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PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY

A WORKBOOK FOR MANUFACTURERS, SUPPLIERS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGERS TO ACHIEVE THEIR SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

BY DENICE VIKTORIA STAAB
Practical Sustainability

A Workbook for Manufacturers, Suppliers, and Environmental Managers to Achieve their Sustainability Goals

Denice Viktoria Staaf
For my grandmother, who taught me to love knowledge;

For my friend, Pradnya Parulekar, who supported me in more ways than I can count;

and for my husband, Alejandro Guzman, who taught me to follow my heart and inspired me to live my dreams through example;

Without their love and support, I would be but a shell of who I am today.
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Introduction

Life takes us on paths we never imagined we’d walk down. My journey in Sustainability began in 2001 when I was an interior designer. The LEED movement was just getting started and every building materials company was touting their green features. I, by chance, worked with a man named Mike Dungan and benefited from the fact that he was an extremely forward thinker. He pushed me to take the LEED AP exam and to get involved with the "green" community in Cleveland, Ohio. Little did I know in 2001 that this simple act would change the course of my future and I would be connected to "green" for the rest of my life, helping a cause I am deeply passionate about by assisting others in achieving their sustainability goals and expanding their knowledge.

I have never been very good at blind faith and following the pack. I've tried blind faith and I always end up with practical questions that the blind followers shrug off as with my lack of faith, so they abandon me as a non-believer. I also am not good at following specific ideas and concepts to exaggerated and extreme conclusions, so my green passion doesn’t mean that I devoutly or religiously recycle consistently or that I am the absolute best at saving every drop of water. I am human, therefore far from perfect by any definition despite my best of intentions. I instead like to expand upon challenging concepts and imagine the bigger picture. As a result, I once focused on creating a cost analysis for a company to recycle one million gallons of water a week and showed how it was good for business. Maybe in my head, that justifies my extra five minutes in the shower or perhaps that is just the story that I like to tell myself. Either way, I always have the greater good in mind, as I do believe most of my peers in this field hold as well.

Few people would believe it, but really, I am extremely practical so with my big picture thinking and practicality I created the book you now have in your hands. I think each chapter for me represents straight to the point and succinctly an inability to follow the norm in my thinking about sustainability and my want to make things simpler. Oh, I forgot to mention that I am all about working smarter and not harder, which leads me to find the simplest way to get results. Some may call it lazy, but I don't believe I am lazy, just impatient. What is it that you really want to get done? Okay, now cut out steps 4-9 and only do steps 1-3 and 10. Done? This one nuisance of my personality has resulted in trouble for more jobs than I can count because of a). As previously stated, I can't do blind faith and b). Some company policy is often laden with redundancies and duplicate procedures which I will never do.

So now we established that this will not be another book about the most famous buzz words or concepts of the week. Instead, this book is going to ask you to look at sustainability a little more differently. My first recollection about challenging the norm in sustainability thinking was also when I was a designer. I was at an event with other green professionals where I was in a group talking about bamboo flooring. A very educated designer who worked for an architectural firm I could only have on my resume in my dreams stated that she is only going to use bamboo flooring in her projects because it is so sustainable, being rapidly renewable and all. I mean no trees need to be cut down to make it and as "greenies" we love trees. Therefore, she stated as it was a fact, bamboo flooring was more sustainable than all other options for flooring. "Hmm", I said to myself.

Now in my limited knowledge about sustainability and inferior professional resume, I did not speak up. I walked away from the group engaged in this affirmative conversation and wondered the following: Did she know bamboo flooring comes primarily from China? Did she think about the greenhouse gas emissions and pollution to the aquatic environment as a large ship that leaks diesel fuel travels from China to the U.S.? Did she think about the fact that those blond bamboo
floors do not grow blond and they are bleached to obtain that color? And more importantly in a country known for grossly ignoring any environmental policies, what did she think they did with the bleach when they were done? Dispose of it properly? I did not know for a fact but in the face of all the horrific environmental disparities reported to happen in manufacturing in China daily, that probability is unlikely. As these thoughts filled my mind, I watched the conversation on bamboo flooring from a distance and knew that I would never be part of their crowd; not only did I not have their educational pedigree, but I did not buy such short-sighted thinking hidden in a company’s marketing message. Later Miss Bamboo Flooring became a well-known local champion for sustainability and I often wondered if she changed her mind on bamboo flooring, but I did not dare ask.

As the movement for sustainability grew that scenario became known as greenwashing because the hype gets ahead of the performance or reality. Some consumers have become more educated, but overall that type of metaphorical lemming thinking still exists. My ideas that I term Practical Sustainability combat that. I am always about helping companies to question common sustainability thinking or more importantly, helping them to link sustainability initiatives to their brand and making more money. If I can make that happen for just 1% of companies in the building and materials industry, I will declare my beliefs a personal success. So, when you think of sustainability don’t take my word, read more, look around at innovators in other industries, and question everything. But most of all, THINK about how your company can be green, help the environment, increase profits, and tell your customers the best story of all- the story of your product. The story is in there, you just need to discover it, and manifest your ideas so they can become a reality that benefits our entire industry.

I hope this book helps to put you on that path and please send me your thoughts and comments or connect with me on LinkedIn.

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1: What is Practical Sustainability?

The big question
There are 7.5 billion people according to most conservative estimates, but I can fit the entire population of the world into two camps, those that see a world of scarcity and those who see a world of excess. Today, modern businesses and startups have the task of thinking big, but at the same time being forced to confine themselves to the individual reality of their circumstances. You are either forced to consider that you need more than what you ever imagine you would need, or you are thinking of how to obtain a little of the necessary tools and resources possible to get the job done.

Every day, people fall into this way of thinking because of competitive markets where manufacturers are trying to decide whether or not they want to operate in an environment based on scarcity or abundance. Do we have the resources to compete? How can we beat our competition to the next client? How can we inflate the reputation of our services? Do more, or do less? Instead of thinking this way as a long-term strategy, you must first evaluate yourself and ask yourself and your colleagues a very important question:

*Can we sustain our business at the level that we are competing at right now? If not, how do we establish what we need not simply to survive, but thrive; how do we develop an inclusive strategy, so we can share our successes with our customers while having as little impact on the environment as possible?*

My definition
Practical Sustainability is sustainability that fits, nothing more, nothing less. It fits into your organizational culture; it fits into your product's attributes, and it fits into the story that you tell your customers. Businesses today require an international reach to maintain upward growth and, in a world, where trust is the key to build a global reputation, your customers don't want to feel small or insignificant, they want to feel that they are contributing to your success. Practical Sustainability is like a pair of jeans that you just feel good in. It is as unique as your product’s footprint and a license to embrace who you are as a company. This is the balance between scarcity and abundance, the calm center that shows you are comfortable and in control. Practical Sustainability is not the “pay to play” mentality where manufacturers with a seemingly unlimited capital race to gain the newest (and somewhat useless) certification (discussed in Chapter 2) thus creating ways to outspend each other while the small to medium manufacturers sit on the sidelines, sighing as they wonder if they are staying with the pack or if they are falling behind.

