



LOWERING EMISSIONS

★ *customers* ✱ about

LOCALLY OWNED

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

How to talk to *your* sustainability



A GUIDE FOR BUSINESSES AND
DESTINATIONS IN TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Sustainability is no longer just a buzzword in the travel industry—it's a necessity.

Conscious consumers are increasingly shaping how companies design and market their products, so showcasing your sustainable practices is becoming more important than ever.

Some travel companies claim their customers don't mention sustainability, so they don't prioritize it. Surprisingly, we hear this often. But here's the thing: you never know who is silently judging your company and choosing not to book because of it.

Recent market research and surveys reveal that consumers are increasingly looking to only buy from businesses that align with their values. So you might be missing out on a massive opportunity to attract these like-minded individuals, broaden your customer base and inspire more customer loyalty.

In today's market, **building a business that's kinder to the planet will make you more competitive.**

In just the past year, we've seen laws and regulations sprouting up left and right to tackle overtourism, preserve local cultures, and encourage responsible tourism. To stay ahead as a travel business, you must be agile and adapt to this rapidly shifting market and consumer trends. If you don't address it now, you risk being left behind.

Being more sustainable is only one piece of the puzzle. The other part is getting your customers to enthusiastically embrace your mission and tell it to everyone they know. That starts with learning how to make sustainability conversations easy, engaging, and relatable.

But don't worry, we've got you. Like the saying goes: "if you're worried about being a good parent, you already are one". So we're pretty confident that you've taken a big step in the right direction just by downloading this resource (it doesn't stop there though). Go you!

In these pages, we're going to dive into some actionable tips on how to communicate with your customers about sustainability like a seasoned pro.



*Sustainability is not an opinion: it needs science, which in the wrong hands can come out as either boring or confusing.*¹

01 Make it make sense

How did you feel the last time someone tried to talk to you about numbers? Did your eyes glaze over? Did you have an overwhelming urge to look at your phone and momentarily zone out?

That's how most people would usually react, and your customers are no different. Numbers are abstract, and so the goal here is to approach sustainability in a way that's relatable and understandable as possible.

Don't be too *technical*

Getting accurate numbers about your carbon emissions is important, but leave those for your reporting and certification requirements. Reporting ≠ marketing. Your customers are not likely to appreciate exactly how much kgCO₂e you've saved (most likely because they have no idea what that means) but they will remember the message.

Here are some ideas for talking about numbers in an interesting and memorable way:

Use unexpected comparisons. E.g: If cows were a country, they would be the third-highest producer of greenhouse emissions among all nations / We planted enough trees to fill 5 football stadiums.

Convert numbers to calendar time. Anything from a day to a year is typically in the right range. E.g: Once a week for a year vs. 52 times / We fed X people during Y period, that's equivalent to having 30 dinner guests every night for a year.

Use comparisons to bolster your numbers. E.g.: We funded the conservation of X square miles of rainforest, which is roughly the same size as Texas.

You want your customers to remember the message, which doesn't necessarily need a specific number. E.g.: By doing X, we prevented emissions equal to 3 round trips from LA to NYC.²

Don't fall into the *cliché trap*

When most people start to talk about sustainability, something strange happens. They turn into drones who use vague platitudes and meaningless buzzwords like "our commitment" or "our promise to the planet".

A review of the world's most valuable brands showed that 98% of the Forbes 50 used at least one sustainability cliché in the sustainability content on their websites.³ So if you want to stand out, be different. Here's how:

Avoid clichés and word salad like "A better tomorrow", "Our commitment", "Future generations", and "Protecting the planet". Just be direct about your efforts.

Avoid using the word 'sustainability'. In the brand review mentioned above, the word 'sustainability' is repeated around 10 times on each sustainability webpage for the Forbes top 50 brands. But interestingly, the most sustainable brands only used it once.

Avoid stock photography and bland icons like leaves, lightbulbs and anything green. Not only are they boring, they're usually meaningless. Instead, use images of the environment or people (with their consent, of course) in the communities that you operate in and will directly benefit from your efforts.

Be consistent to *build trust*

Make your efforts consistent along every brand touchpoint (any instance where your customer interacts with your business). It's one thing for customers to know you're now using only electric vehicles, or booking eco hotels. But if you're making no effort to also reduce plastic waste on your tours, it won't feel authentic. Use small, tangible actions to really drive it home for them. Some ideas include:

Using environmentally-friendly packaging or disposable items, and avoiding single-use plastics.

