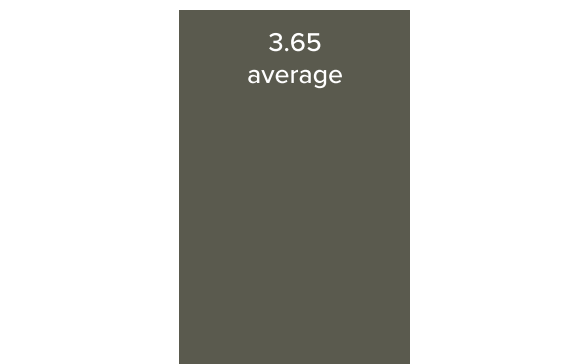
## In your opinion, who is the driving force behind increased sustainability efforts?



### ANALYSIS

- This is an interesting look at how professionals see who is driving real change. It is encouraging to see industry leadership taking charge on increased sustainability efforts. Without leadership on these issues, little can succeed.

## On a scale of 1–5, 5 being highest, how much pressure are you getting to innovate around sustainability?



### ANALYSIS

- The majority of footwear professionals are feeling a large degree of pressure around sustainability efforts.
- This result is not a surprise when, per the prior question, company leadership is viewed as the driving force behind change.
- Balanced with our 2021 benchmark survey that showed over 70% of professionals lack good knowledge to develop and execute sustainable strategies, this may be a reason why pressure feels high here.

# What is being done on packaging

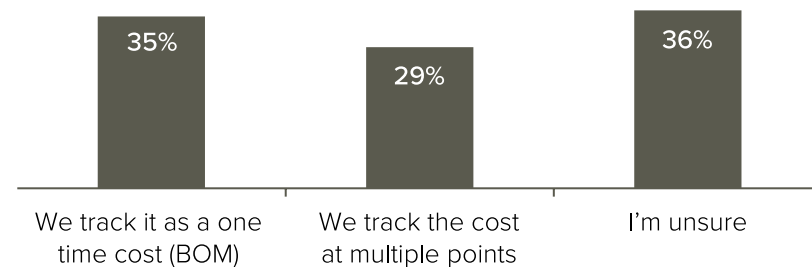
Has your company thought about or developed strategy related to using packaging to help boost your customer experience, while achieving additional savings and sustainability goals?



## ANALYSIS

- Packaging is seen as extremely important to the consumer experience, confirming that it is important that the industry focus efforts to improve packaging quality while reducing unwanted waste.

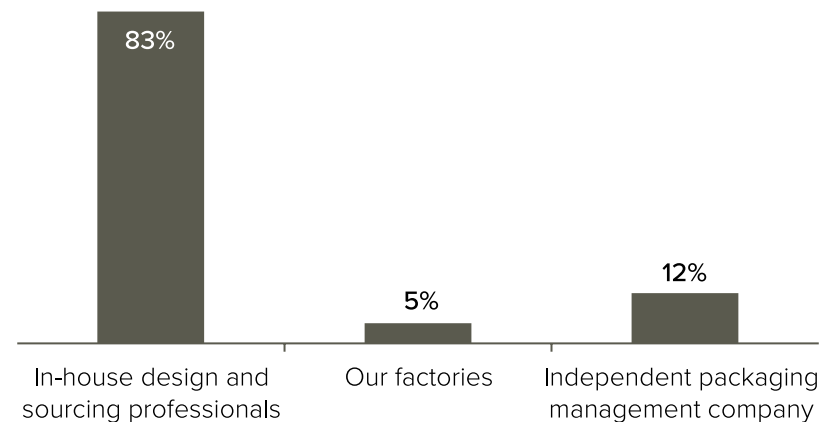
Packaging incurs a cost at each point of the supply chain. Does your company track packaging costs in the BOM only (as a one-time cost) or do you track the cost of packaging at multiple points to identify cost savings?



## ANALYSIS

- Shoe companies have an opportunity to enhance packaging cost tracking in order to trim costs and increase margin.
- It is concerning that more companies assign packaging cost to their BOM because the focus should remain on packaging issues throughout the footwear supply chain.

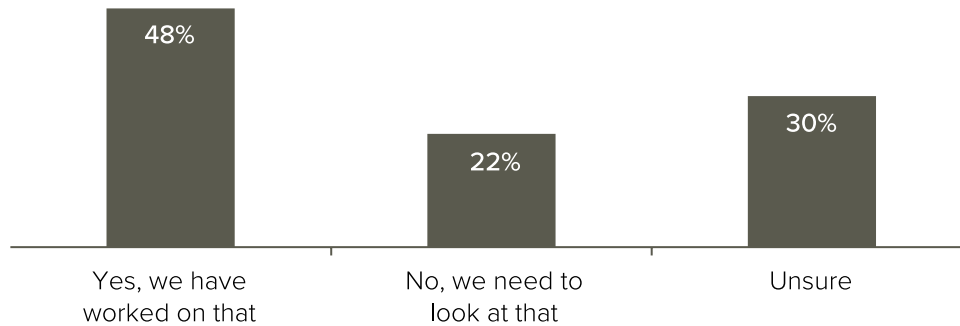
In your opinion, who should drive innovation and sustainability in your packaging design and production?