Please don’t misunderstand, Practical Sustainability is for everyone because everyone has unique needs to match their goals. You can benefit if you are a big or small manufacturer, somewhere in between, or even a company who is an advocate of green practices. Practical Sustainability is a way of thinking that will change what you spend and how you look at your sustainability initiatives whether you have what you need or whether you need to return to the drawing board to see if you are leaning on a worldview of scarcity or abundance.

I first coined the term to describe practical initiatives, Practical Sustainability, when I began working many years ago with building materials manufacturers and witnessing the overwhelming way, they spoke of their need for sustainability initiatives at their company. This was further compounded in graduate school when I studied sustainability frameworks, leading
and lagging indicators, and academic theories devoid of practical use in the real world of manufacturing, at least in my professional opinion. Somewhere at some point in the distant past, some company was buying into these ludicrous concepts and when they didn’t work, they concluded that it was because customers don’t care about the environment. This is not a knock to graduate school because I learned from some of the best leaders and innovators in the industry, but it was showing me that in most sectors, business executives understood very little about environmental initiatives, their marketing, or what customers wanted from them. For them conceptually, they might as well be dropped into a foreign country where they know nothing of the culture and the language. Sure, they grab on to the latest buzz words like “vinyl is poison” or some other non-fact-based statement that someone popularized, but really what is it that they want? To feel they are making safe choices for their family? To protect the children in their school from possible asthma triggers or is it to know they are doing something good thousands of miles away? Figuring that out will be your challenge as we will discuss more about these concepts in later chapters. Start putting that in the back of your mind now, when they put "no BPA" or whatever environmental statement- what is your customer really buying?

I finally thought my day to put all my unique ideas together had arrived when it was time to write my master’s thesis. I was going to pick a sustainability initiative and make a convincing and concise business case for it. Well, first that was easier said than done because I really did not consider which academic professor was going to sign off as my adviser on such a project of science AND business. To say this endeavor would be challenging would be an understatement. Secondly, I almost did not graduate because of my refusal to drop the business part of my thesis and just concentrate on the science. I knew in my heart there was a genuine case to be made, and I had my mind dead set on proving such. “But I want to prove that science and business should coexist in sustainability,” I protested in order to express my authentic passion towards this case. Luckily the university finally allowed me to do my thesis as I wanted, and from there I got to work immediately to prove my point.

The basis of Practical Sustainability is that science and business can coexist, and they aren't two competing predatory packs that can't go near each other without impending controversy or violence. Practical Sustainability is taking the science of what you make and waste and turning it into an amazing story you can tell your customers. Consumers buy products they like on occasion, but they buy products they have a connection to loyally and frequently. Later we will look at an example of this, but for now, think about how well you know your product. Do you think you have anything to learn about your product? Do you see every input and every output in product and waste? Are you maximizing what you do with those outputs? And are you telling your customers about your product sustainability success stories? Does your customer even understand what it is you are explaining to them? This is how it starts whether you are doing a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), a volatile organic compound (VOC) test, or just walking your manufacturing floor talking to employees about waste; notwithstanding how you begin, this is shaping your story, and you and your business will be better for it because you took the extra steps others hesitate to take.

I originally wrote this guide with a focus on the green building industry for manufacturers. At its core is the LEED Rating system. As I looked around at companies’ needs beyond LEED, I started thinking of these ideas in a broader perspective and I began to ask new questions. What if a company is not interested in LEED or they are part of a different industry? Would these ideas and plans still work for them? As I contemplated this, I saw that the answers were a resounding YES and so I decided to break up each section into two subsections. The first will be FOR
GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS and the second will be FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL. Everyone must read, FOR ALL COMPANIES, despite their company’s market segment. At the end of each section, there are exercises to guide you on your journey. I promised a workbook, so I really want you to work through the exercises. They pertain to all industries, so these are a must for all companies.

Section 1 EXERCISE:
1. Brainstorm about what Practical Sustainability can mean in your organization.
2. If you can, poll several people in your organization. Go to the manufacturing floor (if you have one), talk to workers, and ask your salespeople. See what ideas people have and where their ideas could lead. Often employees know their jobs, can spot waste and are better innovators than we give them credit for. Listen and take notes about what they propose.
3. Now put the lists together and create a visual diagram of the departments and various ideas. This will be important later, so it can be a simple pencil drawing with boxes or something more formal in PowerPoint.
2: Defining Sustainability Through a “Seal of Approval”

Who says you are green? What are your priorities as an environmental conscience manufacturer?

- Are you developing or utilizing sustainable packaging?
- Are you a protective and effective steward of water and your surrounding environment?
- What is your impact on energy consumption?

These are some of the basic questions you need to ask yourself, but as you’ll see in this chapter, things don’t stop there if you plan on taking sustainability more seriously.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS

Being involved in LEED and green building since 2001, I can think of at least two certifications that have come and gone because of changing standards or priorities. They were expensive third-party certifications that alienated the small to medium manufacturers and in the world of LEED, they no longer exist. Often, I wonder about certifications like those and the seal of approval they provide. “How do they get companies to buy them?” In the case of one that comes to mind, it has very little recognition outside of the few who have purchased it and it is a close cousin of a more recognized certification that is not only in LEED buildings but a Google project staple as well.

So why the second certification? Because your competitor has one and it would look better if you had one more than them, plain and simple, that is how many businesses operate. However, there is an added layer to this.

My most educated guess on the question above based on years of observation is that in purchasing the certification, the manufacturer is hoping to tie into the story the certification company is telling. From a marketing standpoint, this is another opportunity to show your customer their ideals are your ideals. If you are selling a low VOC (volatile organic compound) certification then as a manufacturer you are hoping by association, you are considered low VOC when you proudly display their logo or seal of approval. This is the best answer that seems to make sense as to why a manufacturer would waste money on something that is simply hollow bragging rights, so to speak; the credibility is worth paying for because their own message of credibility is lacking which may say more about the seal and less about your own reputation, something consumers and competitors will notice. Only certifications or programs that require you to report your ingredients or have stood the test of time should be considered good displays of Practical Sustainability. Besides, why draw attention to certain things that you don’t need to bring additional exposure to? If something is used by more than one organization, if it is recognized by multiple agencies, or is associated with a government agency or an international body, then I believe it is a practical measure of sustainability. I am not a huge fan of anything that requires you to pay big fees for a proprietary approval with limited recognition. An abundance of unnecessary certifications is just overall wasteful unless oversight in a specific market or industry is scarce, so focus on doing what is primarily necessary and your reputation will build as customers trust in your brand.

