

EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCING BEHAVIOUR

Business Perspective



Business is able to influence the behaviour of both its staff and its customers, and the power of brands should not be underestimated. To a greater or lesser extent, people see their brand choices as a reflection of their own values and this gives brand owners enormous power to shape behaviour. By reducing the environmental impacts of their products and services, and by communicating those changes to customers, companies can help to 'normalise' environmentally sustainable choices. They can also help their customers to use those products or services in a more sustainable way, thereby reducing further the business's carbon footprint.

This power carries with it responsibility. Claims must be authentic, transparent and substantiated by hard data, or trust will be broken and the company's reputation damaged. There is 'green claims' guidance on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' website which provides a solid basis for communicating environmental attributes and benefits. Independent accreditation is a useful way of proving the validity of claims too.

Unless your product or service is specifically designed for eco-consumers, it's probably unrealistic to expect your customers to buy it for altruistic reasons. Some of the most effective environmental communications campaigns are where the benefit to the consumer is clearly articulated as well as the environmental gain – for example the Unilever 'turn to 30' campaign which quantified the cost saving of washing at lower temperatures.

Reducing your company's carbon footprint relies as much on the behaviour of your staff as it does on the equipment you buy or the processes you set up. Employee engagement can be challenging and behaviour change is notoriously difficult to achieve. There are no magic bullets but you should expect to have to repeat key messages periodically and to be clear about the benefits to the business of the changes you expect staff to make. Competitions can help to harness peer pressure, and incentive programmes can be very effective; they need not be costly and for activities like energy saving they can be funded from the savings achieved.

Convincing staff to adopt more carbon efficient ways of working is more effective if it aligns with the culture and values of the business. The more consistently the company lives its values, the more likely it is that the desired behaviours will become instinctive. Helping staff to reduce their carbon footprint at home can be a useful way of engaging them to do the same at work. The benefits they experience in terms of reduced energy bills, for example, can help make the business benefits more tangible and increase motivation. They may even become advocates for the cause, and help get their colleagues on board.