

Decarbonization Download Vlog – Full Interview Transcript

5 Questions with Zebra Technologies

Kelly

I am Kelly Speakes-Backman. I am the acting Assistant Secretary here at the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy [EERE] of the Department of Energy. Today I am joined by Mani Balakrishnan of Zebra Technologies, and they are a Better Plants partner and part of our Better Buildings Low Carbon Pilot. Hey Mani, how are you?

Mani

Very well. Thank you for the opportunity.

Kelly

Awesome. As you know, we've been asking some of our partners about their efforts in decarbonization and energy efficiency. We'll start off with the first question: why is decarbonization important to your organization?

Mani

Zebra has historically been known for RFID and barcode printers. We transformed our company by acquiring the enterprise business from Motorola in 2014. We're now the leading solutions provider and trusted partner for digitization and workflow automation across the value chain, including retail, ecommerce, patient care, and hospitals, among many other things.

Although Zebra is carbon-light, we want to be seen as part of the climate solution and not part of the problem, and we understand the climate urgency. The incremental approach to decarbonization is just not enough. We need bold carbon reduction targets backed by science and fast action to limit the climate damage. That's why Zebra committed to science-based targets, the gold standard.

Kelly

That's awesome. Thank you so much for your participation in this. I want to ask you about the broader community around Zebra. Who are your stakeholders and who are your customers? Do they care about decarbonization as well? Or are you out there on your own?

Mani

Absolutely. All our stakeholders care and they should. By stakeholder, I mean employees, customers, investors, and partners. Climate change impacts all of us, so everybody should care.

We also work with many large business customers. And like us, many of our customers have science-based targets. There is that sense of shared purpose, a common goal to leverage innovation for greater good among companies that are committed to science-based targets. And that's very valuable to us.

Kelly

So let's get a little more specific here. What projects are you most excited about that you're working on with your decarbonization work?

Mani

I am very excited about the work we did with the Department of Energy and Argonne National Laboratory on physical climate risk scenario analysis. I know that's a mouthful. We assessed climate risk across Zebra's global value chain, which includes operations, supply chain distribution, and customer markets.

As a lesson learned, we wrestled with data uncertainties. For example, it's ironic, but there is really a lack of granular climate modeling data in parts of the world that have elevated climate risk. In those cases, we want to engage more with our partners in that region to understand how they're managing climate risk.

There's quite a bit of uncertainty in modeling extreme climate events combined with rising sea levels. But I can tell you that after our engagement with Argonne National Laboratory, we came out better informed about our climate risk, and we're really, truly grateful for the collaboration.

Kelly

That's great. You already addressed the challenge of having granular data. Are there other challenges that you see or that you've experienced in your attempts to reduce Zebra's carbon emissions?

Mani

Absolutely. The indirect value chain emissions, or Scope 3 emissions in the technical terms, account for 99% of our carbon footprint. It's a challenge because it requires more collaboration internally and externally with our suppliers and customers to reduce emissions. We understand that challenge. Our company leadership and the board recognized this challenge, too. So, we do a few things differently. Number one is that we elevated the sustainability cause as a key strategic initiative for the company, and focus on areas of carbon synergies, collaborating with our suppliers and customers to create that step function improvement in performance.

Kelly

That's cool. So, you're working with your suppliers as well as those who are supplying you in that whole chain of carbon reduction. I would ask for those companies that aren't quite where you are yet, for those who are just considering getting into this kind of work of carbon reduction, greenhouse gas reduction, do you have any advice? Anything to tell them?

Mani

Absolutely. My first suggestion would be commit to science-based targets sooner than later, and have a technical partner to help you. We chose Department of Energy's Better Plants

program as our technical partner for science-based targets, so that would be my first suggestion. My second suggestion would be to expand beyond operations. Elevate sustainability as a key strategic initiative for the company and broaden the engagement with customers and suppliers to create breakthroughs. My third suggestion, which is really important, is about climate goals. Climate goals are multidecade, multigenerational, so understanding the key carbon-drivers for the company is the first step.

To make the right decarbonization investments, there should be clarity and focus on what are the strategic opportunities for the company in this space? What new technologies and solutions will the company adopt early, and where should they play it safe? My last suggestion would be collaborate, collaborate, collaborate. We can't do it alone. We shouldn't do it alone.

Kelly

One hundred percent. That's a lot of really good advice. I think one of my favorite parts, though, was to join the Better Buildings program.

Mani

I couldn't agree with you more.

Kelly

Thank you so much Mani for joining us today. And thanks for your advice, and thanks for your inspiration.

Mani

Thank you very much for the opportunity.