Gifting them with merch that reinforces sustainable behaviours, like reusable water bottles or cutlery sets, or something that is made by local artisans, and not mass-produced.

Set the tone before your customers travel by sending them tips on how to travel more sustainably, such as packing light (the more weight your vehicles have to pull, the more fuel you'll need to use), bringing reusable shopping bags, and suggesting carbon offset programs for their flights.

Of course, the reverse also applies – don't just rely on these gestures without a genuine commitment to doing better. Customers can and will call you out on it, if not to your face then in online reviews.



The *more specific your claim,* the likelier it is to sell better.

E.g. use terms like ‘carbon zero’ or ‘vegan’ rather than ‘sustainable packaging’ or ‘plant-based’⁴.

Avoid using vague and unqualified claims (such as ‘eco-friendly’ or ‘green’) because no one can really agree on what they mean.⁵

02 Make it interesting

A recent study by NielsenIQ found that 78% of US consumers say that a sustainable lifestyle is important to them. ⁶Additionally, 61% of Aussie consumers say companies' sustainability practices influence their purchase decisions.⁷

All customers (yes, even older generations), care about preventing pollution, reducing waste and conserving nature. Engage with them in a way that will pique their curiosity and interest on these issues.

Educating people *isn't your job*

You're not a science textbook, so leave behind the dense background information and statistics.

Your audience is already aware of the climate crisis; they don't need another lecture. Instead, focus on what truly matters to them: your actions and contributions toward sustainability.

Show them how you are making a difference in a straightforward and relatable way.

Share your initiatives, from small everyday practices to large-scale projects. Highlight your efforts in a way that's easy to understand and appreciate.

Embrace your brand *tone of voice*

It's a serious topic but you can still get your message across and make people smile. Aligning your brand personality with the characteristics of your sustainable consumers can significantly influence purchase behavior.⁸

If your brand embraces humor: Be lighthearted and witty. Collaborate with influencers who align with your brand voice. Showcase behind-the-scenes content of your team implementing sustainable practices. Incorporate vibrant, eye-catching graphics, memes and catchy one-liners. Check out Kia's "Hero's Journey" Super Bowl commercial for a humorous take on this topic.

If your brand is down-to-earth, caring, and community-focused: Share personal stories from the communities and people you work with. Let them talk about their lives, families, and aspirations. Show customers the positive impact they can have by choosing your products. Include thoughtful hand-written notes as gifts, or even personalised video messages.

If being adventurous or sporty differentiates your brand: Your clients are likely energetic nature lovers. Use short, snappy sentences and visual storytelling. Provide equipment made from recycled or sustainable materials. Partner with environmental NGOs and highlight these partnerships. Show people working together to do good, perhaps through organising group cleanup initiatives or volunteering.

Delight customers *with the unexpected*

Stand out in a sea of sameness when it comes to your sustainability efforts by doing something different and get your customers involved!

Get clear on 3 or 4 things you really care about, and then use these to inform your activities and marketing efforts.

Care about waste? Find a zero waste cooking class for your customers.

Emissions your priority? How about scheduling an overnight sleeper train on a tour instead of a flight between destinations.

Passionate about rewilding forests? How about arranging an hour for tree planting for your customers during a nature walk?

Like incorporating games and challenges? Organise challenges like "greenest person on the tour" or give discounts or perks to customers that take eco-friendly actions.



73% of global consumers believe *brands have a responsibility* to make a positive change in the world.⁹

03 Make it meaningful

"When you're telling the story of your business's sustainability, you are not the hero – your consumer is."¹⁰

Put your customer *first*

The cardinal rule of marketing? Put your customer first. This doesn't change when it comes to sustainability.

Tell your customers how they are changing the world by using your product. Here are some ways you can do that:

Ask your customers about the impact they'd like to have. You can use a quick online survey or ask the question on social media.

Provide specific statistics or data showing the positive environmental impact of using your product, such as the amount of carbon emissions reduced or resources saved.

Feature real-life stories and testimonials from other customers who have made a difference using your product, demonstrating the collective impact.

Send periodic updates on the overall impact your community of customers is making, showing them how they are part of a larger movement.

Create opportunities for them to share their impact on social media, with easy-to-share graphics and personalized messages about their contribution.

Know your customers' *values*

Generational differences can make, uh, a difference.

If the majority of your customers are from a certain age group, it may be helpful to understand what values have shaped them so you can relate to them more.

