



IMPACTFUL COMMUNICATIONS: A GUIDE TO CREATING RESPONSIBLE PR, MARKETING AND ADVERTISING

A FUTUREPLUS GUIDE

+ INTRODUCTION

The advertising, marketing and PR industries are some of the most influential drivers in today's society. Their impacts often extend beyond influencing purchasing decisions and lifestyle choices to shaping cultural trends and influencing public opinion on critical issues.

Research into consumer action showed that 57% of consumers say their perception of a brand is influenced by its sustainability practices, and 30% are compelled to action, either by switching brands or advocating based on a brand's sustainability efforts.

Communications therefore hold critical importance for businesses in helping to effectively and accurately communicate to customers and clients the sustainability of a brand or product.

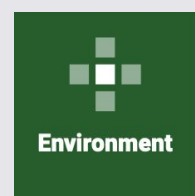
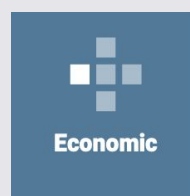
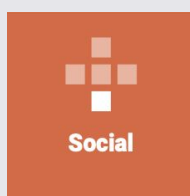
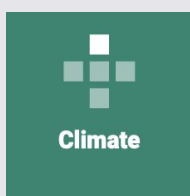
However, creating sustainable communications involves the consideration of multiple factors such as:

1. The information or messaging shared through the communications must be **accurate and transparent**.
2. The messaging or information being shared should have an **ethical intent**.
3. The assets must be **sustainably produced**.
4. The medium in which assets are shared should be carefully considered to ensure the use of **sustainable materials**.

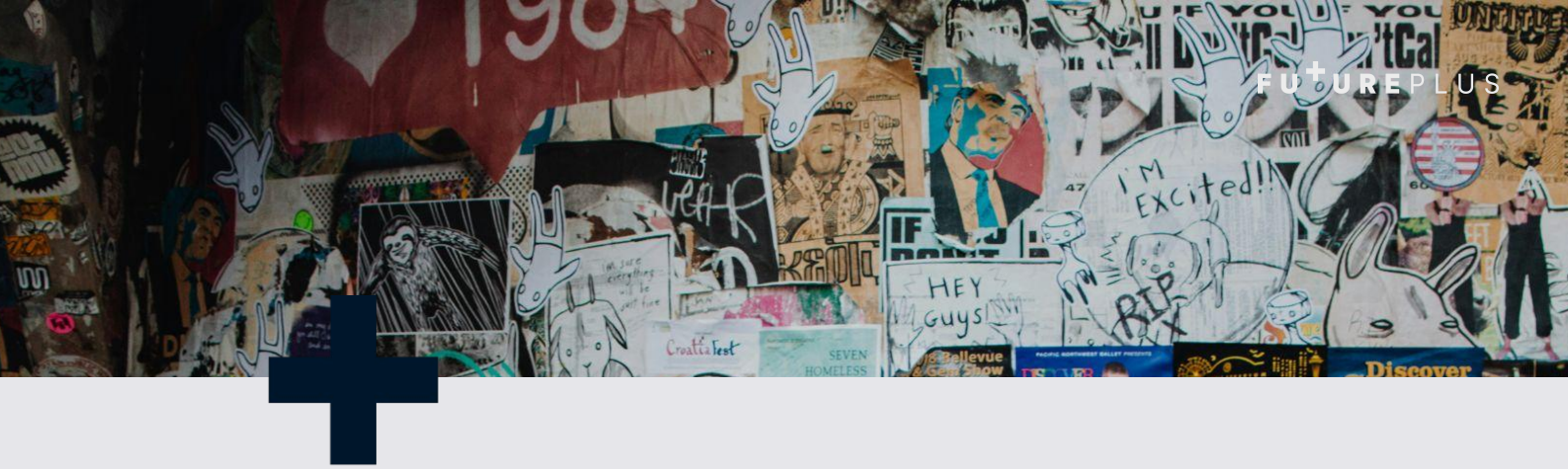
This guide highlights the key areas businesses should consider when integrating sustainable considerations into their advertising, marketing and PR campaigns. We offer practical guidance and strategies for how businesses can integrate each of the 4 key areas above into their future communications.

+ CONSIDERING SUSTAINABILITY

To help businesses understand, define and measure their sustainability impact, we divide sustainability into 5 key themes:



By thinking about sustainability in the context of these 5 themes, businesses are better able to understand and measure their overall impact.



+ CONCEPTS & MESSAGING

When developing a concept for a sustainable communications campaign, your approach involves crafting strategies that are not only effective in reaching target audiences but are also rooted in factual, ethical, and sustainable principles.