A big downfall of this approach other than it enhances someone else’s brand is that most companies fail to truly identify how customers will connect to the certification. Asking why is it important to them and instead companies use the certification as a message and not a story. I recently found a really bad example of truly understanding your target market and creating a story that resonates with them instead of just relying on a certification when I was searching for a
new bed for my son. After clicking quite a few websites I ended up on PBteen, Pottery Barn’s youth furniture line. As I am scanning the page I notice a slider that says Greenguard Gold, Underwriter Laboratory’s third-party VOC certification. Wait what- low VOC certification in residential furniture. I just had to click on the website slider for more information.

I read the information, all two paragraphs, four times and I am still confused what was tested. When they announce their Greenguard Gold status they have a can of paint or finish in the picture so did they test their finishes? But then as you look through their product line it is assembled furniture, an upholstered bed is included, so did they test the whole assembly? And to make it more confusing all the flashy marketing pictures of the furniture have mattresses, pillows, and bedding on them. I am sure that wasn’t tested so I feel they are sending a bad message there; but the whole page and/or collection is super confusing. And if I am confused as a person who does this for a living, at the whole message (description minus a story with any emotional connection), who is their audience? They spent probably upwards of $100,000 on this certification and I still don’t understand the message or the science. This is very important to make sure that your efforts and resources, specifically money, are not wasted. The idea of testing kids’ furniture is fabulous, and I applaud Pottery Barn but as it is listed I doubt they will get much attention or sales from this initiative. So, was it a waste of $100,000+?

Now when you think of a proprietary VOC certification and the money that you need to spend on it, what if I told you that for ¼ the price you could perform a low VOC test that is used and required by the State of California to be specified in any of their buildings, is required to perform a risk assessment for CA Prop 65, is required in the new EPA formaldehyde standard, and is used by LEED v4 and 4.1 green building standards, all from the same test? And they actually test all the materials versus a certification that may or may not test all the products. Which would you invest in? The expensive proprietary certification with a big name, possibly no actual scientific report and a fancy logo or the cheaper VOC test that is recognized by both the state and the federal government? Practicing Practical Sustainability is about researching your options and choosing initiatives that perform across multiple platforms while keeping the cost within budget.

**A declaration with tangible benefits**

Recently I developed a program for LEED for manufacturers in Latin America. It is called REACH Global. It is very similar to an initiative/documentation framework originally developed by the USGBC. Upon a closer look, you can see a few key differences. Both programs screen a products chemical makeup against a hazard list. My program obviously uses the European REACH Legislative lists Annex XIV, the Restriction list Annex XII and the Substances of Very High Concern (SVHC) candidate lists. Ok, so far, they are still looking similar. Next, I set the framework up to be 100% in Spanish on the backend transferring to English on the reporting side. The English declaration is only in English and they are unconcerned with any other language formats. For Spanish speakers, this is a problem. Next, the USGBC program requires a yearly membership fee, again all their documents are in English. They get membership benefits; if they want to be on a technical committee they can apply, but if you are not a manufacturer in the U.S. and you do not speak English well, are these really beneficial? In contrast, REACH Global is based on a per product fee that is renewed every 5 years unless a manufacturer changes their product formulation. There are no yearly fees and all the paperwork is in Spanish.

The REACH Global program was created to provide value to customers who are just starting their sustainability journey or even if they are on it, they can receive real benefits from the program, and it’s based not only on LEED but a European government standard and ISO
certification. First, the manufacturer fills out the substance forms and REACH Global enters the data and screens the product. If I told you how many times, we have spoken with manufacturers who were so confused by the process they gave wrong information. Well, it's a lot. Next, the product's chemical inventory is then third-party verified to make sure there are no mistakes at no additional costs. And thirdly, the screening is not released to the public, just the results. When I look at the other product documentation, I always wonder who is really looking at it and do they understand it? All specifiers really want to know if there are hazardous chemicals in the product. In contrast, a product will not be issued a REACH Global certificate unless it contains zero chemicals of concern.

Lastly, and a big benefit is that the REACH Global program helps manufacturers to write a supplier declaration of conformity which is a self-declared statement within the ISO framework. This means that this can be added to their other ISO programs and it is their statement to make. No expensive certification to hold their information or process hostage.

This documentation framework was created from frustration with what was currently available and with the intent to offer better services to customers. In this case, I have always strived to make the service give more and more benefits to the manufacturer so that it may enhance the story they are already creating and not take away their brand to replace it with my own.

**FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL**

Look at your industry and take note of the “green seal” certifications that are present. Are they providing real value to companies or are they simply allowing companies to tie their own story to the certification body to gain more credibility? Are they from state agencies or departments which validate your work according to their standards or from a private firm that will issue them to anyone that pays? Quality and the illusion of quality can be very deceptive and that is what certain seals and certifications play on. Since I am most familiar with the building material industry, I quickly Googled certifications to see what was available and there are many different certifications available targeting every market segment available. For the sake of example, let's look at a water certification.

One certification from the U.K. offers companies a verified measurement of their water reduction efforts. Their website claims that with this certification they can differentiate themselves in their market space by demonstrating a verified reduction as well as retain employees or attract new talent. I am not sure how verifying their water reductions is going to retain employees and they don’t explain that further, so we will just need to trust that they can do that. However, as President Ronald Reagan once said, “Trust, but verify.” Now on to the point. If you use their certification, you can make environmental claims. But if you perform the science of your initiative so that you can make credible statements with evidence, you can make the same claims. ISO or the International Standards Organization is recognized worldwide and has various frameworks that allow a company to make claims based on supporting scientific evidence. No additional seal of approval is required. The big difference between the certified water program and an ISO 14021, Environmental labels and declarations, is that you will not have their logo. Instead, you will be the subject matter expert and industry leader others look to as an example if you are ethical and complete in your declaration.

Start the practice exercises below and as we move through the sections you will gain confidence on how you can perform the science for a fraction of the cost of the certification and market it effectively using your own logo and thus enhancing your brand and not theirs. Gain
your own license to operate and not rely on a third party’s claim to validate you. Science can do wonders for your organization.

