

5.4: Promotion

Companies engage in promotion of products and services through advertising, public relations, word of mouth, and point of sale. The following paragraphs will discuss selected topics related to sustainable marketing promotion, such as advertising issues, cause-related marketing, sustainable promotional products, and greenwashing concerns.

Advertising is the most familiar element of promotion to reach potential customers. Businesses use sales promotions, personal selling, direct marketing, and public relations to communicate their message to potential customers. Market segment groups identified as particularly attractive for the sustainable business include **Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS)** and Cultural Creatives. The LOHAS segment of the population is described as individuals committed to health, the environment, social justice, personal development, and sustainable living. The **Cultural Creatives** segment of the population is described as individuals committed to spirituality, social justice, and environmentalism. Together, they represent a sizable and growing percentage of our population.

Whether a business specifically targets LOHAS or Cultural Creatives segments of the population or targets the general population, consumers are attracted to ethical marketing practices. A sustainable business often engages in cause-related marketing, or connecting its branding image with certain causes to which consumers will strongly relate. For the sustainable business, the cause is sustainability, and therefore it is critical to communicate the social and environmental benefits of products. It is also important that consumers are able to see a clear connection between the company (or its brand image) and the charitable cause it supports. When consumers consider the product, the corporation's ethics and values are reflected in its choices of charitable causes and they are transparent to the consumer.

Two specific types of cause-related marketing are green marketing and social marketing. **Green marketing** refers to the marketing of products or services that are environmentally friendly. The U.S. Trade Commission and the Canadian Standards Association both provide guidelines for making environmental claims of products. **Social marketing** refers to marketing of products or services for social good. Sustainable businesses often partner with nonprofit organizations to promote social change or to donate a percentage of profit to these organizations. Well-known examples include the partnerships between Susan G. Komen for the Cure and (PRODUCT) RED and the various businesses that support these causes. Due to the emotional connections in linking a cause with a brand, consumer response may actually be stronger through these forms of cause-related marketing than by advertising alone.

Additional marketing promotion considerations are the marketing materials and promotional items. Marketing materials (including business cards) and promotional items will reflect the sustainable business's commitment to environmental and social responsibility. Marketing materials and items used by the sustainable business do not produce waste, require fewer resources in production, are recycled and reusable, are biodegradable, use soy-based inks, use nontoxic components, and avoid PVC plastic and other harmful materials. Examples of eco-friendly promotional products are items made from PLA, a corn-based biodegradable plastic (such as pens or coffee mugs); organic products (such as T-shirts and bags); recycled products (such as mouse pads, umbrellas, and clothing); and renewable energy powered products (such as solar-powered or water-powered flashlights, calculators, and radios).

There are numerous communication channels to reach sustainability-minded consumers and to promote your sustainability message. See [Note 6.6 "Promote Your Sustainability Message"](#) for a small sample of the many print and online outlets for both advertising and press releases.

Promote Your Sustainability Message

There are many print and online media outlets to reach sustainability-minded consumers, such as

- Business Ethics Magazine
- ClimateChangeCorp
- Corporate Knights
- CSRwire
- Environmental Leader
- Environmental News Network
- Ethical Corporation
- GOOD Magazine
- GreenMoney Journal

- Greener World Media and its associated sites (such as GreenBiz)
- Grist Magazine
- LOHAS Journal
- Matter Network
- Mother Jones Earth
- NEED Magazine
- Plenty Magazine
- Sustainable Business Design Blog
- Sustainable Industries
- TreeHugger
- Triple Pundit
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development

The sustainable business's marketing emphasis will be on openness, honesty, and transparency in any product or company claims. An effort to promote a single token product or act of a company as sustainable, green, or environmentally friendly will be met with skepticism by critics and will earn the company a reputation of greenwashing. **Greenwashing** is the act of creating an environmental spin on products or activities without genuine business-wide commitment to sustainability. Sustainability is a company-wide goal that permeates through every task, role, department, division, and activity of the company. Unwitting businesses may engage in greenwashing for a variety of reasons, such as a lack of understanding of sustainability. Other reasons may include attempts to expand market share, attract and manage employees, attract investors, derail critics, circumvent regulatory issues, and improve image. However, greenwashing may damage an otherwise credible business's image or reputation.

The sustainable business can circumvent greenwashing by avoiding vague terms (such as green, nonpolluting, and eco-friendly), providing substantial evidence to support any sustainability claims, staying clear of irrelevant claims, and by providing specific details to curtail misunderstandings. Partnering with one's harshest critics and nongovernmental organizations, such as Environmental Defense Fund, American Red Cross, National Wildlife Foundation, and ClimateGroup, may provide the organization some guidance in making meaningful progress toward sustainability and in creating positive impressions.

Suspect greenwashing can draw attention and can subject companies to violations of various federal and state laws. In particular, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Act set forth Green Guides in 1992 and revised them in 1998 to provide basic principles on what is permissible in green marketing claims. Due to the nature of guidelines, which are not legally binding, there has been little enforcement for companies to closely follow the guidelines. However, the FTC's task is to monitor and prevent unfair deceptive practices and to bring action against a company if they believe it has committed deceptive practices. The criteria for deceptive practices are based on whether a claim can be substantiated, whether the claim is vague and misleading, and whether the claim provides an overstatement of environmental benefits.

Due to the rise in green marketing claims, the FTC is in the process of again updating the guidelines. A new chair of the FTC, William Kovacic, has been appointed and appears to be a strong advocate of addressing greenwashing. Companies are likely to observe stronger enforcement of the FTC Act with regard to greenwashing. The FTC has been holding public meetings on topics related to green marketing, such as green buildings, carbon offsets, and renewable energy certificates. The revised Green Guides are to be released in 2009.

In addition to FTC Green Guides for businesses, several third-party Web sites seek to help consumers identify cases of greenwashing. GreenPeace offers a Greenwash Detection Kit, Retrieved March 23, 2009, from archive.greenpeace.org/comms/97/summit/greenwash.html TerraChoice details the Six Sins of Greenwashing, Retrieved March 23, 2009, from sinsofgreenwashing.org/findings/greenwashing-report-2007/ CorpWatch tracks offenders through its Greenwash Awards Retrieved March 23, 2009, from www.corpwatch.org/article.php?list=type&type=102 and related publications, Bruno (2002). and EnviroMedia Social Marketing and the University of Oregon maintain the Greenwashing Index. Retrieved March 23, 2009, from www.greenwashingindex.com The FTC and third parties are each placing growing emphasis on separating greenwashing from authentic green claims.

This chapter has shown that sustainability impacts marketing decisions made within the standard marketing mix of product, price, place, and distribution. Sustainable businesses will design, package, brand, price, distribute, and promote products and services with social, economic, and environmental impacts in mind.

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