



# SELLING SUSTAINABILITY

PRIMER FOR MARKETERS

This Primer was published by the Sustainable Lifestyles Frontier Group

Sustainable products, services  
and behaviors are the future.  
They are better for business, consumers  
and the planet, and increasingly  
consumers are asking for them.



Ninety-three percent of global  
consumers want to see more of the  
brands they use support worthy social  
and/or environmental issues, and three  
out of four teenagers say they want to  
buy more sustainable products.

So why is selling  
sustainability so difficult?

## WHY IS SELLING SUSTAINABILITY SO DIFFICULT?

It shouldn't be. We know that consumers "care". We have surveys in abundance revealing that people pay attention to social and environmental credentials, especially in the millennial generation.

But all of those good intentions don't fully translate into measurable purchase decisions.

Marketers seeking to sell sustainability face the great values-action gap – the difference between what consumers say in surveys, and what they go on to actually do.

## THE SECRET TO SUSTAINABLE MARKETING

There is a solution. Consumer values are just fine, it's the value offered by brands that needs attention.

Most sustainability marketing today only sells sustainability. At most the consumer is buying a feel-good factor or a guilt-offset. That's simply not enough. There is one simple question that can change everything:

**'HOW CAN SUSTAINABILITY GIVE MY CONSUMER MORE?'**

### About the Sustainable Lifestyles Frontier Group

Jointly launched in April 2013 by BSR and Futerra, the SLFG is taking the lead on sustainability marketing, learning from participating businesses on how to enable sustainable lifestyles across industries and around the globe.

  
FAMILY OF CONSUMER COMPANIES



L'ORÉAL









To join our group, please contact  
Elisa Niemtow: [enietow@bsr.org](mailto:enietow@bsr.org)

### About this guide

This guide was designed for the sustainability, brand and marketing teams of our SLFG member companies.

The insights are based on brand workshops held in the USA, Europe and Asia over two years.



A photograph of a pizza being shared by several people at a wooden table. The pizza is cut into slices, and several hands are visible holding up slices. The pizza has a thick crust, melted cheese, and toppings including pepperoni and green herbs. The background is a rustic wooden table. The text "WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters.

# WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

OFFERING MORE  
FROM SUSTAINABILITY

## CONSUMERS NEED A BUSINESS CASE TOO

For most sustainable products and behavior campaigns the hard question of “what’s in it for the consumer?” is still largely unanswered.

Sustainable products and behaviors are better for the planet; we need to make them more obviously better for the person.

Until we have a compelling value proposition from sustainability, well-intentioned products and campaigns will continue to struggle.

There is a value equation. You need to tip the balance between the barriers and benefits of your product or behavioral ask.

$$\text{FEWER BARRIERS} + \text{MORE BENEFITS} = \text{VALUE}$$

Barriers can be lack of skills, motivation, infrastructure or beliefs (to list a few). For example, a barrier to purchasing an electric car might be the belief that the driving experience will suffer from inferior performance.

Benefits can be functional, emotional or social. Driving an electric car can come with functional benefits, in that you can refuel at home. It also has social benefits – automakers connect drivers to a community of ‘believers’ through apps and online forums.

Remove the barriers and shine a light on the benefits. This is how you deliver better consumer value from sustainability.

## THE SEARCH FOR VALUE

Every sustainable product or campaign needs to answer the question: what's in it for the consumer? If the balance towards benefits isn't strong enough, then it's back to the basics – you need to build in more benefits.

Barriers and benefits fit into three broad value categories: functional, emotional, and social. To help you analyze and brainstorm the type of barriers and benefits that could be enhancing or limiting your value proposition we have suggested here a few prompt questions.



### FUNCTIONAL BENEFITS

Can sustainability add or detract from **value for money**?

Enhance or hinder **performance and efficacy**?

Improve or worsen **quality**?

Give my consumer more or less **time** in their day?

Add to **safety** or risk?

Make their life **easier** or harder?



### EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

Can sustainability strengthen or weaken **sensory experiences**?

Offer more or less **physical comfort**?

Provide a thrill of **excitement** or only a dull experience?

Heighten **self-worth** or add guilt?

Enhance or detract from **personalization**?

Make their life **happier** or sadder?



### SOCIAL BENEFITS

Can sustainability facilitate or disrupt family **bonding**?

Make them seem more or less **desirable** in others' eyes?

Prove how **cool, smart and able** they are or make them look foolish?

Offer **community and a sense of belonging** or isolate them?

Be adapted into **shareable content** or is it too singular?

