

## 5.1: Product

The first element of the marketing mix is the product. The sustainable business addresses issues related to the product's design, packaging, and branding.

Sustainable businesses focus on green product design and development, as discussed in Chapter 5. Green product design and development engages in design for the environment, sustainable product architectures, design for flexibility and reuse, green product testing, design for recycling, and life cycle analysis (LCA) for sustainability.

In designing for the environment, the sustainable business will become familiar with the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 14000 standards, which focus on environmental management issues. The standards are quality guidelines for companies to continuously identify, control, and improve environmental performance. The sustainable business will take steps to create conditions to assure product testing does not cause unnecessary and harmful social or environmental impacts. Design for recycling, flexibility, and reuse not only reduces environmental impact but can also create cost efficiencies for the organization. It is important that the company conduct LCA on products and processes (discussed in Chapter 5). LCA is a method to better understand the impact of a product, service, or process throughout the entire duration of its life from acquisition of raw materials to use or reuse and to its eventual disposal.

Sustainability can also be applied to service design. Businesses providing services such as hospitals, hotels, and restaurants will focus on issues such as minimizing nonrenewable energy consumption, protecting water sources, enhancing the indoor air quality for the consumer, and using environmentally preferable products in providing those services.

A sustainable business also increases efforts to reduce waste and environmental impact through product packaging. Reducing the size of the package or redesigning the shape may result in increased efficiencies in storage and transportation. Eliminating plastic wrap or liners from products will reduce the amount of waste transferred to the landfill. Furthermore, biodegradable, recyclable, and reusable materials for packaging will significantly reduce the long-term environmental impact of packaging. Lastly, the packaging material itself may be altered.

Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. (and Sam's West, Inc.) was the first to implement a packaging scorecard to evaluate the impact of packaging from suppliers. The scorecard criteria cover such items as greenhouse gas/carbon dioxide (GHG/CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions per ton of production, product-package ratio, cube utilization, recycled content, renewable energy, and transportation. Businesses using a packaging scorecard have an objective measure of commitment to sustainability efforts and can inform suppliers of the commitment to sustainable packaging.

Another packaging inroad is the concept of eco-labeling. An eco-label is a label or symbol, such as ENERGY STAR, EcoLogo, or Green Seal, that educates and informs the buyer of certain environmental claims. Sustainable businesses are urged to use industry-wide labels, standardized by ISO 14024 regulations, which are generally recognized by the public versus proprietary labels that do not carry the same credibility factor. Other types of eco-labels may provide information on the product through its life cycle, such as the origin and history of the product or the amount of greenhouse gas emissions created in production. This approach is currently being used in Patagonia's Footprint Chronicles and Wal-Mart's Love, Earth jewelry line. Consumers are able to track the life of the product from raw materials to retail sale.

Lastly, any business should avoid the use of vague terms on packaging, such as green, nonpolluting, natural, eco-friendly, and others. If using such terms, a business should be ready to provide evidence to support its claims. This includes full awareness and understanding of processes and product supply chains. For example, a company that claims its organic product was produced without chemicals or pesticides may find that contaminants have crept in from processing or transport and have made the claim ultimately false. Such vagueness has the potential to be misinterpreted and misunderstood in numerous ways by consumers.

A company will develop a brand in order to give its company and its products an identity. Branding builds an emotional bond or connection with the consumer, and with that bond an organization can obtain loyalty from the consumer. Sufficient consideration should be given to determine a brand name or symbol that identifies the brand with the company's sustainability philosophy and that captures the essence of the sustainable properties of the product. A sustainable business will have the triple bottom line (people, planet, profit) at the base of its branding. Sustainability and branding should provide a seamlessly integrated front. Separated from each other, branding faces the risk of becoming irrelevant or overlooked. Green companies will also want to differentiate themselves from other green companies on the basis of their sustainability. As an increasing number of organizations go green, it will become increasingly important to set themselves and their marketing efforts apart from the competition.

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