



Branding for Sustainability

Five Principles for Leveraging Brands to Create Shared Value

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Like never before, sustainability is transforming business practice and performance. Whether for efficiency, risk mitigation, government regulation, conservation or competitive advantage among increasingly values-driven consumers, sustainability is seeing its moment.

As more of the world's most powerful brands aspire to the same social and environmental values, business leaders and marketers face the new challenge of distinguishing their companies, products and services in an increasingly crowded sustainable marketplace.

So how is sustainability changing the rules of branding? How can branding advance sustainable practice and performance? And most important, how can socially responsible businesses build authentic brands for a more sustainable future?

We believe that sustainability requires a re-imagination of the art of branding — just as branding requires a re-imagination of the science of sustainability. The old branding paradigm stamped a commodity with a logo and a slogan, but we are champions for a new paradigm that delivers practical, social and tribal benefits and offers consumers authentic, meaningful and empowering experiences.

Too often, sustainability is confined to a siloed team disconnected from business and brand strategy. The new paradigm represents a company-wide, top-down, bottom-up imperative that determines business strategy, operations and brand value.

What does branding for sustainability look like? We offer the following five principles, designed to show how values-driven branding can advance corporate sustainability programs, create opportunities for business innovation and drive value to the triple bottom line.

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FIVE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE BRANDING

1. Integration: Aligning Promise with Practice. As technology drives new levels of transparency, consumers are becoming increasingly savvy, looking beyond company-issued advertising to proactively find and share information on their own. With increased expectations and visibility, it's not what you say but what you *do* that matters.

For us, branding is being, representing the full strategic integration of sustainability and brand. Every decision in the lifecycle of a product or service — from design to development to delivery — is now a brand decision.

Success means that sustainability strategy and brand strategy are created in tandem, not in silos. External consumer promises are aligned with internal company practices. And sustainability provides the platform for improvements in operations, innovations in product development and greater impact for every marketing dollar.

2. Co-ownership: Leveraging Stakeholders to Create Value. Companies are no longer the sole owners of their brands. They are co-owned by an array of stakeholders who increasingly test, challenge and authenticate brand promises. Indeed, according to Nielsen Buzz Metrics, 25 percent of search results on Google for the world's 20 largest brands links to consumer-generated content.

From consumers to employees, suppliers to NGOs, investors to government agencies, sustainable brands engage stakeholders — not as passive recipients of corporate decision-making — but as proactive partners, advisors and consultants. In the new paradigm, stakeholders are not threats to mitigate, but valuable resources to leverage for ideas, insights and peer-to-peer influence.

Success means creating opportunities for multiple stakeholders to help shape, realize and share the benefits of products and services based on a seamlessly integrated business and sustainability strategy.

3. Triple Value Proposition™: Delivering Practical, Social and Tribal Benefits. More than ever, consumers are looking to align their purchases with their values. According to the *BBMG Conscious Consumer Report*, more than one-third of Americans say “conscious consumer” describes them *very well* and nearly 9 in 10 say the term describes them well.

Consumers are rewarding companies that do good things for people and the planet, like manufacturing energy efficient products, promoting consumer health and safety benefits, delivering fair labor and trade practices and supporting local businesses and suppliers.

1. INTEGRATION

2. CO-OWNERSHIP

3. TRIPLE VALUE PROPOSITION

4. INSIDE-OUT

5. EMPOWERING

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As important, our study shows that 35 percent of all consumers avoided purchasing a product or service because of company practices in the previous 12 months — a number that rises to 62 percent among the most enlightened consumers. In short, consumers are craving more holistic brand benefits and they're punishing companies when they don't see them.

At BBMG, we believe sustainable brands will deliver on what we call the Triple Value Proposition™, seamlessly integrating practical benefits (price, performance, convenience), social benefits (positive impacts on the environment and society) and tribal benefits (belonging to a larger community that shares my values) into a consistent brand message, image and experience.