## HEROING VALUE

Here are three examples of brands and products that have offered their consumers clear and compelling benefits while tearing down barriers.



### FUNCTIONAL



In a fight against food waste, French supermarket **Intermarché** sold their imperfect fruits and vegetables at a 30 percent discount under the banner **Inglorious Fruits and Vegetables**.

Through compelling messaging, Intermarché offered consumers **value for money** and made tackling food waste the **sensible and easy** option.

This led to all of the **Inglorious goods selling out**, and an increase of store traffic by **24 percent**.



### EMOTIONAL



On a mission to tackle myths that electric cars cannot offer the same performance as gas-fueled cars, **Tesla** introduced an **Insane Mode** on their P85D model allowing drivers to go from 0-60 in three seconds.

The most **exciting and thrilling** driving experience was no longer powered by fossil fuels, making an electric car the most **enjoyable and desirable** car on the market.

Videos of people reacting to the Insane Mode got almost **5 million views** on YouTube, followed by a host of owners sharing their own **Insane Mode experiences** on social media.



### SOCIAL



To encourage more people to exercise, **NIKE** offered its consumers the opportunity to set goals and track their progress with the **Fuelband**. This was paired with a platform where users could **share their fitness goals and progress publicly**, making goals more likely to be met.

With a sleek design, users could **show off** both their **ability and good style**. The public platform also created an opportunity for **sharing** and connecting to a **community** of likeminded people.

Pre-orders were **sold out in four minutes**, and the platform has connected over **18 million users** to share their progress stories.

*\*NIKE is now concentrating on new wearable technologies with Apple.*



## THE VALUE TEST

Check your own product, service or behavior against this framework. Use the questions on page 6 to identify the barriers to overcome and the benefits you could offer. Your value proposition should emerge stronger and clearer.

$$\text{FEWER BARRIERS} + \text{MORE BENEFITS} = \text{VALUE}$$

FUNCTIONAL



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EMOTIONAL



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SOCIAL



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# WANTED: MARKETERS

(WHY YOU'RE AMAZING)

## WHY MARKETERS MATTER

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As a marketer, you know how to analyze your audiences and get to the core of their wants and needs. You already have the skills to sell sustainability.

Which might make you the most important person in the world. If we can unleash consumers' demonstrated desire for sustainability then we might just save the planet by getting consumers to purchase sustainable products over less sustainable products. That way we're doing well and doing good while generating value for our businesses in the process.

Consumer demand for sustainability is the frontier of our transition to a greener, fairer and smarter global economy. You have the power to unleash that consumer demand by strengthening consumer value.

That makes you a sustainability superhero.

## WHY MARKETERS MESS UP

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There is kryptonite lurking in sustainability marketing. Worthiness and Greenwash can kill even the smartest sustainability positioning.

Worthiness creeps in when the value proposition isn't strong enough. Or occasionally when marketers feel uncomfortable 'selling' sustainability value. Keep a careful watch out. Worthiness implies the consumer must make a sacrifice. That's not a great start.

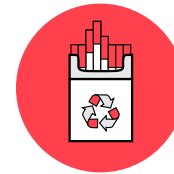
# GREENWASH

Build confidence by knowing the rules. Greenwash is rarely caused by malicious plots to deceive. Far more often, it's the result of over-enthusiasm. Familiarize yourself with the basic rules of Greenwash avoidance:



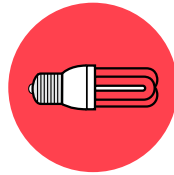
## 1. Fluffy language

Words or terms with no clear meaning, e.g. 'eco-friendly'



## 6. Just not credible

'Eco friendly' cigarettes anyone? 'Greening' a dangerous product doesn't make it safe



## 2. Green products V dirty company

Such as efficient light bulbs made in a factory which pollutes rivers



## 7. Gobbledygook

Jargon and information that only a scientist could check or understand



## 3. Suggestive pictures

Green images that indicate a (un-justified) green impact e.g. flowers blooming from exhaust pipes



## 8. Imaginary friends

A 'label' that looks like third party endorsement... except it's made up



## 4. Irrelevant claims

Emphasizing one tiny green attribute when everything else is un-green



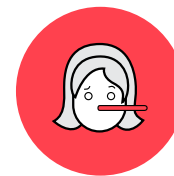
## 9. No proof

It could be right, but where's the evidence?