Sustainable communications transcend the traditional objectives of promotion and sales and aim to foster a positive impact on society and the environment. Does your messaging foster positive environmental or social behaviours, or does it encourage practices that may have negative impacts on the environment or people? Consider the impact of your communication across our 5 key themes.

Are your communications encouraging behaviours that:

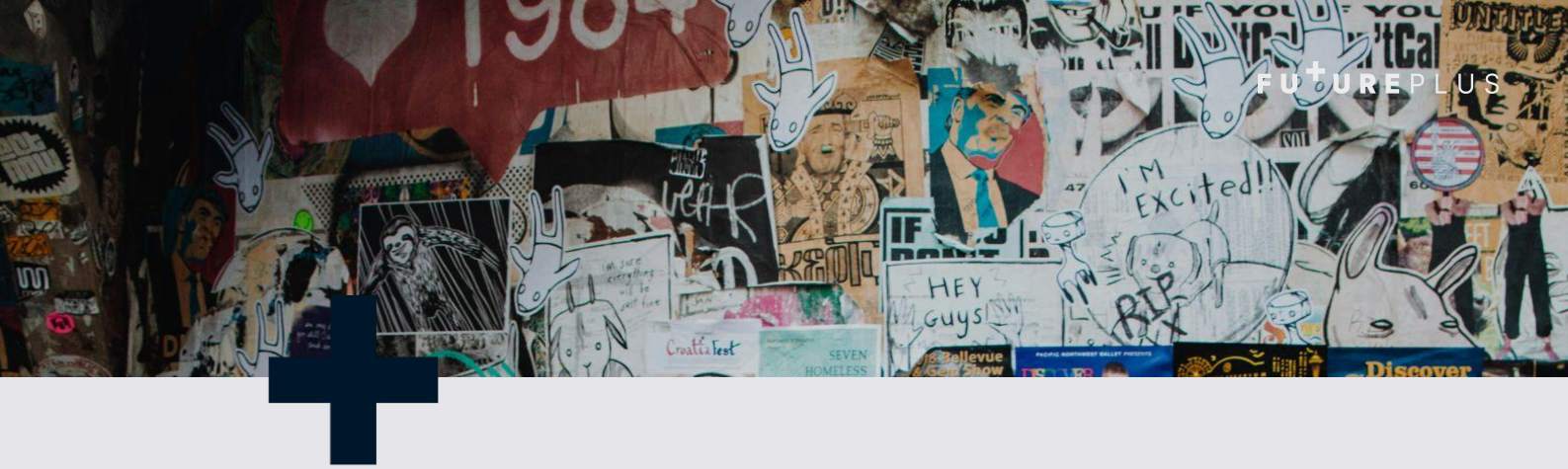
- Align with global carbon emission reduction targets (Climate)
- Support the sustainable use of natural materials (Environment)
- Encourage actions to minimise negative environmental impacts (Environment)
- Foster inclusivity and brings diverse groups together, rather than encouraging division (Diversity & Inclusion)
- Are safe and legal (Economic)
- Are financially responsible (Economic)
- Are **not** associated with detrimental mental and physical health impacts (Social)
- Have a positive impact on communities (Social)

It's important to think about the key messages that your communications are trying to deliver, and what behaviours or actions you are hoping to influence your audience to adopt. Your messaging should promote **honesty and transparency**, ensuring that communications are not just tools for brand promotion but also vehicles for disseminating truthful information and promoting responsible consumer behaviour.

+ CONSIDERING SUSTAINABLE SOURCING

When crafting communications, the sustainability of the entire supply chain from concept through to delivery plays a crucial role in reinforcing a brand's commitment to responsible business practices. This encompasses every aspect of the campaign's development, including the materials used to design sets, the purchase of merchandise, the selection of mediums for message dissemination, and even the choice of partners, such as PR agencies.

When taking this holistic view, sustainable sourcing ensures that the impact of every element of the communication strategy is considered.



+ KEY PRINCIPLES FOR SUSTAINABLE SOURCING

When developing communications, third parties will often be involved throughout the process, through the supply of goods or services. By considering ways to responsibly source goods and services, businesses can help ensure that every aspect of their communications process aligns with their responsible business practices.

We look at key impact areas across our 5 themes of sustainability, that can help businesses align their communications strategies with global sustainability goals.

+ CLIMATE

If your company is looking to reduce its emissions, or has set a Net Zero target, the carbon emissions created in the production and distribution of materials or media will count towards your reporting totals.

