

Thought-Leadership piece

Let's Stop Pretending the Sneaker Industry is Green

By: Lauren Hobart, CEO of DICK'S Sporting Goods

I'll be honest: The sports retail industry has a trash problem. For years, the move has always been "bigger is better", more massive warehouses, giant mall stores with the lights on 24/7, and constant shipping routes that crisscross the globe. It was a race to see who could build the biggest box. But as we get ready for the 2026 World Cup, with millions of fans descending on North America, we have to ask a hard question: Our sneakers are designed for the future, so why is the way we sell them stuck in the past?

Since Foot Locker joined the DICK'S Sporting Goods family, we've been looking at our "footprint" in a much more literal way. We've realized that being a leader in sports retail isn't just about the numbers on a quarterly report; it's about the legacy we leave on the fields where our customers play. Recent consumer research makes it clear what Gen Z expects from brands. They don't want to spend their Saturday afternoon in a dusty, suburban mall store that looks the same in every city. They want the energy of the "drop," the exclusive access, and a brand that actually shows up in their world. They're also smart enough to see the waste it leaves behind. They don't want another corporate promise buried in an annual report; they want to see action on the street.

This realization is the heart of our "Moving Drop" pilot this summer. We're moving away from the old idea that a store has to be permanent to be powerful. During a massive global event, building or leasing giant, static buildings creates a huge spike in energy and waste that just doesn't make sense once the fans go home. Instead, we're learning to move at the speed of the crowd. If the fans shift from the stadium to a local park, our footprint moves with them. By

staying mobile, we can provide exactly what's needed without the massive overhead of a store that sits empty half the day. It's about being present, not just being big.

However, a more efficient store is only half the battle. We also have to take responsibility for what happens after the final whistle blows. At every mobile stop, we're setting up a recycling station for the culture. We're asking fans to hand over their beat-up, unwearable kicks—shoes that would otherwise sit in a landfill for decades. Through our partnership with local urban developers, we are grinding these materials down to build the actual basketball courts and soccer pitches we're donating to the very communities we visit.

We're taking a stand: The future of retail shouldn't be static, and it definitely shouldn't be wasteful. We have a responsibility to protect the places where we play. Because if there's no planet left for a soccer pitch, the gear we sell doesn't really matter. We're changing our footprint today so the next generation of athletes can keep making theirs tomorrow.

Strategy Note

The rationale behind this thought-leadership piece is to position Lauren Hobart as a pragmatic leader addressing the "identity crisis" of modern retail. By focusing on **logistical energy waste** and product circularity, the essay moves the conversation beyond surface-level sustainability. It justifies the "Moving Drop" truck not as a gimmick, but as a strategic solution to the environmental costs of massive global events like the 2026 World Cup. The tone is intentionally direct and less "corporate," aiming to build authentic trust with a skeptical Gen Z audience while aligning with DICK'S "Sports Matter" community mission.

Reference

Piper Sandler. *Piper Sandler completes 49th Semi-Annual Taking Stock With Teens® survey.*
<https://www.pipersandler.com/news/piper-sandler-completes-49th-semi-annual-taking-stock-teens-survey>