Section 2 EXERCISE:
1. Take your diagram from Exercise 1 and look for certifications or tests associated with an initiative. We will look later at the basis of the certifications but for now see what they are measuring and saying. If your product is water intensive and you want to focus on saving water, look for these. The same goes for energy or even waste. I recommend picking saving initiatives first because they will save a company money and will provide an easily calculatable ROI, needed in later steps.
2. If you don’t know of any, contact consultants or testing labs to see what they recommend for testing and initiatives. Also, contact several of each so you get a more diverse opinion. Consultants may only recommend standards they are involved in and testing labs will give you a list of tests they perform.
3. Make sure to get a cost for each certification or standard, the name of who issues it, and a list of who recognizes it. Sometimes there will not be testing or certifications, but quotes and research. Whether it’s getting a lighting quote to save energy and money or a packaging plan to save paper, get several opinions on the best course of action, along with a budget number for each item.
4. Transfer your visual diagram to an Excel spreadsheet to compare your research.
3: Finding the ROI

Measurement is necessary

FOR ALL COMPANIES
This is the number one priority for small to medium size manufacturers and companies who need to justify their budget and the cost for the initiatives. The adage says, “you can’t change the world if you can’t keep the lights on.” Many green and environmentally focused businesses over the last several decades crashed before their time because they failed to understand the business portion of their mission. Therefore understanding, then putting into practice, solutions to bring in a healthy profit is key to future success. The basic way to calculate a return on investment (ROI) from your new sustainability initiative and its effects on customer buying behavior is through calculating increased sales. You can lie to yourself, but the numbers never lie. But in the age of the “customer experience” specific marketing initiatives may not immediately affect the target audience’s behavior; it may take time and time is not measured in the exactness of immediate increased sales. So how should ROI be measured in the new world of sustainability initiatives your company is about to pursue? Should it solely fall on the metric of sales or should it be a combination of sales and savings from company-wide initiatives that have not necessarily been communicated to your customers?

First, the overarching metric (no matter how it is measured) is that ANY investment made on the sustainability initiative(s) must have a two-year payback or less. Somehow, someway the ROI must be two years or less for a small to medium-sized company. This is the difference between expansion and reduction of your business's competitive future. If you are a big company and your budget says you can spend away without calculating a two-year payback (i.e., living in a world of abundance), lucky you. But for the rest of the companies who border the line between a daily mindset of scarcity and equilibrium, the need to obtain the hard numbers to figure out how to make the payback, these principles transcend industries, and this section is exactly for you.

This book and my overall mission are meant to offer a roadmap for the implementation of various sustainability initiatives, therefore prescribing a "one size fits all" ROI does not make sense. You are not a one size fits all company, and you are certainly not a one size fits all person. True leadership involves honest self-evaluations and taking steps to improve; steps that others in your field are not taking. It has been my experience over years of trial and error, that while companies have lofty goals about surpassing their competitor's efforts and message, if they do not have the internal network to support the new battle plan, very little gets accomplished. These companies are like a NASCAR team hoping they can compete without a car or a person who has never ran a full mile attempting to compete in a Spartan Race. Big ideas do not directly translate to discipline and proper foresight. Defining the company's social network marketing, content marketing, and the newer marketing strategies used today may be difficult at first but will set you up for long-term success by avoiding pitfalls others who are less prepared fall into. These innovative marketing strategies lack concrete metrics for measurement in business to business sales; therefore, they are only optional in smaller companies. For this reason, here are options to calculate your ROI. If you would like help to start your digital marketing strategies, specifically your content marketing strategy we discuss this is a later chapter so hold on. Like I said earlier, you aren’t a one size fits all company, so you need individualized solutions so that you can thrive.
**Option 1: The Simple Strategy**

This is a simple strategy because in addition to the sales growth figure, you only need to consider the cost to perform the marketing initiative. Now the price to perform the sustainability initiative and the cost to market the initiative to your customers are both included in the marketing cost figure. The sum of the two expenditures is the actual marketing cost because without the science and measurement you would not have the marketing data you need to craft the story to market. This is a great way to measure initiatives that help your company’s product become attractive to customers because here the sustainability narrative transcends the product itself in the mind of the customer. For this reason, sustainability creates a halo effect for the brand and thus the product too.

The Simple Strategy relies heavily on the marketing initiative to generate interest among customers, positively influencing their behavior to buy more. Generating interest in your story is key. We have gone over the importance of tying a positive story to your brand in previously, and now we are going to expand upon this concept as it directly relates to your ROI efforts. Focusing on positive PR along with your marketing initiative can help to reach a wider audience. A 2011 study revealed that by conducting a tree planting initiative and advertising it to their customers, companies could expect a 25% return on investment in the form of increased sales. Your average consumer has too many of life’s day to day hassles to pay attention to the things we do regarding climate and environmentally positive decisions, therefore if our products and services let them know they are making a difference or provoke a feeling like security, they will return to you and feel better about their buying decisions in the long run. I researched this further and found that the physical act where a PR campaign is launched, and employees or members of the community participated in the event had a higher likelihood of generating a positive ROI than just writing a donation check. This is immensely effective because this builds long term customer loyalty because they have an emotional stake in your brand's story. Therefore, the initiative is not a one-off transaction that won’t develop into something more in the future. As it turns out no one reports on, trends, or tells their "followers" about some company writing a check. What they do like is the story about their co-workers and neighbors getting their hands dirty doing something good.

For this reason, it is important to make sure your marketing initiatives have a human element to the story, that customers don’t just see a logo, but a smiling face and a better future behind it that they are proud to support. Writing a check is the same whether it goes to a non-profit foundation or a testing lab to prove your product is green. At the end of the day, it’s just a check and not newsworthy to anyone. Your goal is to develop profitable customer loyalty, not chasing fleeting moments.

For example, we are going to use a simple method of calculation.

\[
\text{(Gross Profit - Marketing Cost) / Marketing Cost = ROI}
\]

Let's say I am a developer of luxury homes in California. As a developer, I think that the high-end market for homes needs net-zero homes and I plan on building ones where I write off any additional energy consumed in the building process by buying carbon offset credits. California has the only working carbon exchange programs in the world, so I think this is a great California project. Next, I hire a consultant to do all the calculations as to how many carbon emissions are released in the building of my net zero home. I am also going to count transportation and product
manufacturing in that number. Wow, how am I going to explain all this on the marketing brochure?

