Data, Digitalisation and the Future of Supply Chain Sustainability

Paul Lennen speaks with JP Stevenson, Chief Revenue Officer at EiQ, about a career that has moved from sourcing into supply chain sustainability services. Their conversation covers why sourcing and sustainability often run on different cadences, the shift from soft guidelines to hard law, the case for openness between brands, the two big bets ahead for sourcing, and how data and AI could change due diligence.



Nov 2026

From Sourcing to Sustainability

JP's career has moved from sourcing into supply chain sustainability services: first with the Fung Group, a sourcing business, and now with LRQA and EiQ. He described that path as mirroring what has happened to consumer product brands. As sourcing became more commoditised, and as the market came to see sustainability as a necessary operating parameter, businesses were forced to treat it as a core competency.

He has seen the same shift in expectations, he said. What were often soft guidelines on sustainability requirements have become hard law. There is still back and forth in parts of the West, the US in particular, but the tide is rising and it is pushing companies to a higher bar for their own operations.

Two Teams, Two Clocks

Asked whether a Monday morning looks different for a sourcing executive and a sustainability executive, JP said it definitely does. Sourcing today means balancing multiple directives. He borrowed a picture from a friend: whitewater rafting, where you can't plan your route and you take the rapids as they come. Sustainability, by contrast, has a planned course: a programme of work that runs on multi-year cycles of building capacity and reporting, though the waters can still be choppy.

He saw those very different cadences as part of the problem. Sourcing professionals found it hard to put much of a sustainability report into practice, while sustainability teams could stay at a high altitude, sometimes without grounding in what is operationally practicable. People are part of it too: not a lot of sustainability people have worked in merchandising or run supply chains, and many sourcing professionals have not worked in sustainability.

Regulation, Alliances, and Openness

Asked whether consumers would push the market in this direction, JP's answer was short: no. He expected the change to come through regulation, arriving, in his words, "very slowly and then all at once."

Alliances still mattered, he said, though collective work had become politicised this year, particularly for brands sourcing through countries such as China. He thought the industry had spent too much time on hair-splitting and not enough on movement, and saw a place for both collective action and the individual work firms do behind closed doors.

His practical advice was openness. In a transactional vendor base, he said, "you individually do not have power, but collectively you do." If brands can look at a supplier's performance beyond a single transaction and share it in a pre-competitive space, it becomes a powerful way of setting the bar for change. He also pointed to a growing common denominator of sustainability practice, now being codified in law and echoed in frameworks such as the OECD's due diligence guidance, as a solid base for any programme.

Two Big Bets for Sourcing

Asked where a global brand should focus, JP named two bets. The first was supply chain digitalisation: a structural shift much larger than any single brand, covering the documentation used to make trade decisions and what companies are required to report on. It could take a giant paper burden out of trade and enable traceability, a known supply chain that can track goods as they move through it. But it moves at the pace of governments recognising new types of documentation, so he saw it as a medium- to longer-term horizon.

The second was sustainability, which he described as shorter term because, for large brands, it is already codified in law. That makes some of it table stakes. Where leaders can lead, he said, is by looking at their supply chain footprint through the lens of resilience.

What Data and AI Can Change

JP described EiQ as a supply chain due diligence platform. His argument was that responsible sourcing has to rest on something much broader than the data inside a brand's own supply chain, because what regulations now ask for is too complex, and too costly, to tackle alone. Sending more questionnaires to factories was not necessarily going to produce a better production base, he said, and commissioning audits alone was probably not enough.

On AI, he saw the first application as cutting coordination costs. Asked for five years of performance data on a single factory, a sustainability team could take several weeks, with records in filing cabinets and data scattered across spreadsheets. A document of record on each supplier could mean fewer audits and more focus on remediation, and would help sustainability teams keep pace with sourcing and sit at the table with merchandising.

He was careful about the hype. Anyone who called it a done deal, he said, had probably not hit the very non-digital constraints of working with factories, so he saw it as a medium-term play. The bigger prize was a "control tower" view in which quality, sustainability, and operations data inform one another, so that the rapids can be spotted in real time. That does not exist in most sourcing organisations today, he said, but it no longer has to be the case, and he saw the potential for a step change.

Consolidating Suppliers or Not

Asked whether brands should consolidate their supplier base or switch as geopolitics shifts, JP said you have to speak about it in segments. For large-cap organisations, such as big blue-chip consumer goods companies, the data is there to support longer-term partnership: multi-year terms on production orders, and incentivised finance for suppliers that meet certain conditions, helping them build capacity.

But where consumption has moved to transactional supply chains with a broad vendor base, the picture changes. He pointed to a very large marketplace with around 200,000 vendors, where you can't cut the tail and

consolidating spend is very hard. There, he said, the conversation shifts to control mechanisms: checks that suppliers must pass to be on the platform, and that hold for a set period.

Where Sustainability Should Sit

On organisation design, JP said bringing sustainability into sourcing is a really solid call, and bringing it into legal is also potentially another good option. In smaller organisations, it seems to work well when the head of procurement is also the head of sustainability, because one person can translate between the two. In bigger organisations, a split structure may work better, since strong operational guardrails around sourcing have to come first.

Either way, he said, the starting point is organisational design. Sourcing does not necessarily understand sustainability, and sustainability does not necessarily understand sourcing, so the conversation to have is how to structure the table so they are both sitting together.