

PR News

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

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Lean, Green PR Machine: Developing Inside-Out Sustainability Strategies

It may or may not come as much of a shock that many Americans (48%, to be exact) erroneously believe that “green” products and services have a positive/beneficial impact on the environment when, in fact, “green” more accurately describes products with a less

negative impact than competing versions (Source: 2008 Green Gap Survey, conducted by **Cone** and the **Boston College Center for Corporate Citizenship**). It’s a clear disconnect, especially considering the growing obsession with “green-ifying” our lifestyles to prevent (or at least postpone) inevitable planetary combustion.

Add a few more stats into the mix—47% of Americans trust companies to tell the truth in environmental messaging, 45% believe companies are accurately

communicating information about their environmental impact and 61% say they understand the environmental terms companies use in their advertising—and you will realize why, on April 30, the **FTC** will have a public hearing on government regulation of environmental marketing messages.

What does this mean for communicators? As the public and now the government increasingly scrutinize green marketing, accuracy, credibility and deliverables are all the

more important. Thus, initiatives must be aligned with an organization’s mission—not to mention connected to its bottom-line goals—to have lasting impact. Here’s how to get started.

INSIDE OUT: LIVE THE GREEN

Green marketing plans have to start somewhere—that is, internally with a sustainable business strategy. According to Glen Franklin, SVP of

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(DID YOU KNOW?)

Seven Things You Will Learn in This Week’s Issue of PR News

1. When dealing with an image crisis such as that of China and the upcoming Olympics, PR execs should shift messaging away from politics. (p. 2)
2. To empower employees to go green, align incentives with the organization’s desired green outcomes. (p. 6)
3. When trying to be transferred to an overseas job, market yourself by focusing on your key competencies. (p. 8)
4. Pregnant women and new moms engage in one-third more WOM conversations per day than the total public. (p. 3)
5. 62% of surveyed execs believe professional networking sites like LinkedIn will be most useful in recruiting efforts in the next three years. (p. 3)
6. There are five steps to selling search: anticipate, diagnose, integrate, measure and extend. (p. 7)
7. When measuring messages’ impact, focus on storytelling and the impact of specific words on audiences. (p. 4)

SEO/SEM

Measurement

Digital PR

A Match Made in Cyberspace: Integrating SEO & SEM Into Every PR Strategy

Recently, *PR News* provided you with a crash course in all things SEO (see PRN 04-14-08); now it’s time for the master’s class. As the past article suggested, search engine optimization (SEO) and its kissing cousin, search engine marketing (SEM), are the tools that make the world go ‘round—as least as far as PR is concerned.

“Search is the connective tissue that links everyone and everything on the Internet,” says Doug Winfield, VP, digital strategy, **Waggener Edstrom Worldwide**. “It’s not a revolution as much as a period of accelerated evolution.”

Revolution or evolution, PR pros must now think beyond simple Google searches; the

strongest, most apt to survive integrate these platforms into every communications effort, be it blogging, social media press releases, video or measurement. After all, for every communications subfunction, there is a different type of search: algorithmic, sponsored, vertical, local, mobile, paid and organic (just to name a few). However, it’s the latter two that are most relevant to PR execs. Here’s a simple breakdown:

- **Paid search:** These are the results whose position is based on market-driven price and relevance. There are two categories of paid search: pay-per-click (PPC), in which advertisers just

pay when a user clicks on the ad (these appear in the right-hand column of results pages), and paid inclusion, where search engines charge fees for Web sites to be included in their search indexes. The benefits of paid search? Immediate, measurable results and control over content and placement. The downside? You have to pay.

- **Organic search:** These results appear based on algorithms that determine the prominence of their placement. The previously mentioned *PR News* article cited specific tactics that PR execs can implement to boost their

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Green Marketing Plans

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product strategy, **Citi Card**, and Courtney Zwart, VP of product strategy, Citi Card, “in most cases, internal activity does not need to line up with a position in the market or a specific cause; [for example], Whole Foods does not need to certify the eating habits of their employees to credibly deliver on their positioning. It’s different with green. To credibly sell a green product or service, you must act green.”