I forgot to mention that I will want to sell these homes at a premium based on their environmental qualities. My regular house price is $5 million per house and I am going to price my net zero house at $10 million. Please note that in Los Angeles or other places in California these numbers are incredibly low and are simplified for the example only. I am not a proponent that you can charge more because a product is environmental but in this case because of the location and additional features of the house the developer is targeting the luxury market. Next, I need to figure out my cost for the consultant, buying the offset credits and any other building related costs that are attributed to this initiative. I am already starting with the possibility of a higher profit because I priced the house higher but creating demand for the house will be key and that requires a story.

So, let’s look at the costs to create this story. First, you need to have a whole building life cycle analysis of the house. This will give you the science number i.e. the amount of carbon that needs offset. Next you need to hire a PR person to create and tell the story, and finally is the cost of the carbon offset credits to get your house to net zero carbon.

Creating the strategy of the story you tell, in my opinion, needs to resonate with the buyer. Remember in the very beginning we spoke about the misconception that vinyl is poison and that people believe that and buy products that advertise they are vinyl-free not because they understand what vinyl is but because they are deciding based on emotion and their desire to keep their family safe? So now we need to use that same emotional based methodology to create a story about our house project. While building a net zero house is admirable and it will get people’s attention, buying offset credits is not warm and fuzzy, it’s writing a check.

So, in this case, what would I suggest? Let's pretend that this project is being built in Malibu, California and what is something that home buyers in Malibu may want? Bragging rights. Therefore, this house needs an amazing story. My first idea would be to buy offset credits associated to a forest. I use this example elsewhere in this book, but I think when you are talking about buying offset credits it makes an incredible story that customers can get emotionally involved in. In this case Malibu was ravaged by a devastating wildfire in 2018; people lost their homes, and these are not small homes that were devastated, several movie stars lost $10 million+ homes. Hmmm. Maybe they would be interested in our project. What if we tied the devastation of all the forests area that was burned in the 2018 wildfires to reforestation other parts of the U.S.? It’s an idea and it fits our model of emotional connection. Let’s use it.

We have our sales growth, we are going to say $5 million, and the cost of the initiative. Don’t forget that the marketing cost is the cost to perform the science plus actual marketing. For example, we are going to say that the life cycle analysis, the purchasing of the credits, hiring the PR person and some print advertising is a total of $500,000. An average cost of an offset credit per metric ton of carbon is currently as of this writing $15.10 so this number could be a little high, but it makes an easy example.

\[
\frac{$5,000,000 - $500,000}{$500,000} = 900\%
\]

I think that is an excellent return on investment. And although this is a simplified example, you get the idea.

**Option 2: The Holistic Strategy**
This strategy for calculating your ROI is meant for multiple measurements of initiatives that include not only the marketing strategy by sustainability initiatives as well. In this strategy, you calculate the ROI for all sustainability initiatives together including your marketing campaigns. For example, let’s say your company is focused on lowering their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This project has several individual steps, or smaller initiatives, to reach the overall larger goal of lowering the company's GHG emissions. In pursuit of the main goal your company sign up for a GHG audit framework, an energy audit of their facility, and replaces their lighting system. It is the combination of ALL these initiatives that will lead to the 2-year payback.

This method is also loaded with some pretty big assumptions based on your current business trajectory. The model needs to assume that the total month-over-month sales growth is directly attributable to the marketing campaign which may or may not be true if you are changing multiple factors at once. And yes, I know it is a bit of a stretch to assume that all sales growth besides the simple month over month growth is from this campaign, but we are looking for the ability to measure something, so we need to keep the formula a little simple. For instance, if you are starting a new campaign, hired a new national sales manager, and maybe a few additional territorial reps, it may be hard to attribute exactly which initiative led to the growth in sales. It is advisable that you stabilize your other factors before starting a campaign to isolate the marketing impact better. For the marketing ROI to have any real meaning, it is vital to have comparisons. Month to month comparisons is best. If you have a long sales cycle in your product lines, quarterly comparisons will work better. In this example, we will use the sales from months prior to the campaign launching, as our base numbers.

To really get at the impact, however, you can get a little more specific with your numbers. Once you stabilize your other factors, using a 12-month (or 6-month at worst) campaign lead-up, you can calculate the existing sales trend. If sales are seeing an organic growth on average of 4% per month over the last 12-month period, then your ROI calculation for the marketing campaign should strip out 4% from the sales growth. Here is our formula:

\[
\text{(Sales Growth - Average Organic Sales Growth - Marketing Cost) / Marketing Cost} = \text{ROI}
\]

To calculate the marketing costs in this formula, you will need to add the price to perform sustainability initiative to your marketing costs. The benefit of this “package” option is the two-year payback to get to ROI not only takes into consideration the sales from marketing the initiative but also the energy savings achieved by replacing the lighting system. This point is key: the added savings from one initiative in the group may be enough to make the payback where singularly some initiatives may not. Grouping them together allows you to accomplish all three and have a complete story to market to your customers. Just a lighting system by itself, you will learn later, is a poor initiative to market because it lacks the human emotion. Replacing lighting to save money doesn’t create warm and fuzzy feelings for your customers; it's the same as the donation check- who cares besides no one. You must, if this is what you want to concentrate on, make it a story. Getting your customer to emotionally “buy into” your story will help them choose your product to buy.

The measurement of your company’s ROI can be as individual as your company and its initiative. Remember to set the metrics at the beginning so that everyone is clear on how the campaign success will be measured. Although the metrics measure the marketing initiative, marketing is a sustainability initiative that the whole company can get behind. The more successful the sustainability initiative is within your company, the more excited people will be.
about it, and the easier it is to craft a story when there is excitement in the company culture. To put it simply, people don’t get excited or want to commit to something that they don’t care about or have a personal stake in, therefore you need to understand your message, so they become characters in your story’s framework instead of impersonal, outside observers. A successful sustainability initiative and a successful marketing campaign will lead to increased sales which lead to more profits for the company. Build excitement and the profits will follow.

For this example, we are going to work with the lighting project to see if we can make replacing the company’s lighting system a warm and fuzzy campaign. Let’s say the manufacturer makes vinyl technical fabrics. Their most popular line is awnings for both commercial and outdoor spaces. They manufacture their products in sunny California, and they are looking to replace their old and outdated lighting system in their manufacturing facility to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The current inventory for GHG emissions at the facility is 572.1519257 mt CO₂e total. In order to meet its goal of a 35% reduction, they would need to reduce GHG emissions by 200.253174 mt CO₂e. The project that has the best chance of meeting that goal and the first on their priority list is to replace the existing high intensity discharge metal halide (HID-MH) lighting system with a combination of fluorescent/skylight system. Calculations based on the fixture wattage reduction only produce a reduction of 190.6329921 mt CO₂e. This calculation assumes that the new fixtures will operate the same 2,340 hours yearly as the current HID and would not be enough to produce much savings. Instead the company chose a system of skylights AND new lighting with sensors, so the lights only turn on when the level of illumination from the skylights drops below the set threshold. This new system has controls that turn the fixtures off when the level of illumination in the room does not need additional light. The manufacturer of this system boasts a 95% OFF rate for their installations in Southern California. That would further increase the energy and emission savings and the vinyl manufacturer would easily meet its target. Energy savings on its monthly bills will offset more than half of the initial investment for this lighting system. The payback period is less than two years.

