



Ingraining sustainability within a brand

According to the Stanford Social Innovation Review, more than 90 per cent of Chief Executive Officers (CEO) consider sustainability to be fundamental to business success¹. There are some immediate operational benefits in adopting a more sustainable approach, such as compliance with increasing legislation, cost savings derived from reduced energy consumption and satisfying consumer demand for sustainability. Most importantly, incorporating sustainability can help to increase companies' brand value and safeguard a long life for the business.

Earlier this month, Google announced its sustainability initiatives for the next decade, with lofty goals such as zero carbon footprint and 20,000 new jobs in clean energy by 2025². Compared to a behemoth such as Google, it would be easy for small businesses to fall into the trap of believing that their sustainability endeavours are unimportant. But the truth is, we all can and should, strive to make a difference.

However, understanding the importance of sustainability does not always translate into tangible practices that effect change. So how can business leaders develop a sustainable brand that walks the walk?

Start with low-hanging fruit

The quickest and simplest place to start is to focus

on reducing unsustainability by changing the potential bad habits you might have formed over the years. The COVID-19 pandemic might have already addressed many of these situations by reducing the overheads associated with an office and reducing the carbon footprint associated with commuting or business travel. If you do still operate from a brick-and-mortar workplace, look for ways to increase energy efficiency by developing policies around heating and lighting, reviewing your energy supplier, or considering smart building controls. Pre-COVID-19, Sourced eliminated single-use plastics and, where possible, gone paperless.

Live and breathe it

One of the reasons we have so successfully incorporated sustainability into our brand at Sourced is because it is one of our core business values and therefore a critical factor in all of our business decisions. Be it sending something by mail or assessing suppliers, how we improve sustainability is always front of mind of any discussion. Starting with our CEO, sustainability is a passion for the leadership team and this cascades into sustainable behaviours and initiatives across both our business and personal lives.

Lead from the top

Truly incorporating sustainability as part of the brand starts by role modelling sustainable behaviour from



the top down. Pre-COVID-19, Sourced executives would frequently spend their weekends planting trees or marching for social issues alongside the rest of the team. Moving forward, we will continue these activities in a safe manner to provide social connection while we are all working from home. We also have tools in place to recognise employee contributions to sustainability and empower employees to make suggestions for new sustainable practices.

It is also important for business leaders to make important decisions to create an environment that encourages sustainability for all. Having lived the benefits of remote working thanks to COVID-19, Sourced is now exploring the option of increased

work-from-home arrangements to improve wellbeing and work life balance for employees. This will also go towards reducing the carbon footprint associated with commuting.

Educate, share and improve

As a business leader, you may understand the benefits of sustainability, but you should not expect your team to jump on board without first educating them as to why it is important. Consider developing a platform for employees to share their knowledge. For example, we have a Slack channel where employees upload videos about sustainable issues and share sustainable finds from their personal lives. This encourages employees to strive and hold themselves and each other accountable.

Put your money where your mouth is

It is important for employees and customers to understand that the business is not just paying lip-service to sustainable practices. Credible sustainable practices will involve investment. As Sourced prioritises sustainability in every part of its operating decisions, it often means that the focus on budget is reduced in order to pay extra for sustainable products. When considering branded merchandise, for example, we would always choose t-shirt or hat suppliers with the best credentials rather than opting for a more affordable option.

As an international business that involves overseas travel

(or at least did, pre-COVID-19), Sourced is highly conscious of the environmental impact of that travel. As a result, we have conducted a carbon offset analysis to understand the footprint of our travel and will donate to offset our annual impact.

Sustainability is about more than the environment

It is easy to fall into the trap of only considering the environment, but true sustainability also incorporates social issues. At Sourced, we are just as passionate about equality and social justice. Two of our seven-strong leadership team are female and our employees hail from diverse backgrounds. To ensure social equality within your organisation, consider initiatives that support minority groups and invest in training around offsetting unconscious bias.

There is no quick and easy way to develop a credible, sustainable brand. It will require a committed and lasting effort from every employee. But with time, it is possible for a business to become known for its sustainability practices. At Sourced, it was evident that our values were being noticed externally when a valuable partner organisation who wanted to send us a gift chose to adopt a koala in Sourced's name. While it may require dedication, the benefits of becoming a truly sustainable brand will be reaped for years to come. 

Resources:

- https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_next_phase_of_business_sustainability
- <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/sustainability/our-third-decade-climate-action-realizing-carbon-free-future/>



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Angela is a people and culture leader with over 20 years of people and culture management experience. Passionate about building strong leaders, teams and organisations to achieve extraordinary results, Angela adopts a broad business perspective, strategic mindset and collaborative approach to working. She lives in Toronto, Canada and enjoys spending time with her family, tending to her garden and tackling home renovations.