

The Seven Wonders of Sustainability

By Cecilia Jamasmie

Organizations face increasing pressure these days as the [regulatory landscape](#) intensifies and the [need for transparency](#) increases. Global competition is also growing, while the demands of customers change rapidly in a market in which recessionary forces linger.

Against this backdrop, companies realize the importance of deploying sustainability strategies to bolster their market position, build trust and brand loyalty, and retain customers as well as employees. Many organizations, however, have never implemented such proven methods as engaging all their stakeholders in a systemic way, or even developing a sustainability report. As a result, well-intentioned sustainability efforts end up missing the mark or lacking the energy needed to succeed.

This was the primary drive in creating a new report, entitled "[Top Seven Sustainability Practices: The Sum > the Parts.](#)" written by Perry Goldschein, co-founder and partner at [SDialogue LLC](#), a strategic sustainability communications firm.

The special report takes a complex, rapidly evolving field and puts it in a digestible form for users. It identifies the top seven practices every organization should be considering, as well as explains how these tactics work together. The report also explores how organizations can use these practices to thrive in the years ahead.

The paper offers a snapshot of leading sustainability activities and CSR planning, such as setting sustainability goals and metrics, identifying and engaging stakeholders, integrating sustainability into a brand and sustainability/CSR reporting, among others. The report also offers insights into the role of social media, stakeholder engagement from a sustainability perspective and how sustainability/CSR reports can help build trust.

Goldschein says that the report aims to give organizations a better understanding of the main best practices, how they



Organizations should identify and prioritize whom they need to engage in their sustainability policy.

work together and how they can help organizations improve their sustainability efforts.

Here are a few of the tips from the seven best practices detailed in the report:

Setting Sustainability Goals & Measuring Success

For any long-term sustainability program to succeed, it is critical to develop, maintain and tie sustainability goals to overarching corporate goals and at least some quantifiable metrics.

Some questions to ask yourself are: What is the value creation of sustainability for your organization? What are the true costs of not evolving more sustainably?

What are the quantifiable metrics that demonstrate that the board and C-suite should care?

Stakeholder Engagement

Organizations should identify and prioritize whom they need to engage - whether it is employees, nonprofits or others - and how to initiate a dialogue with them. Collaboration and social media tools are some of the emerging ways to connect with stakeholders.

Sustainability / CSR Reporting

Sustainability leaders consistently report on their sustainability and corporate social responsibility activities.

They also have the report audited by a third party, which bolsters the level of credibility.

Your organization can do the same. And while there is no standard format yet, the most commonly used guidelines are the ones offered by the [Global Reporting Initiative](#). You can also consult [Business in the Community](#) and the [World Business Council for Sustainable Development](#).

Integrating Sustainability into Your Brand

Integrating sustainability into your brand requires significant effort. Of course, you need to ensure that your communications are accurate, consistent and relate to your products or services, and that such communications fit in with your overall brand strategy. But more importantly, you need to ensure a corporate culture that supports your sustainability efforts. Integrating sustainability into your brand requires that it be a real part of your entire organization, and not only involve superficial efforts.

Using Social Media to Better Engage Stakeholders

Only a few years old, newer [social media and collaboration technology](#) tools can connect the organization to different stakeholders at different levels, both internal and external.

Social media makes it easier for companies to track and report their impacts on the environment and society more broadly. They allow a company to put reporting information online, and launch a dialogue with the public. For example, a blog or forum process gives stakeholders the opportunity to debate whether a company has identified the most “material” environmental and social issues and whether it has covered the ground on how it thinks about these issues, and has adequately responded to them.

As the title of the report suggests, the benefits of employing these best practices in a systemic way go beyond simple returns such as higher sales and a greater market share. The sum of your sustainability efforts, says the author, results in increased trust, sustained and longer-term customer loyalty and internal



Sustainability leaders should consistently report on their sustainability and corporate social responsibility activities and not only the environment related initiatives.

payback such as increased employee retention and higher morale, among many other benefits. ■

For more information about this report and to download a free copy, click [here](#).

Links and References

- [Beyond the Mine Mouth](#)
- [Business in the Community](#)
- [Gaining a Social License to Operate](#)
- [Global Reporting Initiative](#)
- [SDialogue](#)
- [Social Media Advances the Sustainability Dialogue](#)
- [Top Seven Sustainability Practices: The Sum > the Parts](#)
- [World Business Council for Sustainable Development](#)
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