- **Carbon Footprint:** Preference working with suppliers and partners who are considering low-emissions solutions, or are aligned with international climate efforts.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Choose production methods and technologies that minimise energy consumption, or utilise energy-efficient technology.
- **Renewable Energy:** Opt for energy from renewable sources for digital and physical operations and preference digital displays (e.g. billboard) companies that power displays with renewable energy.
- **Transportation and Logistics:** Minimise the carbon footprint of transportation through efficient logistics planning and choosing lower carbon transport options. When selecting locations for sets or events, consider the emissions related to transporting people and equipment to and from that destination. Preference virtual meetings over in-person meetings when possible.
- **Digital vs. Physical Distribution:** Whenever possible, prefer digital distribution methods to reduce the carbon footprint associated with physical production and shipping.

+ DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Incorporating diversity and inclusion not only amplifies the authenticity and appeal of communications across varied audiences but also ensures that production processes and distribution channels reflect a commitment to social responsibility and equity.

- **Inclusive Representation:** Ensure diverse representation in media content and campaign messaging.



- **Supplier Diversity:** Partner with minority-owned, women-owned, and otherwise underrepresented groups' businesses.
- **Inclusive Workplace Practices:** Adopt and promote inclusive practices within your operations and your partners and suppliers. Do you expect the businesses you are working with to share the values your company champions around D&I?
- **Accessibility:** Make content accessible to people with disabilities, including visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive, and neurological disabilities.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Be mindful of cultural sensitivities and aim for respectful representation in all communications. This should not only encompass the final message but also extend to the selection of locations, sets, and costumes, and the potential impact on local communities.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with diverse communities to ensure their perspectives are considered and respected in your communications.
- **Intended Audiences:** While communications may be designed to target specific groups, remain alert to the potential of exclusionary language or imagery.

+ ECONOMIC

- **Support for Local Economies:** Source locally where possible to support local economies and reduce transportation impacts.
- **Fair Trade Practices:** Ensure that suppliers and partners adhere to fair trade practices, providing fair compensation and working conditions.
- **Long-term Partnerships:** Build long-term relationships with suppliers to contribute to economic stability in the supply chain. Preference suppliers and partners who can demonstrate on-going progress towards sustainability aims.
- **Industry Innovation:** Actively engage in and support industry-specific innovations that drive sustainable development in your sector. Collaborate with partners and stakeholders to explore and implement innovative solutions that address industry challenges while adhering to ethical governance standards.
- **Sustainable governance:** Foster a culture of transparency and integrity to prevent corrupt practices and protect the reputation of the business. Collaborate closely with suppliers and partners to uphold ethical governance standards, fostering a collective commitment to anti-corruption efforts.
- **Transparency:** Maintain transparency about sourcing and production practices to build trust with consumers and partners.



+ SOCIAL

- **Ethical Labour Practices:** Ensure that all partners and suppliers adhere to ethical labour practices, respecting workers' rights and providing safe working conditions. This may be through direct engagement from your business, or by setting standards for ethical labour certifications (e.g. Fair Trade) when making purchasing decisions.
- **High-Risk Industries:** If your communications strategy involves the use of materials that are procured from a high-risk industry, consider the additional steps your business may wish to put in place to gain assurance that your materials are not produced using slavery or child-labour practices.
- **Health and Safety:** Prioritise health and safety standards in all aspects of production and event management that consider employees, contractors and guests.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with stakeholders, including local communities, workers, and consumers, to ensure their needs and concerns are addressed. By integrating this process at an early stage businesses can foster trust, gather valuable insights, and build collaborative relationships that enhance the effectiveness and authenticity of their communications.
- **Community Impact:** Consider what may be the positive or negative impacts of your communications on communities and stakeholders. How can you measure this, to further support positive and mitigate negative impacts?
- **Continuous Engagement:** Cultivating and nurturing relationships with suppliers and partners presents a valuable opportunity for collaborative efforts aimed at addressing identified key social impact areas.

+ ENVIRONMENT

- **Sustainable Materials:** The creation, operation and disposal of materials carries both an environmental and emissions impact. By preferencing re-used, recycled, or upcycled materials for all physical marketing materials, this impact can be lessened. Where this is not possible, materials should be sourced that are responsibly produced and promote the sustainable use of natural materials.
- **Environmental Certifications:** To support the procurement of sustainable materials, businesses may opt to choose suppliers or products with recognised environmental certifications (e.g. FSC certified, Rainforest Alliance etc.).
- **Waste Reduction:** Implement strategies to minimise waste creation both within the production and distribution of communications. Where waste cannot be eliminated, waste should be recycled.



