

Engaging others



'Any sustainability plan must involve communication. It's a key part of your sustainability journey.'



Tell someone who cares: communicate your commitment to sustainability

It is critical for a business to communicate its commitment to sustainability.

Customers, employees, suppliers and partners need to know what you're doing so they can contribute to your goals and benefit from your improved performance.

According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and Futerra Sustainability (Futerra) consultants, for communication regarding sustainability to work, it needs to:

- be practical
- be targeted
- raise awareness
- change attitudes
- change behaviour.

UNEP and Futerra advise that you need to:

1. **Set objectives** – set out exactly what it is that you want to achieve. If you want to reduce energy use by 5%, then say so clearly and succinctly.
2. **Define your approach** – decide your approach, know your audience and then target it with messages that will resonate. You also need to decide how long the campaign will run.
3. **Develop your message** – decide your core messages and develop them to ensure they will emotionally engage and connect with your audience.
4. **Decide the channels of communication** – exactly how are you going to reach people? You need to decide the most appropriate methods to communicate to them. A water-saving campaign, for example, could best be served by water-saving posters near sinks and taps and on the backs of toilet doors.
5. **Provide a mechanism for feedback** – if you're putting up water-saving posters, tell people who to call if they spot a leaking tap.
6. **Decide who will manage and implement the campaign** – if someone calls to report a leaking tap, they need to be able to talk with someone who then organises to fix the tap.
7. **Measure the results** – think of what you need to measure. Is it awareness, behavioural change, reductions in energy usage? Whatever it is, prior to commencing any campaign, make sure you know the baseline by which you can measure the improvements that result from that initiative.
8. **Report and evaluate** – any communication campaign needs to report and evaluate the results. This allows for continuous improvement should you wish to run the campaign on an ongoing basis.

Use positive, targeted messages tailored to your audience and test it with people in your personal network. If it doesn't work with them, then it's highly unlikely to work on your employees.

When communication is carried out well and in an integrated manner, it can bring about significant change. Any sustainability plan your business has must therefore involve communication – it's a key part of your business' sustainability journey.

Talking to customers

Sensis has decades of experience helping SMEs to effectively communicate with their customers. Research has shown that the most effective Yellow Pages® ads focus on the needs of the customer and tell them:

- what your business does
- what benefits your business provides potential customers
- why potential customers should choose you.

Telling people about your environmentally sustainable business initiatives, no matter how big or small, is a great way to open your business up to customers who make their purchasing decisions based on the sustainability credentials of a business. So make sure you're telling your employees and customers alike about all the great stuff you're doing.

Appropriately and accurately tailored sustainability messages can give you an edge when talking to customers.

Businesses with a limited advertising and marketing budget should also consider where to invest their money in order to best communicate to customers and potential customers.

The best way to ensure your business and its environmental credentials have maximum exposure among potential customers is to spread your advertising and marketing budget across multiple active information sources.

Active information sources include:

- directories
- classifieds
- websites
- search engines
- mobiles
- newspapers.

For example, if your business' advertisement is featured in a print directory, on mobile and also online – you've got more chance of engaging a potential customer than if your advertisement is only featured in one of those sources.

Avoid 'greenwash'

'Greenwash' is the term used when a business makes environmental claims about a product which, on closer examination, don't stack up.

Many cases of 'greenwash' may be the result of ignorance or sloppiness rather than malicious intent.

SMEs making 'green' claims about their products need to keep up with developments in this area. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has released a guide titled *Green Marketing and the Trade Practices Act* to help businesses understand what claims are permissible.¹²⁶

A study undertaken in 2007 by Terrachoice Environmental Marketing found that the major problems with 'greenwashing' were:

- no proof being available with regards to the claim
- vagueness about the benefit of the claim
- irrelevance of the claim
- fibbing about the benefit of the product.

Companies that deliberately mislead consumers can face criminal prosecution and significant fines. This, however, has not put companies off making green claims.

According to the consumer group Choice, there has been a significant increase in the use of green claims on product labels. Choice's view is that many claims are not supported by evidence, are irrelevant or are poorly explained.¹²⁷ This risk here, of course, is that such claims leave consumers confused.

Choice found 630 green claims in a stocktake of just 185 non-food supermarket items. These products included garbage bags, tissues, cleaners, detergents and toilet paper.

