

Saving the Planet one Chair at a Time

April 25, 2022



Another Earth Day has come and gone with little to show for it from most corporations worldwide. The same isn't true for manufacturers in the contract furnishings industry, which has been at the forefront of sustainability for decades. Sure, not every contract furnishings manufacturer, but most of them.

The good news is that we continue to innovate as an industry and help clean up the planet even though office furniture accounts for only a tiny fraction of the manufactured goods on the planet.

Case in point: Humanscale's new Path task chair, which was introduced last week (and appears below in our Products category ad nauseam), is cited by all

the cool and hip digital publications like Gear Patrol, Fast Company, and Hypebeast (as office furniture is now fashion apparently - that's a good thing). Billboarding media the way Humanscale did is a great way to garner attention. We now know it's not only Herman Miller (the Miller part of MillerKnoll) who can pull billboarding off. Congrats.

As for the chair itself, it represents a departure of sorts from industry trends. Besides its great environmental story - Path is composed of nearly twenty-two pounds of recycled content, including ocean plastic, post-consumer plastic bottles, and post-industrial material - the chair changes the conversation around aesthetics. Unlike almost

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every current chair on the market, this chair does not scream tech. It appears to be a more modern interpretation of task chairs we saw in the 70s and 80s before the arrival of the Aeron. It's also Humanscale's first genuine attempt to move beyond their widely popular collection of task chairs designed by the late Niels Diffrient (d2013). Path at first glance is simple, yet it displays tailored sophistication in the execution of the two-tone back and its angular geometry. Put simply; it grows on you the more you look at it. It's familiar and yet not.

Path also promises the kind of ergonomics that put Niels Diffrient and Humanscale on the map in 1999 when the original Freedom Chair debuted. Starting at \$1471 (list), it's hardly an "everyman" (or "everywoman") chair. There is no shortage of competition in that price category, including most of Humanscale's current lineup and nearly all popular higher-end chairs from just about everyone. A sustainable chair at a much lower price point would be welcome and would itself start a new category.

"Path was born from the vision of delivering world-class, inclusive ergonomics, responsibly considered, into a relevant user experience for contemporary work culture," says Todd Bracher, founder of Todd Bracher Studio, which partnered with Humanscale's in-house design studio on the chair. "We sought to develop a quiet design solution that is perfectly in tune with the versatile nature of modern office architecture while making no compromise on its ability to solve complex and critical ergonomic needs."

Aesthetics aside, the chair is a remarkable achievement of what can be done, even on a small scale, at one company, to help with the environment. As they say, "it's a start!" A very tiny start at that.

According to estimates, about 12 million tonnes of plastic are poured into the ocean every year. Given that Humanscale's Path helps remove 10 pounds of that ocean plastic per chair (which is why math is essential, especially in Florida), Humanscale needs

only to produce 24 billion (2.4e9) chairs. The best (or worst) of all is that there is no supply chain issue regarding ocean plastics - they're everywhere. Still, producing 24 billion chairs (approximately three chairs for every man, woman, and child) for a total audience of 7.6 billion inhabitants worldwide per year could prove challenging. Nevertheless, it is a perfect example of the scale of the problem and provides an instructive path (Path) forward for every other manufacturer to follow.

(Yes, yes, Humanscale selling 24 billion Path chairs per year would equate to \$3,530,400,000,000.00 - \$3.53 trillion in sales, making them six times larger than Walmart, and one heck of a bonus for all employees).