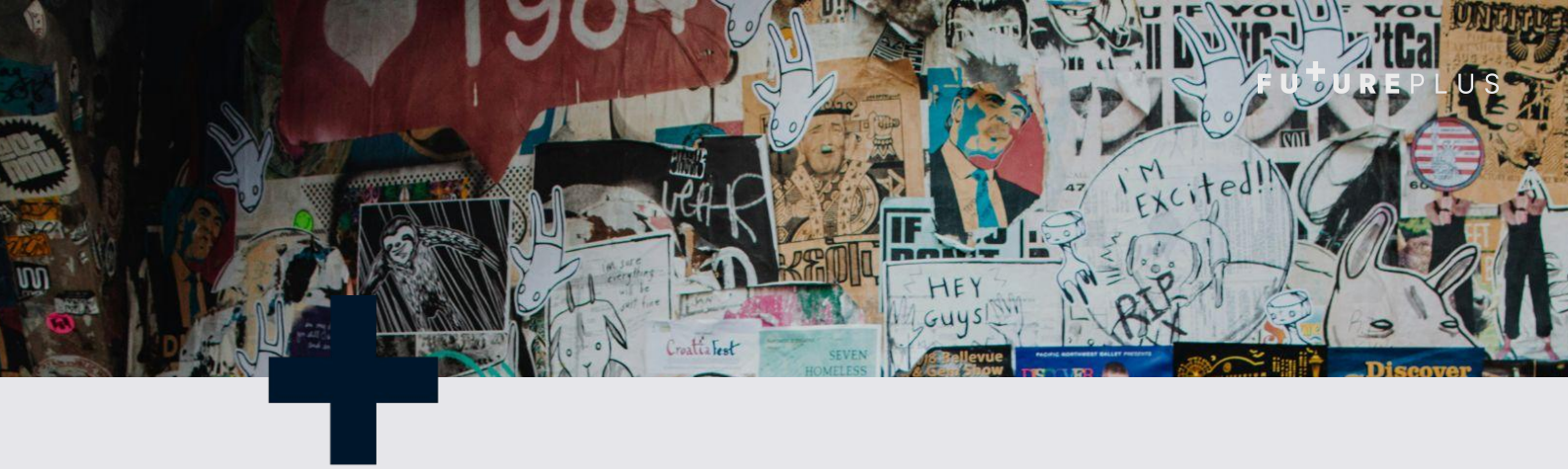
- **Biodiversity and Ecosystems:** Can be significantly impacted through consumption and use of natural resources, generating waste and pollution, and consumption behaviours that lead to habitat destruction. Understanding the potential impacts of procured materials is crucial for pinpointing critical areas of impact and strategically directing mitigation efforts.
- **Water Conservation:** Opt for practices and partners that prioritise water conservation and quality.

+ INCORPORATING IMPACT INTO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Having identified the key areas to focus on, it's now useful to consider how these insights can be integrated into current processes, with the goal of minimising internal impacts on your business. Embracing sustainability does not necessarily require an additional workload, and instead can be built into the fabric of existing practices.

This section provides an example of the steps your business could put in place to build your impactful communications strategy into your operations.

1. **Assess Current Practices.** Evaluate the current practices of your organisation and identify areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainability. What steps are in place to ensure your concept and messaging are inclusive and support environmental and social goals?
2. **Set Goals.** Establish clear and measurable goals for your communications strategy that align with your organisation's values and overall sustainability strategy. Think about how success will be measured.
3. **Sustainable Sourcing Strategies.** Identify sustainable sourcing options and practices by researching sustainable materials, suppliers and production methods.
4. **Communicate Expectations.** Develop sustainable sourcing criteria and guidelines for suppliers, establishing your expectations in a supplier code of conduct.
5. **Engagement and Collaboration.** Building sustainable supply chains and processes takes time. Engage with your suppliers and partners to encourage and support their individual sustainability journeys. Stronger relationships give your business more influence and can help drive change.
6. **Measuring and Reporting.** How do your achievements and progress measure against your targets? Is further action and engagement required? Regular, accurate reporting on progress can demonstrate the transparency and integrity of an organisation.



+ AVOIDING GREENWASHING

'Greenwashing' is a term used to describe misleading claims or untrue actions published or advertised by an organisation. These statements often allude to the positive impact of goods or services on the environment or the climate.

Companies that engage in greenwashing not only mislead consumers but also risk damaging the credibility of genuine sustainability initiatives. Greenwashing also poses a big reputational risk to brands, as seen by the many companies who have received substantial levels of negative press for advertising unsubstantiated or misleading sustainability claims.

To maintain public trust, it is imperative that organisations prioritise transparency, provide accurate information, and back up their claims with concrete actions, fostering a culture of authenticity and responsibility in their communications.

To find out more about Greenwashing, check out our guide [here](#).

+ GETTING HELP FROM FUTUREPLUS

FuturePlus has a number of tools in place to support businesses looking to work on measuring the impact of their operations and engaging with their suppliers.

If you would like to speak with us about the ways we can support your business, please email us a info@future-plus.co.uk