The issue is being closely monitored by the media and SMEs need to be aware that customers are becoming more educated about the issue of environmental claims. Given the heightened level of concern about 'greenwash' by the ACCC and a range of not-for-profit organisations, it pays to err on the side of caution when marketing your business' environmental initiatives.

126 *Green Marketing and the Trade Practices Act*, ACCC, 2008. See www.accc.gov.au

127 See www.choice.com.au/greenwatch

The Environmental Claims in Advertising and Marketing Code

In 2009, the advertising industry introduced a new code of practice to help ensure companies are able to back up their environmental claims.

The aim of the Environmental Claims in Advertising and Marketing Code is:

“To ensure advertisers and marketers develop and maintain rigorous standards when making Environmental Claims in Advertising and Marketing Communications and to increase consumer confidence to the benefit of the environment, consumers and industry.”

The Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA) noted consumer confidence can be undermined by generalised claims such as ‘natural’, ‘biodegradable’ and ‘environmentally friendly’. Scott McClellan, chief executive of the AANA said, “Advertisers should be encouraged to develop and promote environmentally sustainable products.” However, he stated that the claims must be “credible and legitimate.”

Under the new code, if a consumer makes a complaint to the Advertising Standards Bureau, the advertiser should be able to substantiate its claims in a timely manner.

ACCC checklist for marketers

In a media release from 2007, the ACCC stated that “in light of the growing number of complaints, the ACCC is taking a closer look at a number of the green claims being made at the moment, and all businesses need to ensure they are not misleading their customers with such claims.”

If you are going to make environmental claims on your products or in your advertising, you should note the following points from the ACCC:¹²⁸

1. Avoid using terms like ‘safe’ and ‘friendly’ and unqualified pictures or graphics. At best they are unhelpful and encourage scepticism; at worst they are misleading.
2. Spell out exactly what is beneficial about a product in plain language that consumers can understand.
3. Link the environmental benefit to a specific part of the product or its production process, such as extraction, transportation, manufacture, use, packaging or disposal.
4. Make sure any claims you make about your product can be substantiated. Think about how you would answer a query regarding the environmental benefits you are claiming about your product. For example, which scientific authority could you use to justify the basis of your claim?

Entering awards

Entering your business in awards programs can be a very rewarding process and a great way to communicate your business’ sustainability achievements.

While preparing award submissions can take some time, the end result is a thorough overview of your business’ achievements. This will allow you to identify the areas you’re doing really well in, and also where the opportunities for improvement are.

Awards programs can also provide excellent networking opportunities, positive exposure in the media and reputational benefits.

Some of the well known business awards with environmental sustainability categories in Australia include:

- Banksia Environmental Awards: www.banksiafdn.com

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- Telstra Business Awards, Sensis Social Responsibility award category: www.telstrabusinessawards.com
- United Nations Association of Australia (UNAA) World Environment Day Awards: www.unaavictoria.org.au/pages/awards-program/world-environment-day-awards.php
- Premier's Sustainability Awards (VIC): www.sustainabilityawards.vic.gov.au

The Green Cred Checklist¹²⁹

The NSW based environment group Total Environment Centre has developed a Green Cred Checklist which contains the top ten questions marketers need to answer prior to making green claims about their products or services.

Motivation and knowledge

1. Motive

Why are we making this green claim or taking a corporate position on environment or sustainability?

2. Knowledge

Are we adequately informed or skilled up to understand relevant environmental issues before making claims?

Telling the whole story

3. Truth

Telling the truth is obviously vital, as is clarity, but are you using the truth in the right way?

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4. Materiality

Building on truth, is what we're claiming material? That is, does it really matter, or is it inconsequential?

5. Full disclosure

Material omissions are a problem too, so are you sure everything significant is on the table?

Executing well

6. Life cycle

Are we looking at everything along the whole value chain and life cycle, or is something we should know invisible to us?

7. Self control

Are we sure we're not getting carried away by over-enthusiasm or our aspiration, or even by commercial rivalry?

8. Core words

Do we really understand the meaning of core words that are being used in our claims, and are we protecting their integrity?

9. Proof points

Are we backing up our claims with specific proof points that are accessible to the target audience?

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance

10. Help

If we can't answer all of the points in this checklist with confidence, who can help us to get it right?