



HALFWAY THROUGH THE

GREEN DECADE

Communicating effectively at a time of
global systemic transformation

ZENO

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

It has been a privilege to work with Zeno Communications on this report – and I don't think it could have come at a more important time.

Sustainability is one of the most business-critical issues of our time, and we need to keep up the momentum in tackling that challenge. Addressing short-term calls to pull back from decarbonisation requires a clear and persuasive narrative. *Halfway Through the Green Decade* gives you the tools to do that.

The business arguments for tackling environmental degradation and climate change are clear and growing—just ask any Los Angeles Business owner. However, when competing priorities appear, it is easy to forget just how critical it is that we all continue to work tirelessly and collaboratively to ensure we can still do business 20 years from now. It really is that important.

This report is most useful in helping reframe conceptual arguments into clear business imperatives and actions.

Tackling the climate crisis is not only about doing the right thing; it is also about effective business risk management, waste (and therefore cost) reduction, reputational risk management, business continuity and a reduction in disruptive events.

It's about maintaining a healthy and productive workforce and securing the supply chains we all need to do business.

If we all follow the advice laid out here, I have no doubt we can reduce risk, increase our profits and build safer and more desirable workplaces. Something I think even the most cynical amongst us would have trouble arguing against.



Mike Penrose

Co-Founder of FuturePlus
and The Sustainability Group
Former CEO of Unicef UK.

PART ONE

The Status Quo

Midway through the 2020s we are at an environmental inflection point. The best intentions at the outset of the Green Decade, which framed the rush to corporate sustainability commitments, have been eroded. So much so that that the entire ambition to report on – and be held accountable for – progress towards those targets is at risk. As companies revise prior commitments, the Green Decade is under threat from an emerging phenomenon: the Green Vacuum.

A significant number of European companies (at least a quarter and, in some sectors such as transportation and construction, up to 70%^[1]) are falling behind on sustainability goals. Amid economic and political turbulence, they are reassessing priorities and playing for time by pledging – and *doing* – less.

2024 was a year of global systemic transformation, punctuated by more than 80 national elections and a record number of armed conflicts. Meanwhile, as

the task of balancing the books becomes ever more complex, many companies are opting to take a step back and review their sustainability commitments. They are, quite understandably, playing it safe.

And herein lies the problem: taking a step back is a valid tactic, but it is not a strategy. At some point soon, decisions must be made, and that challenge informs our approach to this document. We set out to ask one fundamental question, with communications at its heart.

How can companies communicate sustainability decisions in a complex world which requires them to balance immediate profit demands with longer-term brand resilience?

By exploring the origins of this phenomenon, its challenges and the shifting dynamics of responsibility, our aim is to provide imperatives for communication professionals to consider as they recalibrate their strategies.

Catalysts of Change: Why 2010 marked a turning point

The seeds of the Green Decade were sown in the 2010s, as awareness of climate risks intensified alongside stark scientific warnings. Events such as the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, Australian bushfires and the landmark Paris Agreement highlighted both systemic environmental vulnerabilities and opportunities for global collaboration.

For businesses, these triggers coincided with shifts in public sentiment. Consumers, particularly younger generations, demanded accountability and took to the streets. Meanwhile investors increasingly factored environmental, social, and governance (ESG) metrics into their calculations. Many companies responded by boldly embedding sustainability into their strategies – both as an existential imperative and a clear competitive advantage.



[1] European Commission report on Scope 3 emissions



Climate Catastrophes and Emerging Challenges

The years since then have magnified the sense of urgency, with escalating disasters and further compelling scientific data amidst political upheaval. 2024 was confirmed by the Copernicus Climate Change Service to be the warmest year on record globally, and the first calendar year in which the average global temperature averaged more than 1.5°C (around 1.6°C) above its pre-industrial level.

The 1.5°C figure has become a powerful symbol in international climate negotiations ever since it was agreed as a collective global target in Paris in 2015. Crossing that Rubicon has overwhelmed many and fuelled despair, contributing in some cases to the narrative that it is inevitable we will exceed our planetary limits across multiple fronts – from climate change to ocean acidification and biodiversity loss. And that, when we do, there can be no safe and just future for humanity.

Economic uncertainty has only served to compound these challenges. A cost-of-living crisis shifted immediate priorities, often at the expense of sustainability. Yet consumer demand for green solutions persists. Kantar data shows the proportion of eco-active consumers – those whose purchases are

highly motivated by sustainability – grew to 28% across Europe in 2023 (+7% year-on-year). This means more than a quarter of Europeans are now eco activists – a trend expected to accelerate towards 2030.