## 5. Best in class?

Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are pretty terrible



## 10. Out-right lying

Totally fabricated claims or data



# MESSAGING MOMENTS

RIGHT TIME, RIGHT PLACE,  
RIGHT MESSAGE



## CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

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Outstanding sustainability marketing starts with a clear value proposition, but it doesn't end there.

Media convergence and proximity technology has given marketers more ability to target than ever before. For sustainability this is a helpful development.

## POINT OF BEHAVIOR

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Receptiveness to sustainability messages fluctuates throughout the day. For behavior change campaigns it's especially important to track these changes. The best moment to affect a habit, like recycling, is to reach the consumer at their point of behavior (PoB).

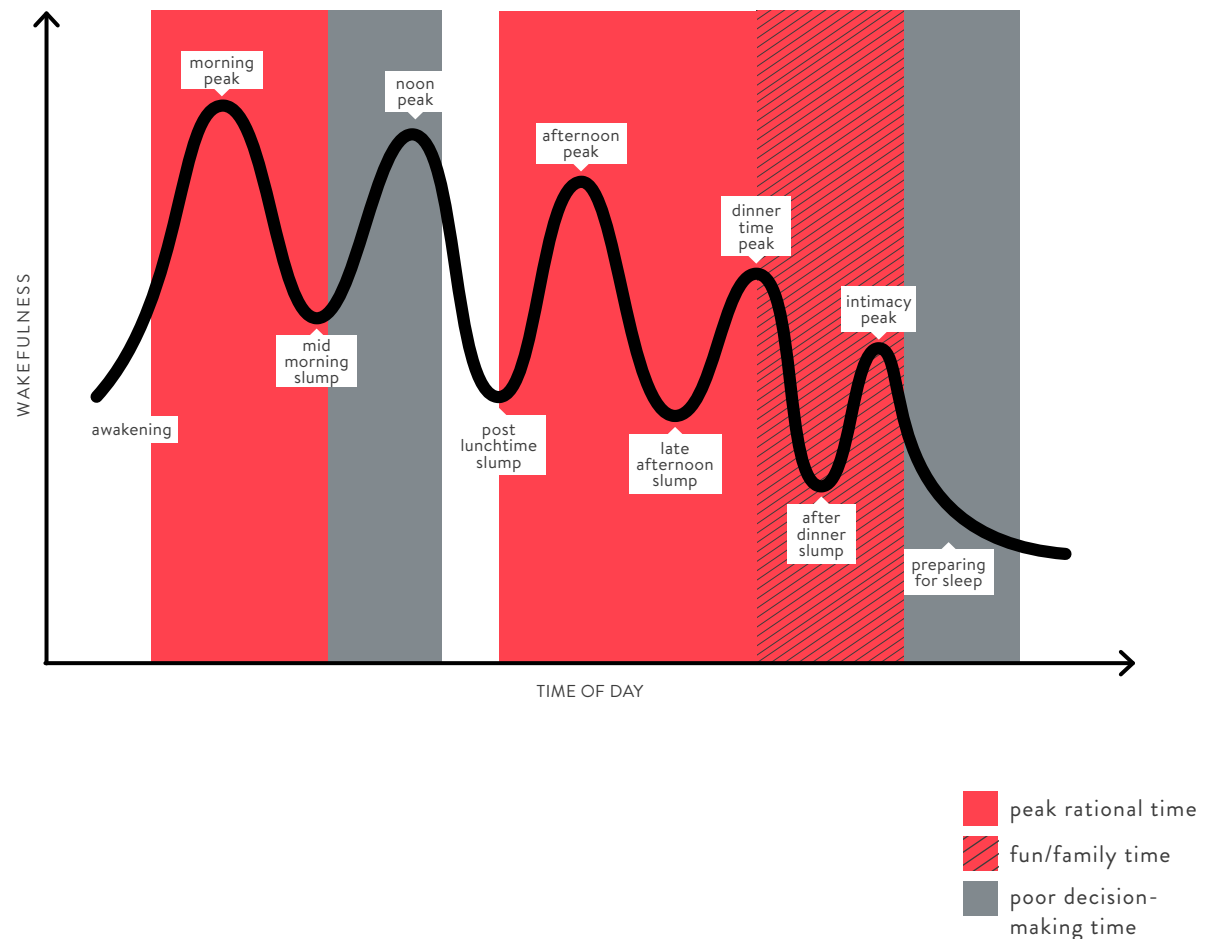
But as you'll find in the following pages, the high impact PoB for sustainability is also the least receptive moment for heavy, scientific or worthy messages.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE

Every brand operates in a unique and specific context. But most people operate within some basic routines and habits of daily life. Building a layered appreciation of daily rhythms, and daily environmental impacts, can ensure the right message, at the right time, is reaching the right person.

