

Ray Rogers (00:06):

I'm Ray Rogers.

Annie Evans (00:07):

And I'm Annie Evans.

Ray Rogers (00:09):

You're listening to Fix This, a podcast exploring tech ideas and solutions to solve today's largest challenges.

Annie Evans (00:17):

Creativity comes in all shapes and sizes. From graphic design to short films, people everywhere are finding new ways to create using technology. But as more and more people look to make something new, how can we ensure we are still being conscious of our earth and our emissions? Canva is a digital platform that allows users a space to develop, brainstorm, and invent with drag and drop options that make creating simple. But by building on Amazon Web Services (AWS), Canva has become more than an affordable and accessible digital art tool, but it is also a leader in reaching and creating sustainability goals.

(00:57):

Canva was the first Australian company to sign onto The Climate Pledge, co-founded by Amazon in 2019, with a shared commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040, 10 years ahead of the Paris Agreement. Canva is committed to sustainability and has introduced programming and tools at the organizational level that help it reduce its carbon emissions. By using the customer carbon footprint tool from AWS, Canva can measure its progress and can set their sights of even larger goals. To get a better idea of how Canva is using AWS to reach the sustainability goals, I sat down with Mike Williams, head of sustainability at Canva. Take a listen.

Mike Williams (01:39):

We have now over 125 million people using our tool every month, which is about a bit over 1% of all human beings on earth. If you're going to solve a problem, that's a pretty effective way to do so being inside such a fantastic company. Even above sustainability, there's a really strong mindset to do the best we can.

Annie Evans:

How is Canva approaching sustainability?

Our CEO, Mel, published our two-step plan, step one being to build one of the world's most valuable companies, and step two is to do the best we can. At a really overarching level, doing the most good we can is embedded with the values and the mission and the vision.

(02:22):

Sustainability, I'd say within that is looked at as an important set of practices to achieve that goal and is really part of two things, being a force for good and being a good human, which are two values at Canva. An outcome of that is we can attract the best people in the world. We have incredible folks working

across Canva in our various international locations, and I think sustainability is core to their interests. More practically in terms of the goals we've set, we have a number of them which are really framed by the pledges and commitments we've made, we've committed to be net zero by 2040, just 10 years ahead of the Paris Agreement.

(03:09):

It puts us on a path to report our emissions annually, invest in operational emission reductions. One of the more recognized ones is our One Print, One Tree program, where for every print order on Canva, we commit to planting a tree. Already there's been over four million trees planted with millions more committed. Really in summary, it's the climate commitments we've made, the measurement efforts we have, as well as the investments in emission reductions and those programs.

Annie Evans (03:47):

Canva was also the first Australian company to sign onto the Amazon Climate Pledge and other initiatives like you mentioned. Can you tell us more about why the company signed on to this pledge and the importance of leading by example and collaborating with other organizations?

Mike Williams (04:03):

Obviously there's an urgent need to act on climate. That's pretty unequivocal. Secondly, it helps frame your own roadmap for sustainability by giving prescriptions around what is embodied in that pledge. And then thirdly, to serve as an inspiration to others to act. Hoping to use Canva's brand and reach to send a signal that this is something that we encourage others to do. I think if you want to achieve these huge goals of net zero, as well as these emission reduction targets, everyone's going to need to be involved. If Canva can play a role to help inspire that change, that's a really important step for us to take.

Annie Evans (04:54):

In addition to inspiring, the measurement and the actual impact that you're doing is obviously so important and the reason you're doing it. On Canva's website we can see you have achieved a 90% reduction in emission from cloud services due to Amazon's renewable energy procurement. How has the AWS Carbon Footprint Tool helped your teams realize this? And how does Canva view measurement?

Mike Williams (05:12):

The tool helps us today measure the ongoing associated emissions with cloud, but also helps us forecast future emissions and strategies to achieve those climate goals.

Measurement is pretty key to understanding your overall emissions footprint. We're measuring across the company Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions, Scope 1 being from sources you have ownership or control over. Scope 2, generally looking at purchased energy. Scope 3 being the purchased emissions and supply chain emissions. Within our Scope 3, we as a technology platform, of course, have associated cloud emissions. It's really helpful to us to have granular insights from any Scope 3 or supply chain partner, but we're very lucky that Amazon has that granularity, which is reflected in that carbon track tool, which is exactly that.

(06:05):

Annie Evans (06:32):

What keeps you optimistic about the future?

Mike Williams (06:34):

I think if you speak to a lot of folks working on climate solutions, a lot will tell you a lot of the technologies to solve the problem already exist. They just need to be scaled up and deployed alongside strong policy frameworks. Secondly, the movement of capital and just the sheer volume of capital into this space is profound, and I think it will just continue to snowball, whether that's direct climate tech investing, government funding through incentive programs, philanthropic capital, it's all pretty demonstrative of the will to solve the problem. That's encouraging.

(07:18):

And then finally, I think the talent moving into the space gives me hope. If you look at organizations in North America like the Climate Draft, they have some of the world's top leaders looking for career transitions to support climate innovation and climate solutions. I think when humanity comes together to solve huge problems, we totally can do it. I believe it's possible and I believe in human ingenuity to achieve these lofty goals.

Annie Evans (07:56):

What advice would you offer to anyone else either in a similar position as you or someone just looking to get involved in their organization's sustainability goals?

Mike Williams (08:06):

For those kicking off their journey, I think the most important sequence of operations is really to kick off with measurement because that helps inform where the hotspots are, where a lot of the challenge might be. Having a really robust measurement, whether that's with a third party or in-house on your emissions and your whole sustainability profile is a really important first step.

(08:38):

And then figuring out and collaborating with peers across the world who might be further along their journey can help accelerate your solutions faster, but also just getting started. Is there one thing you can do today or this week which would make a difference, and then hopefully snowballing that into more material change. That would be my advice.

Annie Evans (09:12):

If you like today's episode, listen back to episode 72, becoming a sustainable technologist with Starbucks, to hear how Starbucks uses the customer carbon footprint tool from AWS to reach sustainability goals and encourages others to bring sustainability top of mind on the individual level. And remember to join the conversation on social media with #FixThisByAWS. And as always, a huge thank you to our guest, Mike.

Ray Rogers (09:40):

And thank you for tuning in. If you'd like today's show, please remember to subscribe, rate, review, and share. We'll be here on the next one.