Further research, by PwC, found that;

A solid majority (80%) of consumers say they're willing to pay up to 5% extra for locally sourced or made products.

One in four will pay up to 10% - and one in 20 will pay even more than that.

The significance of this for business is clear and invites candid reflection. Are sustainability pledges yielding measurable outcomes? What new risks have emerged? One way or another, decision-makers must find a way of balancing regulatory compliance, stakeholder demands and operational realities while maintaining agility in a volatile environment.

The Business Implications of Fractured European Cooperation

Global cooperation on climate change has broken, with geopolitical conflicts and domestic priorities hindering alignment. The United States withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, for the second time in three Presidential terms, is another substantial setback. In November 2024 a delegation of developing nations walked out of the COP 27 summit, demanding a bigger Loss and Damage fund.

A similar story has unfolded in Europe, with countries such as Poland, which are heavily reliant on coal, resisting EU-wide efforts to impose stricter emissions reduction targets. This fragmentation complicates sustainability efforts for businesses which operate across Europe and rely on regulatory stability and international frameworks.

Public trust presents another challenge. While governments are often perceived as the primary agents of change, trust in them is low. A 2024 survey by the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that 44% of respondents felt this way.

Many people simply do not believe governments will take the necessary action to effect real change. Yet conversely, trust is higher for businesses, while expectations are lower. This paradox requires companies to balance leadership with advocacy for stronger policy support.

One thing is clear, however: while it may make business sense to keep your counsel, elsewhere your consumers and stakeholders are hearing a different story. Multiple surveys have found the same results. The PwC report cited above found that;

85% of the public, globally, believe they have been directly affected by the climate crisis.

YouGov research shows the same proportion in the UK believe the climate is changing – and that 68% say the crisis is man-made.



Stakeholder Expectations and Commercial Imperatives

Shareholders increasingly tie company valuations to sustainability performance. Businesses which fail to meet these expectations risk reputational and financial setbacks, while those excelling can still leverage sustainability as a competitive edge.

Consumers, too, demand honesty, even about setbacks. Proactively talking about problems can transform sustainability challenges into opportunities for trust-building. Conversely, businesses that hide or fail to address gaps in their efforts are susceptible to the Green Vacuum, which influential agents will fill with their own invariably negative narrative.

Meanwhile the business landscape, in terms of progress towards sustainability goals, has deteriorated. The Ipsos ESG Council – a collection of sustainability specialists from companies including Unilever, Diageo and BNP Paribas – recently reported that 55% of members feel corporate leaders are diluting their ESG commitments. Almost half (45%) say they spend more time on reporting requirements than on actual ESG priorities.

So we can see that the challenges of the next five years are both undeniable and unavoidable, in the heightened context of a new US administration – one which has emboldened loud but minority-held views on the environment. There is consensus that something must be done to tackle the climate crisis – but real disagreement about what that action should be. This is when organisations need strong leadership.

Only by embracing thoughtful, strategic decisions can companies balance immediate needs with long-term aspirations. Their task is to weigh risks and rewards, navigate uncertainty and chart a course that aligns profit with purpose.

55%

**OF MEMBERS FEEL
CORPORATE LEADERS
ARE DILUTING THEIR
ESG COMMITMENTS**

PART TWO

**COMMUNICATING
SUSTAINABILITY**



Telling the Story

By serving as the conduit between organisational objectives and stakeholder engagement, communications professionals play a pivotal role. The initial wave of enthusiasm generated by ambitious sustainability commitments has given way to the reality of delivering on those promises.

Finding the language to address this stark reality is no easy feat. It means either transforming commitments into actionable outcomes or, where necessary, candidly addressing where goals may no longer be attainable **[SEE CASE STUDY ONE]**. Think carefully about what you are going to say – but say something or critics will fill the vacuum with their own views.

CASE STUDY ONE



Iceland

Palm oil is a significant sustainability issue, associated with deforestation, loss of biodiversity, carbon emissions, soil and water pollution and peatland destruction. So Iceland was rightly proud of its commitment, in 2018, to stop using palm oil in its own brand products.

Four years later, when Russia invaded Ukraine, sunflower oil supplies were hit hard – and palm oil was the only viable alternative. On the horns of this dilemma, Iceland's comms strategy was to be direct, making a U-turn on their pledge for commercial reasons, but explaining why.

Learning: Hypocrisy isn't saying one thing and doing another; it's claiming to believe one thing and doing another. Iceland's statement was clear and direct: they still opposed palm oil, but with no other option had to use it to ensure affordable food on the shelves.

Bridging Strategy with Opportunity

Responsible communication strategies integrate data-driven decisions with both financial and environmental objectives. Public expectation halfway through the Green Decade demands that innovation be framed as a practical, actionable solution rather than an abstract ideal. And for those willing to adapt and lead, this challenging period remains one of immense potential.

The halfway point also highlights the dual pressures of increased legislation and compliance requirements, alongside growing consumer and stakeholder interest in the specifics of corporate sustainability actions.

For example, the European Union has implemented strict climate legislation, including the Fit for 55 package, aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030. In the UK it is mandatory for large companies and financial institutions to disclose climate-related risks and opportunities, in line with the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).

Amid this complex landscape, communicators must act as strategic enablers, ensuring that sustainability efforts are communicated with clarity, accuracy and sensitivity to stakeholder expectations.

The role of communication in this context is to translate organisational efforts into stories of progress and accountability, fostering trust and encouraging engagement across audiences.



Reshaping the Narrative

Communication teams are uniquely placed to reshape sustainability narratives so they reflect reality while protecting corporate reputation. Acknowledging that certain objectives may not be met is not a sign of failure but an opportunity to demonstrate honesty and recalibrate ambitions. By framing these moments as steps towards learning and growth, organisations can reinforce trust and credibility.

For example, openly discussing challenges **[SEE CASE STUDY TWO]** – whether due to unforeseen technological, economic, or logistical barriers – can strengthen stakeholder relationships. This level of candour, combined with a clear plan to refocus efforts, signals a genuine commitment to progress. Communicators can leverage these moments to highlight incremental achievements and reinforce the organisation’s dedication to its overarching sustainability mission.



CASE STUDY TWO



LEGO

In 2023 Lego halted its efforts to replace Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) plastic with plant-based alternatives derived from sugarcane. The company openly stated that the plant-based plastic alternatives had a higher carbon footprint in production and could not yet meet quality, safety and sustainability criteria.

Learning: While some environmental advocates expressed disappointment, being open about the hurdles led to a generally positive response. And six months later the LEGO Group was recognised as the most reputable company globally for the second consecutive year, according to the annual Global RepTrak®100 survey.

One of the most powerful tools at a communicator’s disposal is the ability to humanise sustainability efforts. Stakeholders connect more deeply with authentic and relatable stories. By sharing both the triumphs and setbacks along the way, companies can build empathy and enhance engagement.

Highlighting employee contributions to sustainability initiatives – or detailing specific hurdles that have been overcome – brings the dryest strategy to life.

Take Microsoft, which has committed to becoming carbon negative by 2030 and removing all historical carbon emissions by 2050.

To reinforce these commitments, the company actively engages employees in sustainability efforts through internal initiatives and fosters innovation in environmental technology. As a result it is respected by employees and consumers alike for leadership in corporate sustainability.



Building Positive Reputation from the Inside Out

Scrutiny of greenwashing has never been greater than it is today. Regulators, consumers and advocacy groups demand visibility of sustainability policies and actions – and hold businesses accountable for their claims. As such, sustainability messaging must be both accurate and backed by evidence. This not only safeguards against reputational risks but also positions the organisation as a leader in responsible communication.

A compelling sustainability narrative has the potential to inspire both internal and external audiences. Internally, it can galvanise employees, encouraging them to actively

participate in sustainability initiatives and building a shared sense of purpose. Externally, it can strengthen bonds with customers and investors who increasingly prioritise environmental and social responsibility.

Ultimately, whether a company is excelling or encountering obstacles, its communications strategy should focus on meaningful engagement and projecting a narrative of resilience, progress and innovation. By embracing openness, celebrating milestones and remaining adaptable, communicators can turn sustainability challenges into opportunities.

PART THREE

THE FOUNDATIONS OF EFFECTIVE COMMS

Transformative Language

Language shapes perception, and impactful sustainability communication requires words that inspire action and connection. Overused buzzwords risk losing meaning and credibility, so a refreshed lexicon can reinvigorate the conversation.

Terms like “regenerative” convey a sense of restoration and renewal, going beyond sustainability to highlight the active rebuilding of ecosystems and communities. Phrases such as “climate crisis” emphasise urgency, while referring to individuals as “citizens” rather than “consumers” fosters a sense of shared responsibility and collective effort.

