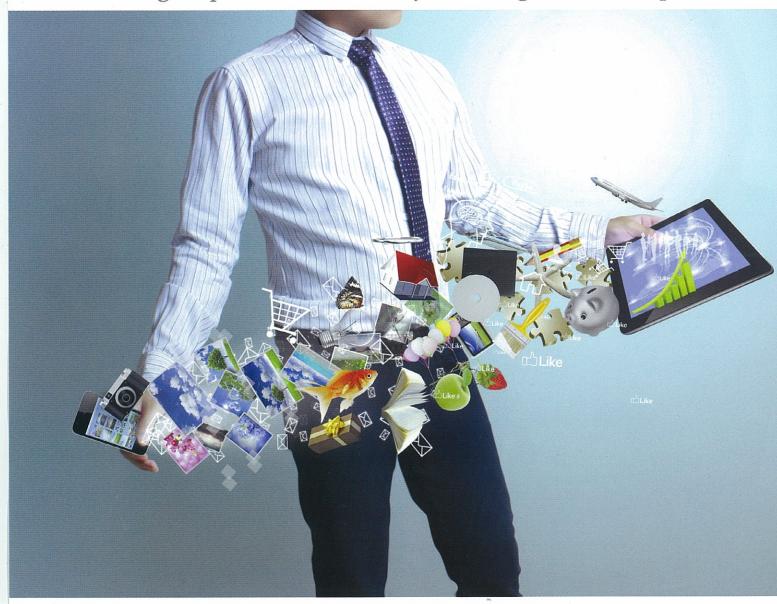
The green plan

Harnessing the power of sustainability marketing and leadership



This is the third article in a series designed to assist you in the design, implementation, marketing and verification of your company's sustainability journey. The first two summarized the main steps in the design and implementation of your sustainability program; this article focuses on ensuring your program is successfully and effectively marketed - externally.

Developing your sustainability plan, recruiting champions, integrating sustainability into the corporate culture is primary and on-going. Marketing your

company's sustainability journey externally starts with asking "What should we say to whom?" – followed by "Why?" and "How?"

Like speaking out in a crowd, all external marketing raises the company's profile, whether it involves advertising, PR, industry presentation or the use of social media. What you have to say will resonate well with some in the audience and serve as a red flag for others. You need to be prepared for the attention and the range of responses you receive. The following steps will help.

sustainability is an evolving and labile area of corporate practice. Since Rachel Carson's book "The Silent Spring" there has been an ebb and flow of interest in environmental degradation of our sustainability as a species. In the last few years, leading businesses have picked up the torch on sustainability – in part because more sustainable business practices can save money in the near term, reduce risk and add financial stability over the longer term. Business

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).
- 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

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