

analysts and the market increasingly reward firms that put sustainability at the centre of their corporate strategy. But greenwashing over the past half decade have made consumers and NGOs both vigilant and skeptical of business initiatives and claims. BP's Beyond Petroleum blew up with its oil rigs in the Gulf while Wal-Mart has enjoyed grudging respect and praise for its initiatives to reduce its carbon footprint and encourage its suppliers to undertake a range of sustainable initiatives. When marketing corporate sustainability - what works is only beginning to become clear and what works is liable to change.

2. Scan "marketing corporate sustainability" for the most learning on what works. Some studies suggest that third-party announcements of awards and certificates have greater impact on share prices and self-proclaimed sustainability reporting and claims. Recent evidence suggests growing attention to corporate action on sustainability. PwC's Do investors care about sustainability? (March 2012) makes the case for seven trends that support sustainable action by corporations - and communication of those actions, by extension. Unilever is now recognized as the world leader in sustainability based on the actions that it has taken, the openness with which it is tackling major sustainability challenges and the fact that it widely publicizes its vision, bold objectives and public reporting of progress (The 2012 Sustainability Leaders report).
3. Audit what competitors are saying about their sustainability initiatives. Sustainability has become part of corporate positioning. Unilever is making sustainability a central element in its corporate branding - even though much of the impact of its products on the environment is beyond its direct control (the use of its products in showers and washing, for example). How are your competitors positioning themselves and their products in

terms of sustainability? Where is the "white space" for your company that is consistent with its history and direction? Even if you are in a conservative industry - your choices about both involvement in and promotion of sustainability will influence whether you are seen as a fast follower or industry laggard.

4. Benchmark stakeholder perceptions of your corporate sustainability performance now. Knowing how you are seen on sustainability - relative to your competitors and other leading companies - is a good place to start setting your objectives. Assess how your company's sustainability profile and position as seen by consumers, customers, shareholders and the public at large. Use these insights to gauge what you can capitalize on and what gaps you need to overcome. Since these are early days in developing sustainability credentials - there is current little correlation between public perceptions of sustainability leadership and independent audits of actual performance. But these will begin to align over the coming years and will start to shape access to capital, reputational appeal, employment appeal and related business success factors.
5. Establish your marketing objectives overall and for each target audience. With your starting points in mind; knowledge of what works based on your industry scans and stakeholder perceptions; and your overall position objectives - you are now in a position to establish your market objectives. When you stop and think about it, sustainable business practices are good for business and the communities they serve. Why would you not want to build a reputation for good business?
6. Identify marketing partners to work with to develop your messaging. Marketing corporate sustainability is relatively new. Debates about the merits of even being involved in sustainability are still raging. Finding marketing partners who have both industry

and sustainability experience can save a great deal of time and optimize your investments. Your marketing partners will be able to provide guidance on the best ways to reach your stakeholders and communicate with them effectively.

7. Pre-test major communications elements to prevent disasters and optimize success. Measure twice, cut once, save wood. Measure your communications against your own knowledge but don't stop there. The only people who can tell you what really works for your target audience are members of that audience. And pre-testing communications with them can often yield additional learning useful in your business.
8. Assess your progress over time - adjusting your strategy and tactics as needed. From time to time it is important to check in with your major stakeholders to understand what you have and have not successfully communicated - and how their expectations have changed overtime. How else do you know how you are doing in marketing your corporate sustainability performance?

Once you have worked through this eight-step process it is time to start over again. Chances are the climate will have changed and the practice evolved. **BS&S**

Peter Love, Bill Ratcliffe and Yasmin Glanville are founding directors of Rethink Sustainability Initiatives. Peter is an Adjunct Professor at York University's Faculty of Environmental Studies and is the former Chief energy Conservation Officer of Ontario. Bill is an Adjunct Professor, with University of Waterloo's School of Environment, Enterprise and Development and CEO of Collected Conscience, a market research firm focused on understanding corporate sustainability and other marketing issues. Yasmin Glanville is the Founder and President of Rethink Sustainability Initiatives and President of CTR Inc, a communication firm serving global and local clients seeking a new phase of profitable growth, innovation and sustainability.