WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF A GREEN INNOVATION REVOLUTION. IT’S ALREADY STARTED IN FACT.

- John Grant
Sustainability is an ubiquitous term no one can elude today, neither consumers nor businesses. The idea of producing and consuming without harming any ecological or social systems has been lurking into our lives since the 1970’s. Now its presence has become so loud that we simply can’t ignore it. Equally, fashion couldn’t escape its influence. In fact, this industry is quite a bad guy. It is recognised as the second largest polluting industry worldwide (beaten only by oil)*. So ‘greening’ fashion could significantly impact the health of our planet. Yet, other industries have been much more successful in mainstreaming their green products (think of organic food).

SO WHAT IS GOING WRONG HERE?

One main reason for the aggravated take-up is a rather negative public image sustainable fashion is left with. Add to this the prior not-so-effective approach to promoting green fashion to the mainstream consumer and you have the answer. Luckily, you are holding this guide to tell you how to turn things around. How can you improve your customers’ perception of sustainable fashion, make it more attractive, promote it more effectively, and, ultimately contribute to a greener fashion industry?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lisa Schneider is an International Fashion & Management student at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute.

Her passion in the industry grew into finding solutions for the sustainable business of tomorrow. She believes in sustainability not only as an inevitable necessity to sustain our planet, but also as a way to produce and consume more efficiently, to innovate lifestyles and to inspire people.

* Stewart, E., (2012); Fashioning change, (2012)
This guide has been specifically developed for high street fashion retailers targeting the broad market of mainstream consumers. Why?

Because sustainable fashion needs to get pulled out of its niche in order to experience a wider take-up (the sustainable fashion market is still at a mere 1% of the total apparel market in the UK*). This can only be achieved by being attractive to the broad mainstream audience, and high street brands have the knowledge and tools of creating desires and influencing perceptions. Fashion brands have the power to change lifestyles. Make green the new black!

The strategies proposed in this guide are intended to be used by marketers of high street brands, aiming to make their green fashion products appealing to their audience, those who generally do not buy fashion based on its sustainable benefits.

It is for those marketers who want to inspire and excite their customers about sustainability. Those, who do not want to promote green fashion by preying on peoples’ conscience, but by portraying it as more than the saving of our planet; by making it desirable, convenient, easy and fun. And it is for those marketers who ultimately aim to change consumer mindsets.

WHO SHOULD BE USING THIS GUIDE?

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HOW SHOULD THIS GUIDE BE USED?

Each of the 15 proposed strategies includes guidelines to be followed. You will get ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ for each approach. But don’t panic, you don’t have to implement all of them to get an effective strategy. Some of the tools are necessary in each strategy and form the foundation of green communications in order to earn customer trust. The tools marked with a blue line can be chosen freely.

Consider your brand DNA and your target customer when creating your strategic mix from these approaches.

However, this guide does not intend to dictate certain strategies. Instead, it should act as a guideline and serve as inspiration and insight for marketers.

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE BASED ON?

This guide is the creative end product evolving out of a research study for the graduation project at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute. All information given in the guide has derived from in-depth primary and secondary research.

The findings of the study have been combined into the 15 strategies presented in this guide. One outcome of the research was that sustainability needs to be communicated in a simpler and clearer way. Neither consumers nor marketers have the time to read through lengthy sustainability reports and advises. Hence, this product aims to meet this need and present the guidelines in a short yet insightful manner.

For a copy of the full research study which built the basis for this guide, e-mail the author at ls-schneider@web.de.

* Mintel (2009)
There is an elephant in the room and it’s called greenophobia. The term was coined by green marketing expert John Grant (author of ‘The Green Marketing Manifesto’) and describes negative perceptions held by the general public towards green products. In fashion, greenophobia finds expression in consumers believing that green fashion is...

- uncomfortable
- untrendy
- pricey
- less beneficial
- constituting a sacrifice
- for ‘hippies’

Next to that, consumers are highly sceptical of green claims and marketing. Why? Because brands have used greenwashing in the past to enhance their green image and products’ competitive advantage. Washing your product or brand image green means promoting it as more sustainable than it actually is. Yet, in the age of digital, your customers can easily find out whether your claims are substantiated. And they will. Greenwash activities have increasingly been revealed during the past years and they further reinforce the ‘greenophobic’ attitudes.

What is more, green marketing has been applied in an extensive manner lately, leading to a ‘green fatigue’ amongst consumers. People are getting tired of the whole topic of sustainability and are also growing immune against green messages.

These negative perceptions and attitudes do not only affect consumer mindsets, but also their purchase behaviour. No wonder, fashion that is regarded as ‘backwards’, uncomfortable or ‘weird’ is not a likely bestseller. In order to reach the tipping point of mainstreaming sustainable fashion, we first need to work on the elimination of those negative perceptions.
WHY HAVE GREEN COMMUNICATIONS NOT BEEN EFFECTIVE?

Green marketing has been practised since the early 90's. But in fact, it has not helped in making this world a greener place.

One main issue with current green marketing and communications is that it has not yet fully tapped its potential. Main focus has largely been on 'lecturing' consumers about the issues through extensive, complex information given in one-directional, monotonous ways.

'Non-green' marketing uses a broad range of marketing tools and diverse methods to persuade consumers. But green communications has exploited only a small number of the tools available. What it is still missing is excitement, engagement and fun.

Green products were also marketed based on their environmental benefits. But, in fashion, consumers care much more about the product design and personal benefits. More so, sustainability communications were often aimed at promoting less consumption. Yet, people don't want to be restricted in their consumption and so these strategies did not resonate with the mainstream consumer. Brands need to understand what the mainstream consumer is motivated by: fun, fashion, benefits and desires.

WHAT IS YOUR MAINSTREAM CONSUMER DRIVEN BY?

Futerra* has developed a consumer segmentation model grouping people according to the values they hold towards sustainability. The three emerging groups are Bricks, Greens and Golds. The majority of people, and by association your mainstream consumer, fall into the Gold segment. The presented strategies have been developed to satisfy the needs and react to the motivations of this mainstream Gold segment.

Certainly, marketing sustainability is no easy matter. What we are trying to sell is not just the next season’s trend, but a principle of new lifestyles. Understandably, brands tried to get to grips with that topic with a certain level of seriousness. That just doesn’t work all the way. Consumers are not willing to change their lifestyles based on negative feelings and guilt endorsed by green marketing messages. Instead, in order to positively influence its public image, brands need to market sustainable fashion as ‘cool’, normal, mainstream, easy, personally beneficial and fun.

* a leading marketing agency with focus on green marketing, based in London, UK
Sustainability is a vague term. There is no general definition of what it is and what it entails in fashion. What it means to you might not be the same as what it means to your customers. This can create noise in your communication process. People need to understand your starting point and your view on sustainability. If they don’t, they might as well ignore your message.

**RESEARCH!**

Before you start, do your research. Find out who your customer is. What motivates him in terms of green purchasing? How does he perceive sustainability and green fashion? What prevents him from buying green fashion? How does he spend his time? Where? Doing what? Having this knowledge will help you in choosing an effective strategy, tailored to your audience, and reactive to their needs.

**DO**

Set objectives you want to achieve with your communication strategy. Then identify key performance indicators (KPIs) which help you measure and achieve them. If you aim to improve consumer perceptions, you may want to find out current attitudes of your customers towards green fashion. Start measuring your KPIs before the next green campaign to compare them with after and see what impact you had.

**PLAN.**

Don’t make it an one-off thing. Keep track of your KPIs over time to recognise developments in consumer attitudes and react to them quickly. It will also help you recognise trends and to adjust your strategy.

**KEEP IT UP.**

Be clear on what sustainability means for your company and communicate how your clothes are sustainable. If you market organic cotton, tell your customers what it makes organic and to which proportion. Be honest and transparent.

**CLARIFY.**

Make sure to tell your audience that your ‘recycled collection’ in fact uses only 95% of recycled polyester. That’s still pretty good, but honesty is key!

**STATE FACTS.**

At the point of sale, your customer certainly needs to know how much percent of organic fibres are used in your T-Shirt. Put it on your product label. More detailed definitions should be communicated through other channels, e.g. your website.

**SHOOT IT ALL AT ONCE.**

Avoid using vague terms like ‘recyclable’ or ‘environmentally friendly’ without giving defining explanations. Vagueness only results in lower credibility.

**DON’T**

Avoid vagueness in your communication. People need to understand your starting point and your view on sustainability. If they don’t, they might as well ignore your message.
Surprisingly, many companies are still trying to trick people into believing claims that lack credibility. Only 5% of green marketing claims were in fact found to be true in 2012*. Don’t be one of them. Doing greenwash or being accused of it isn’t fun. It can weaken customer trust, loyalty and hurt your brand image. Being credible is the name of the game in green communications.

PROVE!

BE SPECIFIC. Making specific claims will gain you credibility. Be objective. Use hard and precise facts to support your message.

‘We have greened up our blue denims. They now use 3,750 litres less water in their production, a reduction of 80%’

SEEK PARTNERS. Partnering up with organisations (e.g. NGOs) can similarly enhance credibility. Yet, it is important that your partner is well-known amongst your customers. As in any collaboration, make sure you both have the same goal and walk into the same direction.

GET CERTIFIED. Seek product labels or certifications which support your credibility. But again, they must be familiar to your customer to have a positive effect. Research beforehand which certifications are suitable for your product and consumer.

DON’T. Don’t lead people into believing your products are 100% sustainable when, in fact, they are not. Your customers will find out. To avoid confusion, make clear what you are talking about and define your terms (see Define!)

PROMISE WHAT YOU CAN’T DELIVER.

Fashion is fast business and your high street consumer does not have the time, nor the motivation to read through lengthy reports to make an informed purchase decision. They want information quick, understandable and simple. Retailers should make it easy for their customers to get those information and to choose the sustainable alternative.

SIMPLIFY!

DO

Make it understandable for your audience. Use simple language. BE CLEAR.

Adjust it to their knowledge level and get straight to the point.

BE CLEAR.

Keep it short.

VISUALISE FACTS.

Stating hard facts is great. Yet, painting a picture by comparing figures can make the information more vivid for your audience. Use comparisons that spark visuals in peoples’ mind.

‘Our denim jeans now use 3,750 litres less water in their production. That’s equivalent to one month of your morning showers.’

DON’T.

Avoid using terms your customer might not be familiar with. Words like ‘life cycle assessment’ or ‘closed-loop recycling’ won’t make you look more credible, they will only scare off consumers. If you want to use them anyway, make sure to Define them.

USE JARGON.

* Hultin and Villberg (2013)
NORMALISE!

DO

INTEGRATE. Make ‘green’ part of your existing strategy. Use the proposed strategies to implement them in your current brand communications and adjust them to your marketing strategy.

ADD VALUE. Make sustainability a benefit for your customer he discovers after he fell in love with the design. Your green benefits can become a determining factor for your customer to buy the product. But only if he loves it in the first place.

Your customers do what they perceive to be ‘normal’. For sustainable fashion to be accepted as ‘normal’, it has to be promoted that way. Just like ‘traditional’ fashion, focus on the design and make it desirable. It should blend in with ‘non-green’ product lines and first attract consumers by what it’s all about in fashion: the look. That is what your customer cares most about. Sustainability is, in fact, always second.

DON’T

FLAUNT IT. Don’t make ‘green’ your number one USP. People buy fashion based on looks, quality and price. Even the greenest mind is unlikely to buy your product only because it’s green. You need to offer benefits that can compete with ‘non-green’ fashion and promote these in the first place.

SACRIFICE. People love shopping. Trying to sell a product or lifestyle that restricts them in their favourite activity will not work. Instead of promoting less consumption, find solutions for better consumption. Let them enjoy their hobby while saving the planet along the way.

FUTURE GREEN BRANDS WILL BE MORE LIKE THE NEW IT STARS, LIKE APPLE OR AMAZON, IN BEING GREAT FIRST AND GREEN SECOND’

- John Grant
Consumers need information, desperately. They generally know very little about the impact fashion has on the environment. Yet, consumers need to become more aware of these conditions to see the need and value of sustainable fashion.

But be careful. Consumers have already developed a fatigue of too many green messages being communicated in too uninteresting ways. Fashion companies today have to find the balance between giving enough information to be credible and not boring their audience. Don’t be the boring one!

**DO**

Know who you are talking to. Know what kind of information they are seeking. Build your strategy around that knowledge. Consider your language, tone of voice, information load and channels used. Speak in your customer’s language.

Dose your information load. At the point of sale or on product labels, information should be given in a short and clear-cut manner. In later instances, you can provide more detailed information to enhance your consumer knowledge.

In a positive way. Trick them into gaining knowledge subconsciously, while having fun and being entertained. Games, videos, apps or product labels can all be used to wrap educational information in compelling ways. Be creative and remember: your customer wants to be entertained in the first place.

Know that when making green claims, some of your customers will want to find out more. So give them the opportunity to dig deeper into your actions and plan. Have all the information ready to back up your story. Your website is a great channel to provide more detailed educational information for your customer.

**ADJUST.**

**SEPERATE.**

**TRICK THEM.**

**BE PREPARED.**

**DON’T**

Too much information at once will just make it complicated for your consumers to understand and handle. Dose it.

Educating is not equated with lecturing consumers, although previous green marketing might have acted that way. Entertain and engage first, educate second.
PERSONALISE!

Your customer is self-centred and cares most about the things that directly relate to him. He is always seeking solutions that will enhance his life and is less likely to engage in a social causes or activities without benefitting in return.

Part of the greenophobic mindset is the assumption that green products constitute a sacrifice in comfort, price or design. But your customer does not want to give up anything without getting something better in return. Sustainability needs to be more personal and relatable in order to be relevant to the mainstream. Give them more value than just 'being good to the environment'.

DO
Communicate how your product will enhance your customers' life. Identify how the sustainable benefits of your products will be relevant to them and let them know.

REWARD.
Rewarding good behaviours is an effective tool to get your customers engaged. And they do not necessarily need to be monetary, gaining a certain status or becoming part of a community can be rewarding as well.

BE HONEST.
Nobody is perfect. Consumers know that neither are brands. Admitting shortcomings will get you more trust and loyalty than covering up. And anyway, you can’t cover up anything. Show them what you have achieved, but also tell about your next steps. Be flawsome*.

GIVE INSIGHTS.
Let your customers look behind the scenes and give them insights into your supply chain. Some brands use interactive online world maps which allow customers to trace product origins. Imagery and movies can also be used to tell the story behind your products.

DISCLOSE!

Hiding information has not only become more difficult, but also more risky (see Prove!). Transparency is on the rise. The percentage of UK consumers stating the transparency of a brand to be a significant factor in their purchase decision has jumped from 53% to 66% in 2013*.

DO
Being transparent about your efforts and supply chain is also another way of educating consumers about sustainability in fashion and how clothing is produced.

REVEAL!
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GIVE INSIGHTS.

* Mitchell (2013)
* Term describing brands that are awesome despite, or because, they are admitting flaws. Coined by trendwatching.com, 2013
Stories are human nature. Everyone loves stories. For hundreds of years, stories have been used effectively in communications, from camp fires to marketing departments. Stories can create a connection between consumers and brands. They are easily memorable, appeal to the emotions and more importantly; they can make people care.

Brands do have a significant responsibility in ‘greening’ the fashion industry. Yet, consumers also have an important impact through their lifestyles. And they want to act. Retailers should take the role as facilitators and make it easy for customers to get active themselves. People don’t just want to read about your efforts. They want to experience them, and they want to play an active part.

Translate complex concepts into simple, comprehensible stories. Sustainability sometimes involves complicated issues which can be better understood when told as a story.

Let them be a part of your journey. Make them contribute to your success and be relevant. Provide opportunities for your customers to engage in more sustainable lifestyles.

John Grant noted true leaders ‘are on a journey, leading people with a destination in mind’. It is not just about what you are doing, but what you are doing together, your company and your consumers.

First, ask what you customer wants and let him inspire you. Use his feedback to implement ideas and improve your business. In return, you will gain consumer trust and loyalty.

Make them part of your team. Create better solutions together. Your customer is the expert in knowing what he wants. Make use of that.
In the greenophobic mindset, sustainable fashion is perceived as rather dull and unexciting. Your task is to challenge that assumption. Shock or astonish your customer and make them wonder. It will not only get them interested in the products, but also the story behind it.

Portraying sustainability in an unexpected way or context can get you attention and cut through the mass of green messages in the market. Your customer is looking for excitement in life, so this time, surprise them by how exciting green fashion can be. This is about challenging perceptions of what sustainability can be.

**DO**

Be daring. Stand out of the green crowd. **BE DIFFERENT.**

Colour it differently. Green does not have to look green. A surprising take on sustainability will get you heard.

The internet is a great channel to effectively spread your messages. Your customer loves seeing what others post and he loves sharing it. Use that to your advantage. **GO VIRAL.**

Create compelling messages online that spark excitement or other strong emotional reactions. They will quickly spread themselves like nobody’s business with minimum costs involved.
What green communications has been lacking is a fun approach. Yes, sustainability is serious. But promoting it that way will not attract your customers. Nobody likes buying products which give you a negative feeling. Instead, customers should see the positive side of sustainability and how it can add joy to their lives. People need to enjoy green fashion and have fun engaging in sustainable lifestyles. So make it fun!

**DO**

- **RESEARCH.** Identify what kind of humour your audience is responding to. Even if you make your green message fun, it might not be their 'kind of fun'. Research is necessary to get it right.

- **ENTERTAIN.** Find creative and compelling ways to entertain your audience while communicating about sustainability. Online games and gaming apps are a great way to entertain people, while subconsciously, educating them.

- **DON'T**

- **GUILT-TRIP.** Certainly, our ‘non-green’ behaviours could cost us the planet. But don’t blame it on your customer. We know he has a big responsibility. And he knows to. But blaming him will only result in him taking up a defensive attitude and not lead to behavioural change.

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*‘USING HUMOUR TO TALK ABOUT AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT CAN MAKE PEOPLE QUESTION THEMSELVES AND THEIR BEHAVIOUR LEADING TO REAL CHANGE’*

- Jennifer Earle
CELEBRITISE!

How do you make green fashion wanted? Dress someone famous in it! Using popular icons to promote sustainable fashion can raise consumer awareness, but also influence green fashions' public image.

Celebrities are role models your audience is looking up to. They embody everything your customer aspires: desirability, status and success. Your customer is certainly following what celebrities are doing and when they endorse your green products, it will grab his attention.

Again, do your research and identify who is well-known amongst your audience and who is respected. Obviously, your chosen personality should be in line with your brand and the image you aim to convey.

Celebrities are not only associated with fame, but also with luxury and high-quality. Indeed, sustainable fashion is in need of a page from that book. Connecting it to those qualities can improve and abolish the greenophobic perception of green fashion being of lower quality.

Think of ways to further engage your celebrity in sustainability issues and to promote your collaboration in more ways than only campaign imagery.

The ethical fashion brand ‘People Tree’ has teamed up with Emma Watson to promote their sustainable collection. Next to campaign imagery, the brand released short movies of Emma visiting the brand’s factories, meeting producers and telling the story of how fashion gets to consumers.

Exemplary green communication strategies make use of a variety of channels to get their green message across. Use one - and two-way communication channels. Let your audience listen, but also response.

DO

CHOOSE RIGHT.

GLAM IT UP.

GO DEEPER.

MIX IT!

Exemplary green communication strategies make use of a variety of channels to get their green message across. Use one - and two-way communication channels. Let your audience listen, but also response.

DO

BE VERSATILE. Make it multi-channel. Use several marketing channels to communicate your green message, offline and online.

BE CONSISTENT. But be clear on communicating the same message consistently across all channels. It will make the message stronger, more memorable and avoid confusion.

DON’T

JUST REPORT. Having a sustainability report is great, but that alone won’t excite your customer. Find more channels to tell them about your efforts. Don’t just let them be passive receivers of your efforts. Engage them.

CONFUSE. Different channels does not mean different messages. Too many green statement which do not amount to the same thing will just confuse your audience. Better to have one strong message and communicate it in different ways across channels.
If your company has implemented sustainability into the business, you are most likely measuring your sustainability performance (e.g. in CO₂ emissions). Maybe, you are even measuring your green communication effectiveness opposed to your ‘non-green’ communications. But what about consumer perceptions?

Most brands are in fact not measuring whether their strategy is improving consumers’ green perceptions. Indeed, consumer perceptions might not directly impact financial performance, so why measure?

First, you want to know whether your efforts are improving the ‘greenophobic’ image of green fashion and whether your communications are making it more attractive to your consumers. Second, improved perceptions of sustainable fashion can positively influence consumers’ purchase behaviour, so you want to know whether your efforts are ultimately generating sales.

Measuring effectiveness should build on the first tool of green communications: Research! This last tool is thus linking to the beginning of green communications and closing the cycle of an effective green communication strategy.

**WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS MANAGED**

**DO**

Keep track of the KPIs you’ve set in the beginning and analyse trends or developments.

MONITOR KPIs.

Choose logical intervals of measuring. For instance, you can measure your KPIs before and after certain campaigns, or independently and continuously.

SET INTERVALS.

Use your measured metrics to adjust your communication strategy. Your customers’ knowledge levels and attitudes will (hopefully) change over time. So move with them and adapt according to their needs.

REACT.
IMAGE SOURCES (AS THEY APPEAR)


4 - CLAIRE MILBRATH (n.a.) Dundas St. Available from: http://muddypix.tumblr.com/post/61073051653/dundas-st [Retrieved 16/05/2014]


CONTENT SOURCES


WE HAVE REACHED AN EXTRAORDINARY POINT IN HISTORY, WHERE THE CONSENSUS IS BUILDING THAT THIS IS THE PROBLEM FOR OUR GENERATION TO TACKLE.

IT’S A HUGE CHALLENGE, BUT ACTUALLY, ISN’T IT THE HUGE CHALLENGES WHICH GIVE LIFE MEANING? AND WE REALLY DON’T HAVE A PLAN B."

- John Grant