Deloitte found that engaging in a purpose that consumers relate to will build brand loyalty and promote awareness.¹¹

Generational attitudes towards sustainability differ quite significantly: Gen X and Boomers are more likely to take simple steps like using reusable bags, recycling, and conserving energy, while Gen Z and Millennials prefer sustainable lifestyle choices such as plant-based diets and public transport, and are more inclined to share information about eco-friendly products with their peers.

Talk about the '*why*'

Talk about why you are taking action. For example, did an initiative come to life because of an employee, because customers were demanding it, or because of a new regulation?¹²

Get deep into your motivations and values as a business, and why this drives the work that you do on all fronts.

Companies that embed sustainability into their organisation, rather than treating it as 'something special' or 'a thing they do' get the best returns on their investment.



Refrain from using sustainability as your *only* marketing message.

If you're going to use sustainability as the cornerstone of your marketing, be prepared for people to really scrutinise it.

If your claims can't hold up under that kind of attention, it's better not to make sustainability a big part of your pitch. ¹³

Sustainability isn't a marketing campaign or tactic, it's a business ethos and commitment to doing better that requires you to change processes, systems and mindsets.

04 Make it transparent

Transparency is crucial when pursuing sustainability because it builds trust and credibility with your customers. By openly sharing your sustainability goals, practices, and progress, you show that you are committed to making a real difference. This honesty not only strengthens your brand's reputation but also encourages customer loyalty and engagement.

Be honest about your efforts

Okay, we know this is a pretty obvious thing to start with. But stop rolling your eyes and hear us out:

Talk about what you're doing and what you're *not* doing (yet). Customers want to see that you are trying, even if you haven't achieved all your goals yet.

Your claims need to be scientific and independently verifiable (where possible).

If you don't have evidence to support what you're saying, reconsider talking about your sustainability efforts until you do.¹⁴

Be as **radically honest and specific.** Show every detail that you can - from the carbon and water footprints of your products, to animal welfare standards and any factories that you deal with. When you are open about your supply chains and the impacts of your products, customers will have more trust in you.

Know how *not* to talk about it. It's very easy to unintentionally fall into the greenwashing trap. But this shouldn't deter you from addressing and communicating your impact. Arm yourself with knowledge on what you can or cannot say. A good place to start is to read the [Australian](#), [US](#) and/or [UK](#) green marketing regulations or what is applicable to your country.

Remove *unnecessary* barriers

Nobody is deliberately unsustainable. It is a byproduct of our choices. So help customers make better choices all throughout their journey.

Unilever estimates that nearly 70% of its greenhouse gas emissions are influenced by customer choices and their sustainable use and disposal of products—such as conserving water and energy during laundry or recycling containers correctly.

Additionally, you can:

Label your products. For every product or service you offer, give them labels, such as which ones conserve the most water, or have reduced emissions. You can group tours under categories like 'slow travel' or 'farm to table'. Let customers self-select according to their values. It's also a great way for you to see what is in demand and what customers want more of.

Make it easy for consumers to do the right thing. Design for lack of effort. Make the most sustainable service, option or product the easiest to buy.¹⁵

Make your sustainability information easy to find. Give it a separate tab on your website, not hidden 3 pages into your "about us" section. Dedicate a homepage section to it.

Start where you are, today

You don't have wait to earn a certification like B Corp to be considered a bona fide sustainable company. You just need to start. Be direct and specific about your intentions. The key thing is to avoid using broad and unqualified claims (such as 'green' or 'eco-friendly') as they lack clarity around what it means.

Small actions like:

Asking your customers and employees what environmentally sustainable and ethical practices matter most to them, and what commitments they would like to see from you.

Informing your customers about your 1, 5 or 10-year sustainability goals (it will help keep you accountable too).

Figuring out which sustainability certification(s) make the most sense for your business and setting a plan to attain them.

Signing up to [Equator](#), which helps you understand the impact of your products and how to design them to be more sustainable.



About *Equator*

We're the world's first AI trained on sustainability data for travel and tourism.

We take the quality of our insights, sources and data seriously. That's why our AI is trained on almost exclusively peer-reviewed articles. We share where the information is from, who published it, when it was published and the source type.

We make it easy, simple and fast for companies and destinations to calculate their emissions, support local communities, and protect heritage and environments.

Discover the impacts of your products and services in minutes, from just \$49/month.

For more information:

Visit equator-ai.com

Email hello@equator-ai.com

Follow linkedin.com/company/equator-ai

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