Humans all deal with circadian rhythms – our 24-hour cycle of physiological process. The highs and slumps in our wakefulness affect our risk-taking, memory, ability to process information and openness to suggestions.

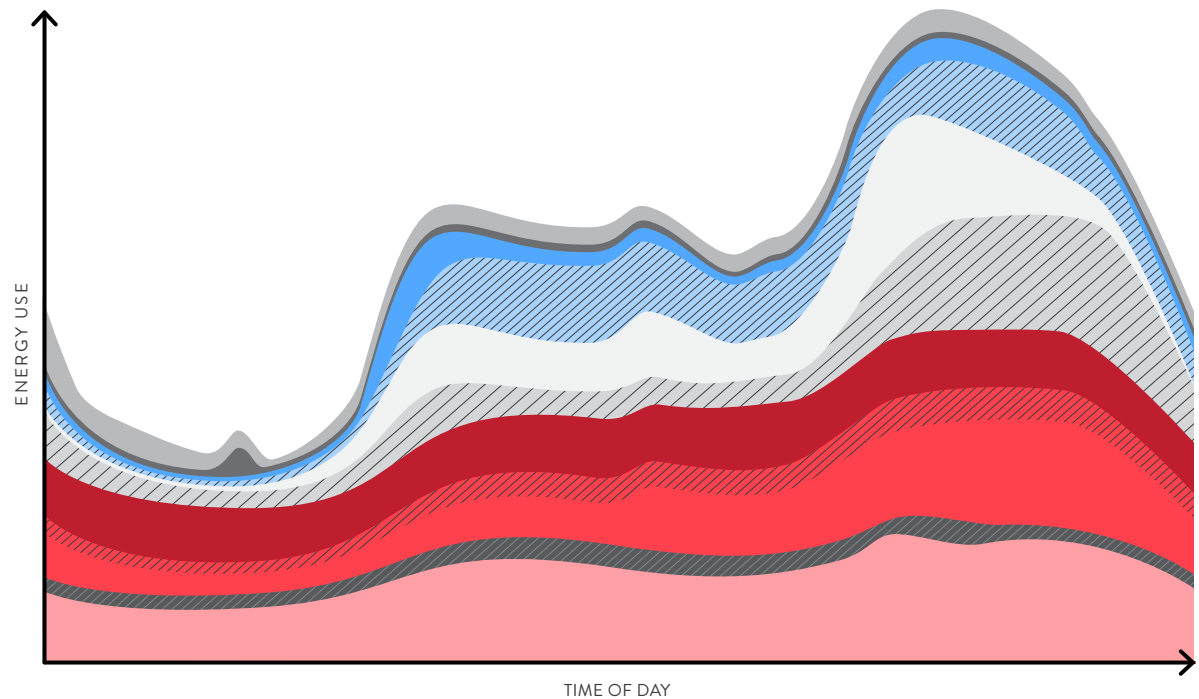
Simply put, we make poor decisions when we're hungry or tired.



## UNEVEN IMPACTS

If you are seeking to change consumers' long-term behavior, we suggest you analyze when and where they create the biggest environmental impacts with your product. For example, this graph illustrates how a consumer's energy use fluctuates throughout the day.

Our personal wakefulness changes throughout the day, and so does our environmental impact. In the morning, our showers, breakfast and washing build a first peak of impact. By the evening, watching TV, cooking dinner and lighting lead to the highest footprint of our day.

