

# Sustainability and the Marketing Strategy

Sustainability must be woven seamlessly into your marketing strategy. Want to know how? Read my top 5 tips!

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"Do well while doing good and know how to show it to the world" as taught by Harvard Business School Online. There's a huge potential for investment in the area of environmental sustainability—as much as \$ 12 billion in just 4 areas. Many companies, especially the big ones, are already underway.

Businesses have a great responsibility to make a difference in the world—in terms of changing work processes and collaboration in the arena of environmental sustainability, as well as consumer behavior. Businesses can help consumers become even more aware of the necessity to support environmentally-minded businesses. Today's consumer is very aware of environmental issues. It's this consumer that companies must attract. The right marketing strategies will attract the right consumer.

**Invest in the right marketing strategies—those focused upon sustainability.**

The company's marketing strategy, including branding and communication, must be able to clearly explain the company's environmental mission—including any ESG and CSR—in a uniform, strategic, and tailor-made way, while also differentiating the company from its competitors, and attracting and retaining employees, customers, partners and investors. Many companies focus only on "sustainable communication," and have completely forgotten the entire marketing package. Furthermore, there are some companies that have not thought about how marketing should be linked to sustainability, while others are struggling with "green-washing."

Checklist: 5 marketing tips your business should consider:

**1: Avoid green-washing**

Unfortunately, some companies are struggling with the "green-washing" phenomenon, while others believe they need to emphasize their sustainability mission by talking only about the environment and planetary goals. It doesn't have to be this way! Consumers become confused and lose confidence in companies and their marketing if all they talk about is going "green" in the same way. The first step for the company is to find the "green story" at the core of the company, and document one's "green approach," instead of inventing stories that are used exclusively for marketing and branding.

The company's marketing must give a true and loyal impression of the products and the company and must not mislead consumers without explaining how the claims are related to the company. Words such as "environmentally friendly," "green," "sustainable," "climate-correct," etc., must be explained to avoid "green-washing" accusations. Also, avoid linking "eco" to a word solely to appear environmentally conscious. Companies must focus on being honest and transparent. They must appear to be ambitious in terms of sustainability if indeed they are. If they're not entirely sustainable, and have production facilities that do not fully comply with CSR or ESG, for example, they must show they have the desire and potential to be completely sustainable, in order to gain consumer confidence, while showing that they're aware of this global problem, and working towards doing the right thing. In addition, companies' sustainable messages don't necessarily have to be communicated by classical graphic or communicative methods, which are typically linked to the environment. There may be other creative ways to promote sustainability that seem more reliable to consumers. Express your message implicitly and use symbolism!

**2: Get your marketing strategy under control**

To establish the right marketing strategy, first look at your company's business strategy. Is your business defined by clear goals and a clear vision? What values and stories do you want to tell the world about? Your business and marketing strategy should go hand-in-

hand. The marketing strategy that suits your business is based upon your goals, growth goals, resources, customers, and Unique Selling Propositions (USPs). Since sustainable change is a process embedded in the business strategy, it's also here that the company's purpose is incorporated so that it covers everything from management and strategy, to all the employees, suppliers, investors and customers / potential customers via marketing. Build your marketing strategy with the SMART concept, which offers specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely goals. Even large companies that typically have a marketing department must look through the marketing strategy in relation to the business strategy and sustainability, to be sure that sustainability and visions are rooted in the marketing strategy to optimize efforts. In this way, companies benefit more from their marketing investment.

### **3: Know your customers**

Do you know why your customers invest in your products? Do you know who your customers are? Most companies base their customer segmentation on traditional marketing methods. They divide customers by age, gender, geography, etc. However, research has shown that 90% of all buying decisions are based on unconscious, emotional sensations. Thus, only 10% of the decision is based on rational, conscious arguments such as geography, price, product range, quality and service. Therefore, understand your customers' emotional types (Emotionelle Kundentypen®) so that you can hit them correctly with tailor-made marketing techniques that don't necessarily include typical "green" elements, but which implicitly focus on sustainability.

### **4: Get control of your marketing channels**

Once you understand your customers, and have built your unique marketing strategy, you'll find which marketing channels are best for your business. Promote yourself to hit your target audience with your unique environmental message. All people are different, and so are your customers. As such, it's important to keep the focus on your customer, and market in a way that best suits them while winning their loyalty. You're not marketing the way the marketing department or management thinks looks best.

Is it exclusively online marketing you're after? Or offline too? Perhaps you need omni-channel marketing? These questions are answered once you've set up your marketing strategy and defined your customer. With today's digitalization, many companies become confused. Many believe that every business should have a Facebook page or that each one should use Google Adwords or invest in SEO—just as some think some marketing channels are better off hitting sustainable marketing and communication than others. However, this is not necessarily correct. Nor is it always the case. All marketing channels can be used to promote sustainability. It's the strategy that's different from channel to channel.

Therefore, it's important to know one's customers *and* have the right strategy in place so that companies know where to market to customers and how the message / story should be told. In this way, companies can hit the sweet spot, becoming more efficient, while not wasting time investing in the wrong marketing strategies. After all, not every company should have a Facebook page. Investing in Google Adwords may not necessarily be beneficial. And, you can't invest in SEO unless you have your entire marketing package in place first!

## **5: Know your competitors' marketing strategy**

It's not enough to know one's competitors. Companies also need to analyze competitors' marketing strategies so that they can see what competitors are doing and not doing, and outperform competitors, and differentiate from them. Companies need to remember that in most cases they're marketing to the same consumer, so it's basically about winning the consumer, and that's what you do with the right marketing strategies!