

Uncovering the myths about 'green' marketing



By [Melissa Baird](#)

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You hear the word bandied about in boardrooms ...'sustainability'... and are left wondering what this actually means to advertisers who have a brief to follow and strategists who have communications plans to develop.

When trying to define something, it is often useful to describe what it is not and in this regard I'd like to demystify some myths around effective 'green' marketing...

1) **A green message is equal to a sustainable message**

'Green' messaging has overshadowed the real work of sustainability strategies which are fundamental economic models that take into account the financial, social and environmental impacts of a business or organisation. In other words, a billboard proclaiming the 'green' credentials of a product is not the full story of a brand or company's sustainability strategy.

2) **Consumer's don't care**

The research that Ogilvy**earth** has undertaken shows this to be quite the opposite and trends worldwide show a rising segment of consumers who do care about the full life cycle of their products and they will boycott a product or company because of its environmental or social practises. The rise of the conscious consumer is not a fallacy and the bigger brands that are waking up to how this can retain and develop new markets are the ones that will lead and keep their market share.

3) **Communicating to your staff is a waste of time**

The biggest stakeholder in understanding a company's sustainability strategy is its staff. It is no good running a campaign to say how energy efficient your brand is if the staff have no idea why it is important to be so. Efficiencies put into practise can not only reduce overheads massively but also encourage positive behaviour change in staff who will reap the economic benefits while having a positive environmental impact.

4) **CSR is of no interest to your consumer**

One of the biggest trends for 2013 as stated by the CEO of WPP, Martin Sorrell, is that "Doing good is now understood to be good for business". The Ogilvy**earth** survey confirms this perception too because more than 80% of respondents say they would choose a brand or product because of the CSR work in which it is involved.

5) **Sustainability strategists are tree hugging hippies who don't get marketing**

Quite the contrary - in fact you will often have a sustainability strategist that looks on in amazement towards a marketing executive who thinks this way. In case you were not paying attention, this is the biggest 'growth' opportunity of the 21st century and how a brand impacts the environment and society within which it operates is vitally important. It will determine who continues into the future and who doesn't.

South Africa is a developing nation and job creation and economic growth are paramount for the country as whole. The rising costs of electricity and the energy demands of a growing economy are real threats to growth as is labour unrest and an estimated 25% of the population living on social grants. These factors make for a highly volatile landscape and one that is not welcoming to 'green' messaging because it is considered a luxury to place the environment at the centre of business and developmental policy. And yet what about the brands who are actively involved in developing strategies to manage the changing landscape and who have incredible stories to tell about the transformation achieved as a result of placing environmental and social sustainability at the heart of their business strategy?

'Green' is not the preserve of the wealthy

The role of 'green' is not an issue dedicated to the wealthy of the country that have the most vested interests. The middle sector of the population has the biggest area for growth and therein lies the opportunity for a brand to become a sustainable champion for their own business and offer product and services that act as cohesive contributors to the economic and environmental landscape that ultimately determine its success, or not.

Whilst we are connected to the major thought leaders engaging in this conversation with local and national government as well as some of the country's top CEO's, it is part of our role as communication specialists to uncover the stories that are powerful enough to act as motivators to support behaviour change and create a bridge between brand and customer that turns into a conversation; not just about a brand's heroic transformation, but about collective engagement in what matters to all of us.

ABOUT MELISSA BAIRD

Melissa Baird is a multi-faceted communications strategist, workshop facilitator, public speaker and talented wordsmith whose career has spanned traditional advertising, interactive television, digital marketing and book and magazine publishing. Currently Baird is an independent sustainability communications strategist, writer and editor after a five-year tenure heading up strategy at Ogilvyearth.

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