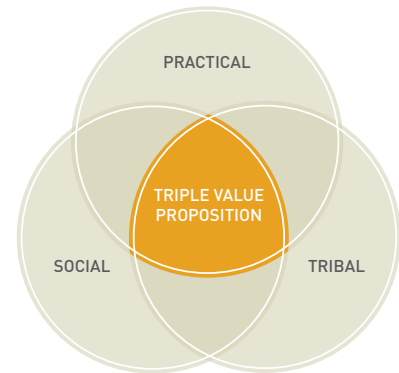
Success means bringing together these multiple benefits to deliver the combination of product performance, social promise and personal purpose. Leveraging the Triple Value Proposition™ means consumers won't have to seek out a company's sustainability performance in a CSR report. Sustainability will emerge in every product, service, action and micro-interaction.

4. Inside-Out: Sharing an Authentic Brand Story. Ironically, green marketing has become one of the greatest threats to the success and scale of corporate sustainability practices. Ubiquitous (and often unsubstantiated) green claims have created a greenwashed, eco-cluttered and eco-saturated marketplace.

Trust marks and certification labels, initially designed to guide consumers in making more informed decisions, now create confusion and inspire a lack of confidence as consumers try to differentiate between company, industry, nonprofit and independent watchdog information and recommendations. Indeed, the BBMG study shows a wide gap between high familiarity and low favorability among many of the leading certifications.

This new reality means companies must communicate their sustainability strategies in ways that connect the consumer-facing brand story with the authentic corporate back story. It means sustainable values and practices come to life throughout the entire organization, and stakeholders provide trusted information about the experience, expertise and proof behind the promise.

In short, it's not just about crafting the right marketing message. It's about illuminating facts with truthful, emotionally resonant stories. It's about building mutual, honest and transparent relationships that embody the brand and extend its influence and impact.



Sustainable brands of the future will deliver on a Triple Value Proposition™, integrating practical, social and tribal benefits into an authentic brand story and empowering consumer experiences.

5. Empowering: Realizing Our Best Selves and Society. Traditionally, branding has focused on how companies differentiate themselves in a crowded marketplace. Branders illuminate the latest and greatest aspects of commodities and rely on advertising to capture our attention, reveal our deficiencies and magically deliver a new and improved life — regardless of reality.

In truth, we humans are much more complex. We have deeper desires, surprising needs and higher aspirations than traditional brands have been willing or able to give us credit.

Sustainable brands educate, engage and empower the whole person and our infinite potential. They deliver ideas, experiences and opportunities to address the issues that matter most to us. They recognize and respect the nuances of our individual and collective journeys. They understand that we bring our whole selves with us to the marketplace.

Simply put, sustainable brands are not ends unto themselves, but empowering platforms that allow us to meet the full spectrum of our needs, make a difference in the world around us and realize our truest selves and best society.

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SUSTAINABLE BRANDS: DRIVING INNOVATION AND CREATING SHARED VALUE

It is becoming clear that our most powerful social structure — the global economy — is increasingly unsustainable. The dissonance between our current world and our ideal world comes from a way of doing business that all too often operates on a zero-sum game of scarce resources and a one-dimensional view of consumers motivated only by selfish wants and needs.

We believe instead that we live in one of the most promising moments in human history, where sustainability and brand strategy are one and the same — where the ideas and experiences of our stakeholders can spark innovation and the Triple Value Proposition™ delivers prosperity that is good for people and the planet.

Done right, sustainable branding will lead a revolution in which companies are no longer distinguished by the “what” of new and improved commodities, but by the “how” of human relationships, shared values and common purpose.

With branding for sustainability at the center of every business decision, stakeholder relationship and company action, transaction becomes transformation, marketing becomes movement and buying becomes being that can grow the bottom line and change the world.



Raphael Bemporad and Mitch Baranowski are co-founders of BBMG, a leading branding and marketing agency dedicated to helping socially responsible organizations harness the power of branding to improve society and grow the bottom line. www.bbm.com



The branding paradigm shift from the “what” of the commodity to the “how” of shared values.