By reframing the language of sustainability, organisations can inspire proactive behaviours and align stakeholders around a vision for meaningful change. For a more detailed breakdown of transformative language, see our **New English Dictionary of Sustainability** overleaf.

Narrative Consistency

Crafting a compelling sustainability narrative is a powerful way to engage both internal and external stakeholders. The strength of this narrative, however, lies in its consistent delivery. A cohesive message, maintained over time and integrated into the broader organisational story, ringfences authenticity and amplifies impact.

Consistency means weaving the sustainability narrative into every relevant communication channel, from marketing campaigns and investor updates to employee newsletters and social media posts. It cannot be a one-off effort or tied to a single event.

Instead, it must serve as a cornerstone of the company’s communication strategy. This unified approach builds trust and credibility, making sustainability an integral part of the organisation’s identity rather than a fleeting trend or afterthought.



The New English Dictionary of Sustainability

“Regenerative” over “Sustainable”

While “sustainable” implies maintaining the status quo, “regenerative” suggests restoring and improving ecosystems.

“Planet-Friendly” rather than “Eco-Friendly”

“Planet-friendly” broadens the scope to include all aspects of Earth’s (planetary system) well-being.

“Visibility” over “Transparency”

Transparency still suggests a barrier, or window of some transparent kind, whereas visibility offers a clear view.

“Conscious Consumption” instead of “Ethical Consumption”

“Conscious consumption” highlights awareness and intentionality in purchasing decisions, encouraging individuals to consider the broader impact of their choices.

“Climate Action” instead of “Environmental Protection”

“Climate action” suggests proactive steps to combat climate issues, whereas “environmental protection” can imply a more passive approach.

“Climate Crisis” instead of “Climate Change”

The term “climate crisis” conveys a sense of urgency and the need for immediate action, whereas “climate change” can seem more gradual and less pressing.

“Circular Economy” in place of “Recycling”

“Circular economy” encompasses a comprehensive system of reusing, refurbishing and recycling materials, promoting a closed-loop system that minimises waste. “Pre-Loved” also elevates reused products.

“Low-Carbon” over “Green”

“Low-carbon” specifically addresses the reduction of carbon emissions, whereas “green” is a more general term.

“Nature-Based Solutions” rather than “Environmental Solutions”

This term emphasises leveraging natural processes to address environmental challenges, promoting harmony with ecosystems.

“Citizen” over “Consumer”

As it emphasises active participation and responsibility, not simply consumption.

Open Communications

Openness (not transparency – a term which has been devalued by overuse) is a fundamental element of effective sustainability communication, particularly when goals are not met. Openly addressing setbacks demonstrates honesty and reinforces the organisation’s commitment to improvement. Pairing openness with a clear action plan to address challenges ensures that the message remains constructive and forward-looking.

Many organisations started their sustainability journeys with ambitious targets driven by the urgency of the climate crisis. As real-world obstacles – whether technological, economic,

or logistical – emerged, achieving these goals proved more difficult than anticipated. Communicating these challenges openly, alongside revised targets and actionable next steps, highlights resilience and builds trust.

This approach also emphasises the collective nature of sustainability. Systemic change cannot occur in isolation; organisations face similar hurdles and collaboration is key. By sharing both successes and challenges, companies can demystify the process and position themselves as responsible, credible leaders in the sustainability space.

Human-centric Storytelling

Stories with a human touch resonate far more deeply than abstract data or statistics. By spotlighting individuals within the organisation who are driving sustainability initiatives, companies can create narratives that are relatable and inspiring.

These stories could feature employees innovating sustainable solutions, championing green practices, or leading impactful projects. Accompanied by engaging visuals, these narratives can be tailored to different platforms and audiences. Similarly, telling stories which engage the public directly can challenge negative preconceptions, turning perceived weaknesses into strengths **[SEE CASE STUDY THREE].**

CASE STUDY THREE

Andel, Windy Retreats

The Danish energy firm Andel let the public stay in holiday lets near wind turbines to demonstrate that, contrary to sceptics’ insistence, turbines are not noisy. Their approach amply demonstrated that if you have confidence in your proof points – and they are genuine – proactivity works.

Learning: Allowing consumers and stakeholders to experience your work first hand creates trust and moves beyond a mere assertion. Following Andel’s activation, one in six Danes said they felt more positive about turbines.

Humanising the sustainability journey demonstrates the organisation’s commitment on a personal level, fostering stronger emotional connections with stakeholders.

Leaders' Voices

The most important humans in a communications arsenal are spokespeople in the senior leadership team. Securing their buy-in and vocal support is critical, and often one of the more challenging tasks comms professionals will face.