Now comes the part where we need to make this campaign warm and fuzzy as I refer to creating the emotional connection for the buyer. Off the top on my head, since this is just a made-up example, I would create "Fun in the Sun" campaign. The new skylight system will bring natural light into the manufacturing facility. If all the research on bringing natural light indoors is true, then the mood of the employees should dramatically change, and the overall employee morale should improve. For this, I would make a series of videos that can be displayed on the company's website and in social media if they have it. You can still also take photographs to add to all the marketing literature. The first video would be about the new improved facility and how it has changed employees' lives. I would interview the employees and try to capture their upbeat emotion. Next, I would post a video on people having fun in the places where the fabrics are being used. The awnings at a playground would be a great example of "Fun in the Sun" or a customer's location that is an ice cream shop or something like that. The idea is to tie the improved employees' well-being to the fact that there are skylights in the manufacturing facility, and it is not a cold dark place to a customer's own feelings of having fun in the sun. Also, since it’s California have a company picnic at the beach and shoot more video. What do employees like to do in the sun for fun?

As you can see this campaign has a lot of variables that may or may not work in the real world. This is for use as an example and since I knocked vinyl previously in the perceived opinion that vinyl is poisonous, I thought I would give it some good PR by tying it to the images
of a great day outdoors and happy employees. It's all about the emotions you can bundle with your message that your product can then be associated with. When was the last time you thought of vinyl and a fun day at the beach or children having fun at the playground? I rest my case.

Back to our ROI calculations. The company currently has an average growth of 1% per month for the last 12-month period. This comes as a result of a sales manager that they hired 18 months ago. He initially gave the sales a bump, but they have leveled off and they are receiving indirect pressure from their market segment to perform sustainable initiatives just like their competitors. No other changes will be made as we run our new campaign.

\[
\text{(Sales Growth - Average Organic Sales Growth - Marketing Cost) / Marketing Cost = ROI}
\]

The company has $6 million in sales over the last 12 months. For this example, we will not give this campaign a limited time because once the website works, the printed literature and other media are created, they are available until the company changes them again. It is not as if they are running a limited time campaign. Also because of the long sales cycle we will measure the sales volume changes over the next 12 months. The new lighting system costs $250,000 to buy and install. The savings that the company can expect for the lights being shut off only 75% of the time is $125,000 over the two-year payback period. We will also assume for the sake of example that the sales only increase for the first year and then they level back off to their 1% organic growth in year two. We used 75% instead of the 95% average shut off that the lighting company promotes in their literature as a safety factor in case there are more than usual cloudy days thus requiring more lighting on time. The videos and website work plus extra printing cost an additional $25,000. That brings our campaign total to $150,000. Notice here how the savings for the electricity the company uses is factored into the cost for the marketing initiative. Although the initiative is $250,000, they will save $125,000 over the payback period and $75,000 each additional year although we are only concerned with the 2-year payback period.

The average organic sales growth of the company is an average of 1%. At $6 million annual total sales this is about $5,000 per month. The results from the new campaign are an average of 4% or $24,000 per month. With those figures, we can now calculate our ROI on our new campaign based on the yearly totals.

\[
\frac{(255,000 - 62,880 - 150,000)}{150,000} = 28.08\%
\]

This means that the campaign was a success and, has a 1-year payback period and has boosted the company’s image.

**Option 3: Adding Digital Marketing**

Many companies today have a digital marketing expert or staff, hire a consultant, or even wing it themselves. The point is, they have somebody and whether they consider it to currently be successful, they use various platforms to get their message out to their customers. We are going to expand on the previous example of the vinyl fabrics to include digital media in our ROI calculations.

Digital marketing can be a little complicated in some businesses to calculate. In the end, it is ROI and ROI is determined by revenue, minus expenses, which equals profit. Digital marketing ROI is the same but sometimes on different terms. First, we will need to determine how we will measure our campaign. This is individualist for your business and your product. It also may
depend on what you are using as a platform. Facebook campaigns will look different than LinkedIn campaigns or even Instagram. Let’s look at some key concepts that we will need to define to calculate the ROI of our campaign.

**Average revenue per sale (or average sale value)**

To calculate your average sale value, divide your revenue by the number of transactions you made. The quickest way for most companies to do this is to divide the revenue by the number of invoices sent out in any period of time.

Our example vinyl company sells to fabricators who turn their fabric into awnings or other products. Selling to fabricators they sold $6,000,000 of fabric and processed 1,000 invoices; therefore, their average revenue per sale is $6,000. Here is our formula:

\[
\text{Revenue/Number of Transaction} = \text{Average Revenue per sale}
\]

**Lifetime value of a customer**

The lifetime value of a customer is determined by knowing how much each customer typically spends with your company over the lifetime of their patronage. For our vinyl fabric company, each fabricator is worth about $300,000 or 50 orders over the next 4 years. Since this is often an environment where your product gets named on the project then you get the sale, we will shorten into 4 years instead of an actual lifetime. That means an average of 12.5 orders per year or $75,000 in sales annually; therefore, each new customer is worth $75,000 per year in new sales.

Using that same methodology, we obtained three new customers from our campaign for a total of $288,000 in new sales. Tying the two examples together would mean that in our campaign we spent $8,333.34 to get a new client. I am only using the $25,000 pure marketing number for this example because we need to have something to market so the cost sustainability initiative is outside the pure number per client. Also, remember that the company experiences a $75,000 per year savings on energy bills years three to infinity.

Layering a social media strategy into our previous example and calculating its ROI can get a little complicated so for the sake of this example we are going to try to keep it simple. We had a positive ROI at year one with our sustainability initiative, +$75,120.00. Now, what if we took that profit and poured it into a digital marketing campaign? Our previous message with little overall marketing, increased sales by three new customers a year at the price of $8,333.34 per new customer. What would the cost be and how many new customers could we get with our digital media efforts and $75,120.00?

**Vinyl Company Example:**

This is what we know:

- Their annual sales are $6,000,000
- The average order from a fabricator is $6,000
- Each new customer is worth $75,000 in sales per year and $300,000 over the next 4 years.
- They have $75,120.00 to spend on a campaign based on the ROI of their sustainability initiative.

