

HOW BRANDS CAN MESSAGE GREEN CHEMISTRY TO THE CONSUMER





INTRODUCTION

“Sustainability” has evolved into more than a buzzword. With ethical consumption and climate change top of mind for many, brands in every industry face continually increasing demand from consumers to take concrete, quantifiable, and transparent action on sustainability.

“Green” consumers have come firmly into the mainstream, and they increasingly base their purchasing decisions on a brand’s demonstrable commitment to sustainability.

To succeed in this continually evolving consumer environment, brands need to develop effective, conscious messaging, and support that messaging with action.

Modern consumers, with vast networks of information at their fingertips, need reliable evidence that a brand’s actions live up to its words. The key to successful sustainability messaging is to start taking steps towards real action.

THE MODERN CONSUMER MINDSET

Corporate social responsibility – including reducing environmental impacts, taking climate action, and improving ethical practice – has become one of the strongest driving forces behind consumer decisions.

Understanding this trend is crucial for any brand looking to effectively demonstrate its sustainability leadership and connect with global consumers.

There is huge demand, particularly among younger consumers, for mainstream brands to operate ethically and minimize their environmental impact. 85% of millennials, 80% of Gen Z-ers and 79% of Gen X-ers believe that it is “extremely” or “very” important that companies implement programs to improve the environment¹. Companies targeting these demographics may be disregarded by consumers if they do not set goals, take action, and communicate effectively around ethical and environmental issues.

This shifting demand has resonated, and as a result the sustainable fashion market is expanding at an impressive rate. In 2018, US consumers spent a total of \$128.5 billion on sustainable fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) products, the category that includes clothing and fashion products. This growth in sales of sustainable products was four times faster than the growth in sales of other products between 2014-2018. By 2021, total spending is expected to rise to around \$150 billion².

Many brands have already begun marketing their commitment to sustainability. However, this is not enough to sway educated consumers. 90% of millennials cite “authenticity” as a significant factor in deciding which brands to support³. If a brand’s marketing does not align

with its behavior, consumers are unlikely to convert to purchasing from that brand or remain loyal to it. This practice of expressing ethical intentions without providing transparency or action, known as “greenwashing”, fails to persuade consumers that a brand is acting in line with its purported values⁴. Consumers are demanding evidence.



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DEMONSTRATING COMMITMENT THROUGH ACTION



Sustainably-minded consumers seek authentic proof of positive action before shifting their perspective of (and investment in) a brand.

How can a brand prove to consumers that it lives up to their high standards for sustainability? What evidence can brands provide to communicate their achievements, and stand out from the competition?

While 72% of companies mention the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in their annual reporting, only 27% detail tactics for working to meet the SDGs in their business strategy⁵. Consumers recognize this disconnect between words and action, and may harbor skepticism towards corporate promises of sustainability. To address these attitudes, a brand must live up to its claims around

sustainability -- and go beyond them.

While any action taken to improve the sustainability of a company's operations is better than none, consumers do not look favorably upon brands that do the bare minimum. For example, using recyclable materials, thereby pushing responsibility for reducing waste onto the buyer, is not sufficient improvement in the eyes of the waste-conscious consumer⁶. Brands who stand out are those that exceed expectations by setting ambitious goals, showing real progress, and providing transparency about their path towards meeting them.

Goals that have proven to be particularly effective for pioneering brands include:

► Big Picture Commitments

The idea of sustainability is inextricably tied up with five main metrics: waste generation, energy use, water use, safe chemistry, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. At minimum, responsible brands are expected to make commitments to generate reductions in these five areas. Brands that report on specific, science-based, and scheduled commitments that meet or exceed global standards will see the greatest benefits. Many successful brands use third-party software solutions such as [CleanChain](#), an ADEC Innovation⁷, to help them facilitate delivering against those commitments and communicate their successes.

► Responsible, Ethical Products

Many consumers use fashion as a form of self-expression. They may be drawn to brands innovating to create the products they love with sustainable alternatives to existing materials and manufacturing processes.

► Support of Local Communities

Consumers recognize that smaller-scale, local initiatives are often less intensive in terms of resource use and emissions than larger-scale initiatives. Manufacturing products locally within the areas in which they will be sold is often well-received, even by consumers who are not part of these communities. Responsible manufacturing, that respects local communities and avoids polluting local environments, is another impactful way to build consumer confidence. Consumers may also be excited by local R&D projects that create new products or solutions that can be scaled up and replicated for wider use. The future of innovation is local.





MEETING HIGH CONSUMER STANDARDS

Many high-profile brands are already enacting strategies to message their environmental credentials to consumers.

Adidas

In 2018, sportswear giant Adidas made an ambitious commitment, pledging that they will only be using recycled plastics in all their shoes and clothing by 2024⁸. This commitment was backed up with specific targets, including confirmation that 50% of the material currently used in Adidas products is polyester, and that Adidas aims to sell 11 million pairs of shoes made with recycled plastics in 2019⁹. By communicating these headlines via press releases and social media, while also providing a high level of detail on their website¹⁰, Adidas sent a clear message to consumers that they are already aware of how far they have to go, have set clear and intentional targets, and have outlined the actionable steps to meet them by 2024.

Marks & Spencer

In 2017, UK retail giant Marks & Spencer, began an ambitious project of work with local communities across the UK¹¹. They set the goal of helping to transform 1,000 communities by 2025, primarily through

employee initiatives that give M&S staff paid time off for volunteering, match their donations to fundraising groups, and recognize their achievements with awards. Since then, they have made significant progress. Their #MarksInAction volunteer week in June 2019 saw nearly 5,000 volunteers working with over 450 organizations that support young people in Britain and Ireland¹². M&S are also working on providing benefits to local communities in other ways, making space available for community groups in many of their stores, and awarding funding to community renewable energy projects.

Patagonia

Patagonia brought sustainable innovation to local communities across multiple continents in 2016 with their 'Worn Wear Tour'. The Tour offered free repairs on broken zips, rips, tears, buttons, pulls, and more, regardless of brand, as well as upskilling communities by educating them on how to do these repairs themselves¹³. This worldwide yet localized initiative demonstrates that major brands can make large-scale statements about slow fashion and the circular economy while working on the individual scale.

BEYOND GREENWASHING

Consumers that factor sustainability and ethics into their purchasing decisions are becoming a large proportion of many brands' consumer bases -- and that trend is predicted to continue.

Reaching out to these consumers and standing apart in a crowded industry can be challenging. Consumers are looking for environmental and ethical leadership, and effectively messaging that position is key.

Brands that set definite and detailed goals, enact strategies to support local communities, and pioneer innovation in sustainable alternatives are well positioned

to improve their reputation in a sustainability-minded market. Environmentally and socially conscious messaging may be perceived as greenwashing if it is not backed up by tangible, measurable action. Brands should take steps towards real action on sustainability and communicate them effectively to improve perception among sustainability-minded modern consumers.



ADEC Innovations ESG Solutions advances sustainable practices around the world, and helps organizations responsibly grow and operation.

CleanChain, an ADEC Innovation, is an award-winning chemical management system that aligns with your current processes and streamlines the process of tracking, managing, and reporting compliance with Manufacturing Restricted Substance Lists (MRSLs) and controls limits.

CleanChain can help you:

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- ▶ Reduce costs and burden of aggregating supply chain data
- ▶ Understand and reduce risks across your supply base
- ▶ Implement and track corrective and preventive actions across your supply chain
- ▶ Make more informed procurement decisions
- ▶ Demonstrate progress against your sustainability goals

For more information, visit [cleanchain.com](https://www.cleanchain.com)

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