CEOs have competing priorities – many of which are mandated under corporate governance laws – and will hold personal views about the climate crisis. To bring them on board, comms teams must build a compelling case and emphasise the importance of consistent sustainability messaging.

One of the best ways to tackle this often delicate task is through messaging training. A step beyond regular media training, effective sessions delve deep into the macro context and work hard to explain why it is important to communicate openly on sustainability matters.

The best thought-out messaging is quickly undermined by an unconvincing or undisciplined spokesperson. Time invested in training pays dividends over the long run.



PART FOUR

TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR ENGAGEMENT

Effective engagement requires a deep understanding of where stakeholders and broader audiences interact with content, then tailoring approaches that resonate with each. By aligning channels, content and storytelling tactics, you will meet the varied expectations of today's audience.



The Importance of Crisis Preparedness in Communicating Sustainability Goals

In today's hyper-connected world, sustainability goals are under constant scrutiny. For brands in the media spotlight, even minor missteps in sustainability efforts can lead to reputational crises, undermining hard-earned trust. Proactive crisis preparedness is essential to protect your brand's reputation and maintain credibility.

The stakes are high when communicating sustainability. Consumers, investors and civil society expect visibility, authenticity and measurable progress. When these expectations aren't met, or when unforeseen challenges arise, a lack of preparedness can amplify reputational threats. Preparing for such moments ensures that your sustainability narrative remains resilient, even under scrutiny.

Steps to Protect Brand Reputation

Conduct a Risk Assessment

Identify potential vulnerabilities in your sustainability initiatives, from supply chain issues to ambitious targets that may face delays.

Evaluate how these risks might be perceived by different stakeholders.

Develop Clear Messaging Frameworks

Create a messaging "playbook" that anticipates tough questions and outlines responses rooted in openness. Be prepared to acknowledge challenges while emphasizing ongoing commitment and concrete actions to address them.

Train Your Spokespeople

Equip leaders and spokespeople with the skills to respond confidently and consistently during crises. Media training and scenario-based rehearsals ensure they can effectively communicate your brand's sustainability story under pressure.

Engage Stakeholders Early

Build relationships with key stakeholders, such as journalists, NGOs and industry partners, before crises occur. Creating social capital with these allies can provide validation and support when your initiatives come under scrutiny.

Monitor and Respond Proactively

Implement robust monitoring tools to track public sentiment and emerging issues. Quick, proactive responses can prevent minor concerns from escalating into major reputational threats.





Framing your Sustainability Narrative: Turning Stakeholders into Allies and Advocates

A successful sustainability narrative is more than just words – it's a call to action that inspires stakeholders to actively participate in your sustainability journey. Framing your sustainability narrative is about moving beyond traditional communication, creating a dialogue and fostering genuine partnerships.

The strength of your stakeholder relationships directly impacts your organisation's ability to navigate reputational challenges. Tailored engagement strengthens trust and transforms stakeholders into advocates who vouch for your authenticity during moments of scrutiny. For instance, consumers who are emotionally invested in your sustainability initiatives are more likely to defend your efforts publicly, while partners and civil society groups can provide third-party validation of your efforts.

Start from Within: Employees as Ambassadors

Advocacy begins internally. Employees are a company's most authentic and influential ambassadors. Empowering them with the knowledge, tools and opportunities to champion sustainability enhances credibility and fosters shared ownership.

Celebrate employees' contributions through storytelling, recognition programmes and training initiatives. For instance, highlight teams that have implemented innovative eco-friendly practices or reduced resource use. Personal stories create emotional connections, transforming sustainability from a corporate goal into a shared mission. By fostering pride and ownership, employees become passionate advocates, sharing their experiences with colleagues, customers and the broader community.

Bespoke Engagement with Key Audiences

While employees play a central role, building strong relationships with external stakeholders is equally crucial. Each audience requires a tailored approach to foster deeper connections and maximise engagement.

Partners and Suppliers

Collaboration is key. Share co-branded success stories that showcase joint sustainability achievements, such as reducing emissions in the supply chain or developing eco-friendly products. These stories not only inspire but also position your organisation as a leader in fostering innovation through partnership.

Consumers

Invite them to join the journey. Campaigns that encourage participation – such as eco-challenges, upcycling competitions, or user-generated content initiatives – build a sense of community and shared responsibility. These efforts engage consumers emotionally, making them feel like active contributors to your sustainability goals.