With their refined message the company previously obtained 3 new customers. The goal is to obtain 5 new customers through social media and to spend only the profit from the initial
sustainability initiative/campaign. Now if this is the first time they are calculating the ROI, they will need to see how many new customers they get for the money spent and what “clicks and likes” mean to their sales numbers. For this example, we will make the goal and assume that they made it to continue on the calculations until we get to the number of dollars invested and what their payback is based on all efforts including the sustainability initiative. Based on this information we could run an even more refined second campaign. You need to start somewhere. In putting everything together so far, the examples illustrate that the sustainability initiative is good for the company and its bottom line, but it is also a great talking point to catapult their marketing initiatives and strengthen the company’s license to operate in the community. What to do with that money:

- Social media marketing: $1,000 per month/ $12,000 per year
- Pay-per-click advertising/SEO: $3,000 per month/ $36,000 per year
- Blog posting: $125 a post x 4 posts a month= $500 a month/ $6,000 a year
- LinkedIn advertising: $1500 per month/$18,000 per year
- Basic email marketing to customers and people who signed up for newsletter: $250 month/$3,000 a year

**Total per year: $75,000**

With all this marketing effort the company can expect to have their current customers buy more because their message will be everywhere. Earned media coverage from trade associations, magazines, blogs, or other sources are not figured into any of these numbers because they are free; nor are referrals from current customers considered in this formula. If the company gained 8 new customers from their total efforts, then the price for a new customer is $12,500 including the videos, website work, and social media efforts. Those 8 new customers will bring in $600,000 additional revenue to the company for an overall growth of 10%.

- Total new customers: 8
- 1-year sales of those customers: $2.4 million
- Acquisition cost with the sustainability initiative (SI): SI + Cost for video + cost for social media – energy saving from SI over 3 years= ($250,000 + $25,000 +$75,000 - $225,000) = $125,000
- Grand total $2.4 million - $125,000 =$2,275,000
- ROI = $2,275,000/ $125,000 = 1,820% or 18.2 times the payback
- For every $1 the company invested, they received $18.20.

Now all of this may be very “pie in the sky” you may be thinking but those are the overarching theme in this example is that marketing can help you to get a better ROI on your sustainability initiatives and sustainability initiatives can help you to get a better ROI on your marketing campaigns.

**Section 3 EXERCISE:**

1. First, select how you will measure the campaign. Will you use the simple strategy, the holistic strategy, the digital marketing strategy, or something of your own creation? When you communicate this to your team, do they fully comprehend your goal?
2. Outline it exactly. Be very clear. Will you allow the full two-year payback or is the initiative shorter and 3-6 months is a better timeline? Whatever you decide, communicate that number to the marketing team and ensure there are no loose ends that can cause confusion later.

3. As the initiative starts, brief all employees about the new initiatives and your ideas on how to communicate it to your customers. You can also ask for suggestions because someone might have a beneficial idea, and at least the employees overall will feel more personally invested (benefitting your story). The more creative you can be and the more excitement you can create, all the better.
4: Putting Sustainability Together with Strategy

Creating a Competitive Initiative
STEP 1: Know Your Competition & Your Budget
STEP 2: Solicit the ideas of “Experts”
STEP 3: Look for the Low-Hanging Fruit First
STEP 4: Using Science for Credibility
STEP 5: Take Breaks and Promote Your Successes
STEP 6: Preach Sustainability Throughout Your Organization

FOR ALL COMPANIES
Tying together your sustainability initiatives and your company’s strategy is vital to successfully implementing practical sustainability. It will strengthen your brand and help to ensure that you do not waste your budget on empty initiatives that will not give you the impact in the market place that you desire. Like always, you need to balance your life between scarcity and abundance. These six steps are the beginning of your real journey towards choosing which initiatives your company will benefit from and performing them. Environmental Management initiatives using ISO frameworks can benefit all companies, regardless of industry and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6. Most people have heard of ISO 9001 or their company has invested in it. What we will talk about going forward are hybrid programs, initiatives that you can insert into your current programs, and how to create programs that match your company’s ultimate strategy. Sustainability is not a stand-alone program but one that is interwoven into the fabric of your entire organization; this is what creates the difference between your “story” and your competitor’s “story” and how you will achieve your advantage in the marketplace.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS
Small to Medium-sized manufacturers can benefit from LEED but becoming compliant is often cost prohibitive. Some of the concepts in this chapter are repeats of concepts already discussed and ones you will find this throughout the book. Once you understand the interconnectedness of sustainability you will see how they overlap and with that overlap of initiatives is the overlap of the questions and ideas surrounding those initiatives. If a manufacturer has a game plan and prioritizes their sustainability goals, LEED can be inclusive for their product(s). It may take creativity, but it is possible to become a part of the LEED revolution without breaking the bank.

The prerequisite to any program or movement in your company to get your product compliant with a credit or credits in the LEED Rating System should be to understand the LEED system of credits. You know your product best so read through the rating system with your product in mind. In LEED v4 or 4.1 Building Design and Construction, specifically read the entire Materials and Resources (MR) section as well as Credit: Low-Emitting Materials in the Indoor Environmental Air Quality (EQ) section. If you are relatively new to the LEED Rating System none of this may make sense to you but read it anyways and mark anything that you feel your product or company could be. The more you know, the more you can guide your firm down the
path that is right for your product, either financially or as discussed in Step 5, with an environmental story that is cohesive and interwoven into your company’s current message.

It is very important that your sustainability story enhances the story you are already telling your customers or is part of the story you desire to tell them in the future. Chasing a credit and paying for tests without weaving it into your corporate message is a waste of money for your company. This may sound ridiculous, but many people will never ask themselves this simple question, “if I’m not getting a positive ROI, is this really something I want to put money into?” Things like this should be done to make your company better and more competitive, not just some hollow achievement, so you can match what a competitor has done. Let your competitors waste money, and you be smart with yours. This underlying concept is one of the biggest mistakes companies make when trying to comply with the LEED Rating System or any competitive program. They talk to a consultant, order an expensive third-party verification report (you know how I feel about those), receive that report, post it on their website, and that’s it, they get paid for giving you something you didn’t need, and you feel good about something that doesn’t ultimately help your long term goals. Their goal is complete, your product has a LEED point, but misses a huge opportunity to connect with your customers and to enhance your corporate story. It is usually these companies who complain LEED is not worth it and they wasted their money. In truth, they did waste their money if the result was a PDF on a website that no one even knows is there. This is like throwing your money into a bottomless well instead of customers throwing endless piles of cash at you. The goal should be to have your investments make money, not you invest in wasteful practices. Although this example uses the LEED Rating system for buildings, this is not just for building manufacturers.