## ANALYSIS

- This answer does not reflect reality. While most think brands should oversee packaging, the previous response shows that it is not really the case.
- It's important to receive input from companies who specialize in packaging and can better advise brands who may not see opportunities.

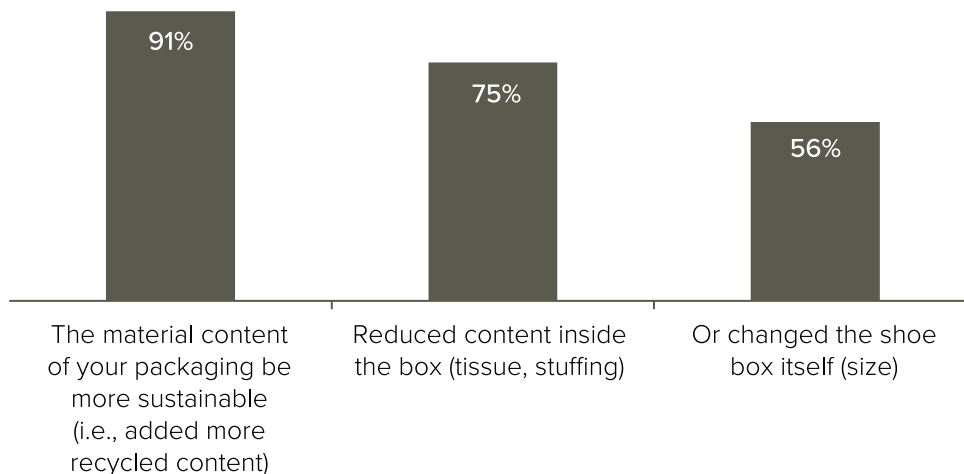
Companies can immediately see the efficiency of master cartons filling out a shipping container but has your company considered the unused air space within those master cartons?



## ANALYSIS

- If any shoe company is looking to trim supply chain costs they must look at carton optimization. Period.
- Less than half the industry has explored carton optimization, making it a large opportunity to reduce waste and costs.

Choose all that apply: In the last 2–3 years, has your company changed:



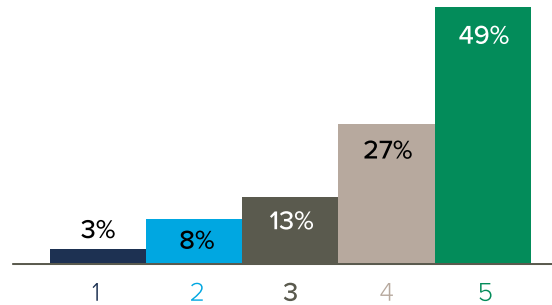
## ANALYSIS

- Everyone seems to have added more recycled content to their packaging, a positive step.
- 3 in 4 companies have dug deeper inside the box to look at reducing the content or changing its makeup, still providing more opportunity.
- Only around half have considered changing the size or composure of the shoe box itself. This is a large area where best practices or a guide can really help companies.

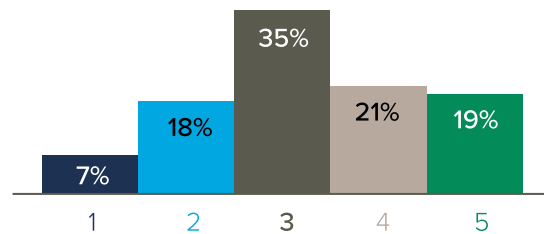
# Importance of footwear packaging for sustainability

On a scale of 1–5, 5 being highest, how important to sustainability are:

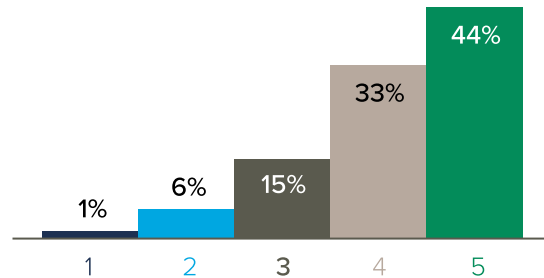
**1. Shoe Boxes** (shape optimization/reduction vs. reducing the number of packaging?)



