

# 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 toward 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. 75% of Gen Zers would rather buy sustainably than go for brand names.<sup>1</sup> 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. The global ethical fashion market is expected to grow to 11.12 billion USD by 2027 at a compound annual growth rate [CAGR] of 8%. Statista predicts the US ethical fashion market alone to be 7.7bn USD today.<sup>2</sup> This growth in sales of sustainable products was four times faster than the growth in sales of other products between 2014-2018.<sup>3</sup>

Environmental, Social and Governance [ESG] uptake and legislation in some jurisdictions has resulted in some brands already marketing their commitment to sustainability. However, this is not enough to sway educated consumers. 90% of millennials say “authenticity” is an important factor when deciding which brands they like to support, with 80% of baby boomers and 85% of Gen Xers reporting the same sentiment.<sup>4</sup> 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 values.<sup>5</sup> Consumers are demanding evidence.



**\$11.12 B**

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Gen Zers

**71%**

Millennials

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Gen Xers

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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 there is clear commitment toward the Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] in business's sustainability reports, with four-in-five companies assessed now including a commitment, actual progress continues to be slow, as less than half set measurable targets for how their actions contribute towards fulfilling these goals.<sup>6</sup> Consumers recognize this disconnect between words and action and may harbor skepticism toward 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 consumer.<sup>7</sup> Brands that stand out are those that exceed expectations by setting ambitious goals, showing real progress and providing transparency about their path toward 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 Innovation<sup>®</sup>, 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 the smaller-scale, local initiatives are often less intensive in terms of resource use, and emission 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, which respects local communities and avoids polluting local environments, is another impactful way to build consumer confidence. Consumers may also be inspired 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 to only use recycled plastics in all their shoes and clothing by 2024. They backed this up with specific targets, including transitioning from 50% polyester to selling 11 million pairs of shoes made with recycled plastics in 2019.<sup>9</sup> By communicating this through press releases and social media, while also providing a high level of detail, 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 actionable steps to meet them by 2024.<sup>10</sup>

### Marks & Spencer

In 2017, UK retail giant Marks & Spencer began to work with local communities across the UK 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 fund raising groups and recognize their achievements with awards.<sup>11</sup> 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 Ireland.<sup>12</sup>

M&S are also providing benefits to local communities in other ways, making space available for community groups in stores and awarding funding to community renewable energy projects.

### Patagonia

Patagonia brought sustainable innovation to local communities in 2016 with their 'Worn Wear Tour.' It offered free repairs on broken zips, rips, tears, buttons, pulls and more, regardless of brand, and educated communities on how to do these repairs themselves.<sup>13</sup> This worldwide yet localized initiative demonstrates that major brands can make large-scale statements about slow fashion and circular economy while working at the local level.

### Levi's

Levi's understands that the denim manufacturing process has a major impact on the environment, as it uses large amounts of water. As part of a sustainability initiative, Levi's has developed a new product line called Water ←less. This product line uses up to 96% less water in the manufacturing process, making it far more sustainable. Levi's is also working toward improving the circularity of its products and using cotton that is 100% sustainable.

# 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 toward real action on sustainability and communicate them effectively to improve perception among sustainability-minded modern consumers.



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- ▶ 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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