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Sustainability Report 2022: Adoption of Sustainable Product Development Embraced but Opportunities Exist to Boost Momentum

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Survey finds nearly 90% of companies incorporated sustainability goals into product design, but other priorities continue to compete for organizational focus

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A [newly published report](#) on sustainability in product development has revealed how individuals tasked with sustainability initiatives across multiple industries are prioritizing their efforts and the challenges they face in doing so. The report—informed through third-party research commissioned by digital manufacturing leader, [Protolabs](#)—surveyed 200 engineers, product designers, sustainability leaders, and corporate executives to gather insight into their philosophies toward sustainability, levels of involvement, and adjustments needed to make products more sustainable. Respondents made clear that sustainability directly influences product development, but focused direction and measurable goals are essential to accelerate progress.

Nearly **90% of respondents reported notable corporate changes that have led to incorporating sustainability into product design and development over the past two years**. Furthermore, nearly 80% of respondents said sustainability had a defined role in their company as either part of the product development process or integrated into everyday programs and activities.

But the push and pull between competing goals for sustainable product development is evident. “We have to come up with innovative designs, but they also have to meet specific sustainability government regulations. And still meet certain costs for our business to operate accordingly,” responded a medical device/industrial engineer in the survey.

While the focus on sustainability is not new—nearly 70% of respondents have been involved with sustainability for more than six years—their **overall attitude towards sustainability remains lukewarm**. For example, respondents agreed they are proud to work at their company because of their sustainability initiatives, but similarly agreed those initiatives are often driven by regulations and trumped by fiscal concerns. Product designers and engineers are only moderately confident in their understanding of how sustainability aligns with overall company strategy, and nearly one-third of respondents reported their company does not have sustainability-related KPIs.

One way to tackle sustainability priorities is with today’s digital capabilities, which have played a major role in working towards objectives—the top-three design practices implemented to advance sustainability objectives were **artificial intelligence, design for sustainability (DfS), and integration of electronics, all cited by 68% of respondents**. Physical actions also played a prominent role with half of respondents identifying **materials engineering and sourcing/procurement** as areas that would benefit most from executing sustainability initiatives. Sustainability practices under consideration for future implementation include corporate social responsibility (54%), closed-loop product development (47%), and additive manufacturing (40%).

“Sustainability is influencing every stage of product development today, and we have a tremendous opportunity to learn from each other to further our environmental initiatives. We are excited to shine a light on the progress made to date while also identifying the opportunities that lie ahead in these key industries,” explained Protolabs’ President and CEO, Rob Bodor. “It is clear that collaboration is the key to sustainability success, and we look forward to playing a role in the journey.”

Digital manufacturing will continue to serve as a partner in sustainable product development. From automated design analysis to on-demand production, learn more about Protolabs’ progress in becoming a more sustainable manufacturing partner for its customers [here](#).

About Protolabs

Protolabs is the world’s leading provider of digital manufacturing services. The e-commerce-based company offers injection molding, CNC machining, 3D printing, and sheet metal fabrication to product developers, engineers, and supply chain teams across the globe. Protolabs serves customers using in-house production capabilities that bring unprecedented speed in tandem with [Hubs, a Protolabs Company](#), which serves customers through its network of premium manufacturing partners. Together, they help companies bring new ideas to market with the fastest and most comprehensive digital manufacturing service in the world. Visit [protolabs.com](https://www.protolabs.com) for more information.

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