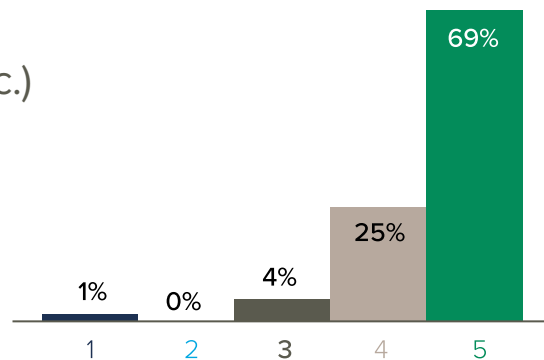
**2. SKUs/sizes**



**3. Interior dunnage reduction** (tissue or stuffing, etc.)



**4. Sustainable raw materials** (recycled, biodegradable, etc.)



## Analysis

- Most companies focus on the material makeup and the box itself when focused on packaging sustainability.
- There is still great opportunity for companies to reduce waste, space, and cost by focusing on the box size and shape to optimize packaging across the full supply chain.
- The two key areas of note where the industry could use more information and support are packaging size by type and interior dunnage issues, especially around polybags.

## In your opinion, what should industry-wide collaboration focus on, specific to packaging? What are your pain points that could benefit from industry-wide collaboration?



- Education on what currently happens to the packaging after use (through recycling centers)
- Environmental footprint comparison between using recycled materials, eliminating / avoiding packaging weight
- Consolidation, reduction, chemical inks
- Create a standard with traffic light system
- Difficult to stop vendors from using packaging knock offs that aren't sustainable
- How to make outer cartons with more recycled content while still retaining strength and integrity to protect the product during transport
- Increasing recyclability rates
- Local for local sourcing to reduce transit costs and carbon footprint
- MOQs from box suppliers; original inner box vs. shippable boxes
- Opportunities for cross-brand info sharing, which would hopefully lead to consolidation of materials & leverage pricing
- Optimize space for shipping
- Packaging composition, quantity of packaging
- Paper first, let's nail this... plastic second, as corn/hemp/soy are on the rise!
- Partner with How2Recycle and work with retailers to establish more in-store collection of plastic bags for recycling
- Poly bags! (*our report saw 6 other responses saying this as well*)
- Reducing or removing dunnage as well as finding suitable eco-friendly replacements for plastics (bags, hangers, etc.)
- Reduction of plastics and chemical use in packaging
- Retailers needs vs. E-Com needs, brands choose the lowest common denominator to appease all channels
- Sharing knowledge and best practices across the brands, not that our company is perfect, but we see many brands still repeating mistakes of the past
- Shoe box size/shape optimization; standard interior dunnage reduction; clear guidelines on sustainable material marketing
- The biggest issue in an omni-channel environment is that racking systems at retail are designed to accommodate a certain set of sizes in shoe boxes. Changing that would be challenging for the sit and fit retailers.
- The types of papers used (must be certified – FSC, PEFC, SFI, etc.); types of inks; carbon emission of shipping from packaging suppliers to Tier 1 factories
- Understand the benefits that this process can bring to the industry
- Uniform standards for what “sustainability” means in packaging



### Do you have any ideas how the footwear industry collectively can support sustainability in footwear packaging? Please share any thoughts on sustainability and packaging.



- As many bio-degradable and renewable materials as possible
- Change 2-piece boxes to clam shell boxes, move to FSC paper, remove pp finishes and foil printing
- Clear guidelines across the board; sharing of best practices and innovation across the supply chain
- Create a system to return all shipping boxes and shoe boxes back to paper recycling firms for 100% recycling
- Engaging the consumer – e.g., a coupon for no packaging or returning the packaging
- First, reduce or eliminate stuffing paper/molded cardboard inside each shoe, or any packing material that a consumer would need to throw away before putting on each pair of shoes
- Reaching agreement on a common standard for DTC packaging, including the elimination of packing slips for DTC shipments
- Incentivizing companies to use better materials and reduce material use through tax rebates
- Increased use of recycled materials
- Make all brands use the same unbranded shoe boxes to increase the chance they are reused
- Similar to shipping pallets, there can be standard sizes for all so we don't need to create all kinds of packaging, and also have a unified way to reuse/recycle them
- We send back used outer cartons to suppliers for credit or we "reuse" overseas outer cartons, giving cost savings and sustainability. It's a win/win.
- Remove all plastics from packaging
- Reusable master cartons
- Share the best practices, what works and what doesn't, considering the macroeconomic scenario
- The industry's sales channels to consumers is much more diverse and fractured. A single SKU could have multiple different packaging options depending on its channel. E-Com consumers do not need POP hangers, for example, but hangers are required by wholesale accounts. Factories get confused, consumers get upset, and wholesalers don't take responsibility for re-use of hangers to eliminate them. We've offered free replenishment of hangers to eliminate them in all packaging only to have it come back because wholesalers cannot find a path to recycle and reuse.
- We need to rethink use of boxes entirely
- Work cross functionally and across brands to solve the problem
- Work on the distribution side is most important for us. We can design a great box, but if the warehouse machinery or automated pick and pack process is not accounted for, new ideas die on the vine.

