

Making Sustainability Matter

The Hartman Group

"Sustainability" is the marketing buzzword of the year. With all of the attention given to companies and consumers "going green," one would think that by now the term would have diffused into commonplace language. While sustainability has become a household word for the industry and media, findings show that while consumers are actively engaged accommodating sustainability in their day-to-day lives, the average consumer does not use the term "sustainability." For consumers, sustainability is not about "saving the Earth;" it hits much closer to home. Preserving a certain condition or way of life is top of mind, allowing consumers the ability to control their surroundings.

As consumers move deeper into the World of Sustainability the dynamics of sustainability in US consumer culture will continue to change and evolve. Through further exploration and understanding, companies can leverage consumer values to tap into consumer desires and emotional aspects of sustainability.

Preserving lifestyle and calculating risk

The Hartman Report on Sustainability: Understanding the Consumer Perspective by The Hartman Group, Inc. finds that just over half (54%) of consumers claim any familiarity at all with the term "sustainability." When consumers talk about sustainability, they are communicating six key values: healthier, local, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, simple living and control.

While most consumers have a limited understanding of the broad concept of sustainability, consumer engagement can be described in varying degrees of "sustainability consciousness." Sustainability consciousness is not just about "eco-conscious consumers" and the environment; it is broadly distributed across society in the ways people mitigate risk in everyday life.

To counteract the risks posed by everyday life, consumers establish habits such as:

- Avoiding unfiltered tap water
- Wearing sunglasses and sunscreens to "block out" harmful UV rays
- Fastening vehicle safety belts and using child car seats "in case" an accident happens
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Other adaptations to risk only now emerging:

- Using sanitary wipes on grocery shopping carts
- Routinely using air filters in living rooms
- Questioning the purity of water in plastic bottles

These small measures provide entry points for consumer participation in sustainability, even when they may not be familiar with that as a term or the global impact.

Sustainability from the inside out

As individual sustainability consciousness develops, it grows from the physical body, to the household, to the community and finally to global interconnectedness - centering on the body and ranging outward to the broader environment. Our most recent research shows a variety of influences that prompt consumers to participate in the World of Sustainability:

- Having children tends to dramatically impact understandings and increases mental and practical investments in issues of sustainability.
- Participating in outdoor recreation that centers on or around wilderness areas or undeveloped land (e.g., hiking, cross-country skiing, rock climbing, sailing, fishing, camping) brings face-to-face confrontation with balancing conflicting needs.
- Narcissism impedes sustainability consciousness and action; thus, the recognition that the world doesn't just "revolve around me" is a pathway to sustainability consciousness.
- When a cherished "way of life" shared by many people comes under siege of broader changes - that is, when a future life that was assumed as a given by the group becomes threatened - questions of sustainability are likely to arise (e.g., "Will I have access to clean water?", "Will I still be able to get local produce?")

Key barriers to regular participation in sustainable behavior are price, convenience and tangible benefits where personal health and well-being are critical triggers. These key dimensions must be met and/or rationalized before consumers will begin their journey into sustainable products, services or experiences.

The pathway to "green"

Companies of all sizes and orientations have the opportunity to partner with consumers to help solve meaningful issues related to sustainability. To connect, focus on what's relevant to consumers' daily ways of living.

- Begin orienting company innovation, communication and experiences toward consumer definitions, not industry definitions, of sustainability to ensure all efforts are relevant. Environmental or eco-friendly strategies are influential in purchase decisions to only a small number of consumers.
- Focus on a select few (basic) areas tied to products that are driven by people's desire to be involved in health and wellness and resonate with them on their shopping occasions.
- While the term "sustainability" is not a household word, it is an umbrella term for six key values: healthier, local, social responsibility, environmental responsibility, simple living and control. Leverage sustainability values in communications, both linguistically and visually, to tap into consumers' desires and emotional aspects of sustainability.

The dynamics of sustainability in US consumer culture will continue to change and evolve. Before framing messages of sustainable values it is important to find definitions that consumers can relate to. What companies need to understand as this new wave of

sustainability enthusiasm continues to roll in is how it unfolds to become active in consumers' everyday lives. Armed with this understanding, marketers can then devise innovative, relevant and actionable strategies and tactics that resonate with consumers.

Remember, the key is simplicity and easy participation. After all, recycling didn't work until it went curbside and sorting was simplified.

About the Report--The Hartman Report on Sustainability:

Understanding the Consumer Perspective

A landmark new study by The Hartman Group

The Hartman Report on Sustainability: Understanding the Consumer Perspective is the first major integrated quantitative and qualitative study to find out how consumers feel about a world struggling to live in balance today for the benefit of future generations.

Our research clearly reveals that a cultural shift is taking place in terms of consumer awareness, acceptance and practices that relate to sustainability. Specifically, this report provides detailed sociological exploration of how perceived risks from air, water, sun and food vectors translates into both personal behavior as well as larger notions of what are sustainable and environmental practices, products and services.

What You Can Expect

Expect the unexpected: Few consumers have deep or extensive knowledge of expert, policy or corporate discourses related to sustainability and sustainable development. In fact, relatively few consumers have any familiarity at all with the terms "sustainability" and "sustainable development." At the same time, however, we found that most consumers (93%) do, in fact, operate in everyday life with varying degrees of what we have come to think of as "sustainability consciousness."

The Hartman Report on Sustainability: Understanding the Consumer Perspective is a deep dive into how cultural behaviors are evolving in a variety of spheres, including but not limited to recycling, household cleaning, gardening and the selection of apparel and household objects and how these preferences translate along the lines of so-called "sustainable" choices.

CH I provides the theory behind sustainability looking at whether or not "sustainability" is a household word and the key triggers to sustainability consciousness.

CH II introduces the World of Sustainability, the segment profiles and dimensions of participation.

CH III examines risk awareness, triggers of risk perception and evolution of sustainability consciousness.

CH IV discusses the search for solutions within the context of everyday life at work and at home and delves into the power the consumer wields (or not).

CH V looks at the various levels of how consumers react to world problems from active to passive engagement.

CH VI paints a portrait of the largest segment of the population, mid-level consumers, and examines their understanding of sustainability issues and behaviors.

CH VII explores consumers' view of corporate citizenship detailing characteristics associated with environment-friendly companies, the importance of business practices in consumers' purchasing decisions, consumer reactions to companies with sustainable values and the companies perceived to be socially responsible.

CH VIII explores how sustainability intersects with health and wellness, leading to broader notions of quality.

CH IX provides reflections on opportunities and recommendations for companies.

About The Hartman Group

The Hartman Group, Inc., <http://www.hartman-group.com/>, founded in 1989, is a full-service consulting and consumer insights leader offering a wide range of services and products, specializing in the health and wellness marketplace.