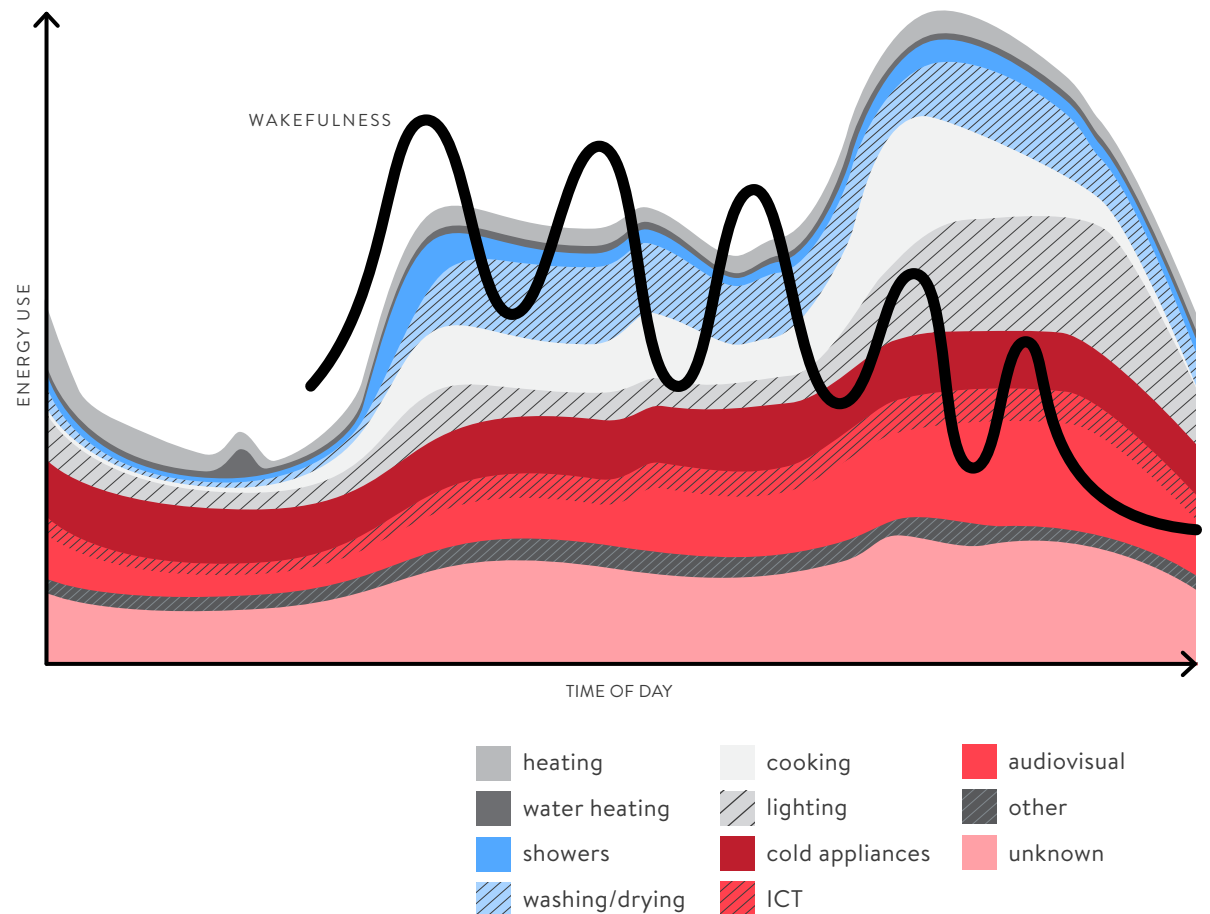


Source: "Household electricity survey", UK Department of Energy & Climate Change, (2013)



## THE IMPACT PARADOX

Our wakefulness and impact don't align. In the evenings, during our biggest household impact, we are the least open to any rational or functional messages about sustainability. This paradox is waiting to catch unwary change campaigns.





## HOW DOES THIS HELP?

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The daily life exercise is useful in appreciating your consumer's day. We suggest to think about your consumer's typical day, then put it together with the "A Day In the Life Map" and the "Uneven Impacts" graph and some helpful rules emerge:

- Rational and functionality messages work best in the mornings or after lunch
- Social benefits are valued at work, in stores and when bonding with family
- Emotional messages are all we can handle in the evenings. So at this time, these are the messages that will make the most difference in changing behaviors.

# BRINGING IT HOME

SIMPLE RULES TO LIVE BY

## THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER:

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1

Offer consumers  
more value from  
sustainability

2

Build functional,  
emotional and  
social benefits

3

Timing  
matters

## WORKING TOGETHER

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The Sustainable Lifestyles Frontier Group is a collection of pioneering brands working to reveal the consumer value of sustainability.

Together we are mapping benefits and barriers, and testing value activations. We have now begun live-testing of marketing and messages to see what works and what doesn't.

## GET INVOLVED

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A benefits-based approach can transform your sustainability results and activate your consumers. If you are marketing sustainable products or trying to change consumer habits, join us and unlock the secrets to better sustainability marketing.

To learn more about our approach, please contact [Elisa Niemtzwow](#).



### About Futerra

We are the sustainability change agency. Using strategy and communications to imagine better businesses, better brands and ultimately a better world.



### About BSR

BSR is a global nonprofit organization that works with its network of more than 250 members companies to build a just and sustainable world. From its offices in Asia, Europe, and North America, BSR develops sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration.