

## Dan Hendrix: The Future of Interface is Bright & Greener than Ever

By [Adam Aston](#)

Published January 25, 2012



Because of the enduring green epiphany of its charismatic founder, Ray Anderson, the influence of [Interface](#) has always been outsized in the world of sustainability.

In the wake of Anderson's death last autumn at age 77, following a nearly two-year battle with cancer, the focus has shifted to [Daniel Hendrix](#), Interface's CEO and president. Yesterday, at the [GreenBiz Forum 12 in New York City](#), senior writer [Marc Gunther](#) caught up with Hendrix to

see how the billion-dollar carpet maker is moving ahead with its founder's eco-vision.

At Interface, sustainability continues to evolve from an operations focus into tool for innovation and market development, Hendrix reported. One example of this shift will soon be found up in the air.

After a four-year development process, the company's carpet tiles were okayed for use on commercial jets. Developing the product required reducing the weight of the tiles by nearly half, while meeting stringent fire and toxicity standards as well as passing Boeing's grueling performance tests.

[Southwest Airlines will be among the first to start](#) using the tiles as part of its Green Plane initiative, a project to outfit a Boeing 737 cabin with green products. "It's a big win for us, and for the airline industry," said Hendrix.

Promoted to his post in 2001, Hendrix has been running Interface's day-to-day business for over a decade. Hendrix, who will celebrate his 30th anniversary with the company next year, worked closely with Anderson through an acquisitive period in the 1980s to scale-up the business. A decade later, when Anderson had his green epiphany and declared this intention to transform how the company would make tiles, Hendrix recounted that he was a disbeliever: "I thought Ray had lost his mind."

It didn't take long for Anderson to convert Hendrix, or the rest of the company. To aid his effort, Anderson turned to a green "dream team" to make the case to his colleagues. A veritable who's-who of sustainable manufacturing, the team included [Paul Hawken](#), [Bill McDonough](#), and [Amory Lovins](#), among others. The case altered the thinking of Interface's leadership, and re-set the company's course towards a goal of making carpets using less oil, water, and other inputs, with less waste overall.

The company has tracked these metrics steadily since 1996. Since then, the company has lowered the oil intensity of its products to 60 percent from 90 percent, Hendrix reported. Roughly 40 percent of its carpet are produced from post-consumer recycled materials, remade from used carpet tiles where fiber is shaved off for reuse, and the heavy backing is re-melted to recapture its embodied energy. "We've seen an 82 percent reduction in water use, and a similar improvement in waste sent to landfill," Hendrix said.

One of the latest efforts to deepen Interface's green practices is a program to develop [environmental product declarations](#), or EPDs, a sort of successor to a life cycle assessment (LCA). "It creates transparency," said Hendrix, as a kind of environmental nutritional label for each product, showing key content such as carbon footprint, toxicity data, and water usage.

"It's like an LCA but with more detail. It takes a lot of the mystery out of what impact this product has on the environment," said Hendrix. "It's far from being standardized. And we're one of the first to pursue it in the U.S."

After nearly 20 years of sustainability efforts, the process of extending green practices within the organization, born with Anderson, continues today. "Ray gave Interface a wonderful gift: There's a tremendous emotional capital that continues to motivate our people to get up everyday and think there's a higher purpose than just a paycheck," Hendrix said.

Interface is looking to its employees for guidance on how and where to innovate. "We call the exercise 'appreciative inquiry,'" said Hendrix. "We interviewed employees and a few customers, to help push towards a goal of zero emissions." A lesson that emerged from this exercise was to cross-pollinate staff between offices, sending high performers from Bangkok to Europe, or from the U.S. to Australia, to learn and to exchange innovative ideas.

For more on Anderson's legacy, check out Joel Makower's memorial to the "[iconic and iconoclastic industrialist](#)". And in the first of an ongoing series called "Radical Industrialists" here at GreenBiz.com, read an essay contributed by Interface's [Lindsay James and Mikhail Davis](#), "Mind the Void: Interface after Ray."