John Friedman, board member of the [Sustainable Business Network of Washington](#), identifies more tangible benefits of conducting business in green/sustainable ways:

- License to operate (speed to market)
- Cost reduction/avoidance
- Market opportunity/advantage. “Brand reputation is arguably the most important asset a company has over the long term,” he says.
- Employee engagement
- Access to investment capital

So, the reasons to go green internally are there; now it’s just a matter of making it happen.

► **Align the program with your core business model.** “Successful businesses must be adept at determining market changes, trends and expectations,” Friedman says. “They cannot be in such a rush to embrace the ‘new’ trend that they abandon their fundamental and core purposes.”

In terms of said core purposes, Robert Best, SVP of commercial real estate services firm **Jones Lang LaSalle**, recommends establishing an environmental sustainability policy by defining the business objectives, the sustainability strategy and goals and key senior sponsorship. Then, create a team to communicate and enforce this

policy. Best gives the example of Jones Lang LaSalle’s ACT: A Cleaner Tomorrow program, whose team exists in layers, from a Global Environmental Sustainability Board to regional boards, to internal environmental initiatives.

► **Determine where you can make an impact, and integrate practices into your day-to-day operations.** Best says these impacts can be made in a number of areas, from energy conservation to waste management. When linked to your organization’s sustainability policy, you begin to see specific, measurable results; for example, **Staples** saved \$6 million in two years by using centralized lighting controls, Best says, and **FedEx Kinkos** retrofitted more than 95% of its branches with energy-efficient lighting and motion sensors.

Friedman expands on this step with these tactical tips:

- Move from a vision to a culture by communicating the sustainable, green business strategy.
- Identify and build on “quick hit” benefits.
- Reduce costs: tax advantages/incentives and risk management, for example.
- Increase opportunities via social marketing and co-branding.
- Identify longer-term benefits, including a stronger reputation and image.
- Align incentives with desired outcomes to empower employees.

The last point is absolutely essential, as any external communication of green business practices will come across as greenwashing if said practices aren’t being championed by senior management and imbedded into employees’ everyday responsibil-

ities. Organizations like Citi and **General Electric** have extremely successful green marketing campaigns primarily because they are being executed from the inside out, via cross-business collaboration that’s facilitated by environmental affairs at Citi and the franchise-wide Ecomagination program led by GE VP Lorraine Bolsinger. Jones Lang LaSalle goes so far as to train employees to execute its sustainability goals.

► **Develop an overview of action items and how they will be implemented.** Referring to the ACT program, Best cites specific initiatives that his organization undertook, from eliminating Styrofoam cups in office kitchens and conference rooms to setting thermostats one degree higher/lower in the summer/winter to become greener internally and, in turn, have something positive to communicate externally.

This, of course, is the embodiment of the overarching communications plan: Identify goals, develop strategies, implement via tactics, measure success and communicate it accordingly.

OUTSIDE IN: CREATING A GREEN MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Once your organization has a green program worth sharing, it’s time to shape communications campaigns.

► **Craft the message.** Franklin and Zwart offer these tips that can apply to all message-creation sessions:

- Know your target audience and understand what’s in it for them.
- Personalize and localize the message by putting it in context for the target audience.
- Keep the messaging simple and tangible with just enough

information to ensure they [audiences] understand, believe, care and act.

- Don’t pigeonhole yourself into solely discussing environmental benefits; also think in terms of economic or health advantages. “Depoliticize marketing,” they say. “Inspire the audience to take part.”
- Reference relevant, credible third parties, including the **Environmental Protection Agency**, **The Nature Conservancy** and the **World Wildlife Fund**.

► **Disseminate the message thoughtfully.** When choosing communications channels, make sure they are congruent with the green message; for example, if you are talking about recycling, don’t send out reams of paper. Instead, use digital platforms or, when printed material is required, make sure the paper is recycled and the ink is soy-based.

Banking is just one example of an industry that’s successfully using greener communications channels, as many companies are moving from paper bills to electronic statements. Citi Card’s paperless statement initiative, tagged “Make a statement with your statement,” offers customers a simple, tangible action item (“Enroll in Paperless Statements today”); provides context by explaining what Citi will do when they enroll (donate a tree to the **National Arbor Day Foundation**); and gives a “what’s in it for me” explanation chock-full of added benefits (e-mail notifications, instant access, etc.). **PRN**

CONTACTS:

John Friedman, johnf@sbnw.org; Robert Best, bob.best@am.jll.com