Civil Society

A structured, global approach to engaging with civil society transforms potential sceptics into allies. With Zeno's Allies & Advocates programme, organisations now have a comprehensive framework to identify, map and engage with civil society. This programme enables organisations to pinpoint key partners – such as environmental organisations, local communities or advocacy groups – who align with their mission and sustainability goals.

By involving these groups early and collaborating on meaningful projects, organisations can forge powerful partnerships that enhance credibility and expand influence.

An ALLY is in your corner, sharing your interest or mission, while an ADVOCATE publicly stands with you and for you, driving meaningful impact and sustainable progress.

This approach builds trust and positions sustainability as a collective movement that benefits all, while helping to navigate challenges effectively. As a strategic asset, Allies & Advocates extends influence beyond traditional communication channels, by building new communities of support.

Underpinned by advanced technology and artificial intelligence, Allies & Advocates provides a structured method to empower organisations with the tools and strategies needed to engage civil society effectively.



Cross-Channel Storytelling: Bespoke Stories for the Right Channels

Not all audiences consume content in the same way, nor do they interact with brands in the same spaces. Brands must:

Identify audience platforms and content consumption habits

Understand where key decision-makers, partners and wider audiences engage, whether it's LinkedIn for professionals, X/Bluesky for policymakers or Instagram/TikTok for younger audiences.

Tailor the message to the audience

Recognise where core stakeholders engage versus where broader audiences are likely to interact with your content. For instance, professionals on LinkedIn seek in-depth thought leadership, while younger audiences on TikTok prefer short, engaging visuals.

Contextualise their role

Showcase not only what your organisation is doing but why it matters in the bigger picture of addressing the climate crisis and driving systemic change.

Customise storytelling for each channel

Tailor narratives to match how audiences consume content, whether it's long-form articles for websites, quick updates on social media or immersive visual content for YouTube.

Create a cohesive journey

Move beyond individual campaigns to tell a comprehensive sustainability story that aligns all actions, data points and goals under a unified narrative.

This approach ensures sustainability isn't presented as an isolated initiative but an integral part of your brand's identity. A channel-first approach ensures sustainability messages resonate deeply, enhancing both relevance and impact.

Content Formats: Building a Full Picture with the Right Tools

Different formats allow brands to communicate sustainability in ways that are meaningful and effective for various audiences. Key strategies include:

Long-form formats (e.g., documentary-style videos or white papers)

These provide depth, showing the complexities of sustainability efforts and the people behind the initiatives.

Short-form formats (e.g., reels, infographics)

Perfect for social media, these formats capture attention quickly while delivering key highlights of sustainability efforts

Audio formats (e.g., podcasts)

Enable deep dives into specific topics, offering insights from leaders and experts.

Interactive content (e.g., quizzes, live Q&A sessions)

Encourages direct audience engagement, turning communication into a two-way dialogue.

Each format serves a distinct purpose but should collectively contribute to building a comprehensive, multi-layered sustainability narrative.



PART FIVE

CONCLUSION: WHAT THIS
MEANS AND WHAT SHOULD
YOU DO

To Paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr

“The arc of corporate sustainability is long, but it bends towards net zero.” Instilling sustainable principles – and furthermore acting on them – is no easy task, but those businesses unwilling to adapt ultimately risk obsolescence.

Crucially, there is no off-the-peg solution. Every single company must evaluate its own unique context to balance profit and progress.

To test the tenets of our report, we commissioned research to examine consumer expectations on the nexus of sustainability and trust. The outcome was clear and unequivocal.

A significant majority of respondents (83%) told us that communication of sustainability goals is important, with a third stating this is “extremely important”. While there are some variables – for example women are more concerned than men and one in five of those aged over 46 did not regard it as important – the strong indication was that open communication of sustainability efforts is crucial for building consumer trust.

Silence comes at a cost.

Half of respondents (49%) have a negative perception of companies that remain silent on sustainability efforts, feeling either suspicious (40%) or losing trust (19%).

Notably, only one in five respondents find this silence understandable in the current sociopolitical environment. Doubling down on this, more than half indicated they would be unlikely to continue purchasing from companies that go silent.

The remaining 49.6% said they would continue buying from the same companies, showing a nearly even split in purchasing decisions. But however you interpret the data, there is a clear risk of losing a substantial portion of your customer base.

If what you say does not align with their view, they are vocal about being prepared to look elsewhere.

So the conclusion is clear. In a market increasingly driven by consumer awareness of environmental issues, effective sustainability communication is essential for brands to differentiate themselves and ensure long-term success.



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