FOR ALL COMPANIES
Look at the sustainability initiatives your company has performed or attempted to perform in the past. How did your customers respond? Was it important to them? Did they even know they existed?

This is NOT about fancy stories written by a marketing department devoid of science that stretches their claims of compliance in any sustainability metric system. When looking at company websites displaying the latter it’s amazing, and they do not realize how damaging it is to their reputation. It shows an immense lack of confidence which reflects poorly on the company; claiming ignorance is not a good defense and science will always be on your side. DO make only credible statements on your website and literature, please. Reputations take years to build but only seconds to destroy. Stretching your “green” statement, for the sake of appearing “greener” is never a good strategy. They call that greenwashing and it will ruin your reputation.

STEP 1: Know Your Competition & Your Budget

FOR ALL COMPANIES
The Competition
Just like a good sales strategy starts with analyzing the competition, so does a good sustainability strategy. If you are a company who is late to the game in your industry this may feel overwhelming or if you are the trailblazer you may feel empowered; either way, you must review the strategy of your major competition to better understand your market sector's forward movement into sustainability. Refusing to do so is like purchasing a plane ticket to a random country you’ve never heard of, refusing to ask where you’ve landed and ignoring the maps all
around you because you fear where you may have landed. Companies that are intentionally ignorant of their competitor’s actions and reputation in the market deserve to topple because they refuse to be serious about their potential deficits compared to others. This may sound childish, but each industry is built upon the graves of those companies who set themselves up for destruction from the beginning. Take note of what they say versus what they can prove. Attached to statements should be credible documentation, and in the absence of that documentation, their claims border on greenwashing. When working with a company, I analyze the competition and when I see nothing but empty statements, I get excited, and so should you. This is a huge opportunity for your company to leap ahead as a market leader who only promotes a credible sustainability story backed by science. Much like houses, one may be big and fancier on the outside compared to the other but if the earth shakes, the house with the firm foundation will be the only one left standing. In your case, facts, data, and legitimate backing are your firm foundation.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS

An excel spreadsheet is a way to organize your competition into the different LEED initiatives and if there is documentation or not. Again, it doesn't need to be LEED and it can be simply a similar list of your competitors and what they are saying about their "greenness" to start. I like to see what the entire market is doing so I know where to start concentrating resources, finding you that moderate balance between scarcity and abundance once again. If 3 out of 5 companies in your sector are concentrating on Low VOC claims, then either it is expected in your market or customers have given that preference, either way, you should start looking into how to make a claim on low VOC. This specific course of action exemplifies what we discussed earlier, that just like you and your company's needs are different than that of others, so is the market in which you plan on competing in, therefore it is vital to know how to compete so that an idea that works in Nebraska doesn't fail in Nevada because you refused to analyze the market properly. Open a second tab on the same Excel spreadsheet you have been working in. Go through each claim and label them. Green means there is credible documentation and red means it is an empty statement.

The Competitive Analysis
First, my examples in this section are based on real data of real companies that are in the wood products industry. The actual names are not listed because in looking at the data I am more interested in their initiatives and not their names. Also, the construction market is small, so I am not here to embarrass any company for their lack of substance directly. From this analysis I can honestly say, their market sector is embarrassing in telling a credible sustainability story. What is worse is the false and ridiculous claims they make on their websites in addition to these empty statements. Because of this, you can already predict that their future, unless a drastic course correction is made, will begin to look grim at some point. In analyzing this market sector, there is a fantastic opportunity for a company to emerge as a sustainable leader and to raise the expectations in that sector. Currently, only one company has a credible document on their website but sadly it is a single document with zero marketing flair to enhance their story.

Of the four manufacturers analyzed, Manufacturer C we will call them, has the best and most complete documentation. In full disclosure, Manufacturer C is one of the largest corporations in the construction materials industry. They do not need to tell a huge story because their name is enough. Their years of practice and consumer trust allows them this advantage over others, much like Google in the search engine world, or why most people ask for a Kleenex instead of a facial
tissue. Consumers see their name on a sign or a product and know immediately they can trust them. The missing opportunity for this company is the increased competitive advantage their credibility could enhance because they are often highly priced compared to their competitors. If Manufacturer C were to publish documents on their website that display FSC compliance, Low Emitting Materials, and certified third-party documents for recycled content, then run a marketing campaign that focuses on how architects and specifiers can trust their claims backed by science, the competition (Manufacturers A, B, & D) would be at a huge disadvantage and could suffer market share decline. The difference between having a credible document and having a good marketing plan is the difference between raw cocoa and the chocolate you buy at the store. Raw cocoa is the basis of chocolate, but no one wants to eat it raw, meaning customers don't care to read a document that doesn't offer anything interesting. Added flair and presentation is what will turn cocoa into chocolate, and your document into another aspect to your brand's story.

Know Your Limit
Another possibility of analyzing the data is that you are Manufacturer A, B, or D and you are trying to create a major competitive advantage in your market space. In this case, you may not have the financial resources to spend $25,000+ on an EPD to equal Manufacturer C, so does that mean you are sunk and will never have a credible sustainability story? Absolutely not. In this case, creativity can trump big dollars to spend. Now I am not saying that you can do this all for free, but you can definitely stretch what dollars your organization allots to sustainability initiatives further.

The Budget Review with Solutions
This is when the fun begins and where everything we have discussed in this and previous chapters starts to come neatly together. Remember the goal is to be truthfully backed by science and with credible third-party documentation whenever possible. Additionally, the information should be clear and easily found on your website, allowing you to put your best foot forward as you try to make the perfect first impression for any interested customers who come directly or stumble by as they assess the available options in their marketplace. All analysis is for demonstration purposes only and the scenario presented is for LEED v4 Rating System for Building Design and Construction. All credits referenced are updated January 27, 2017, and available for download: http://www.usgbc.org/resources/leed-v4-building-design-and-construction-current-version. A new version of LEED, v4.1 is just coming out as of the writing of this but in the interest of time the focus is on v4. If you have any direct questions about v4.1 please feel free to email me. So, let’s begin.

We have reviewed the competition and we have established the budget. This budget isn’t scarce nor is it filled with unnecessary (abundant) waste; it is exactly what you need to accomplish your direct goals. Don’t forget what you learned about ROI and keep that in mind when setting your budget. The industry average to have an EDP performed and verified is at a minimum $25,000 (U.S. currency). In our scenario, you are Manufacturer A and you need to create a competitive advantage for $14,000. You are a privately held U.S. manufacturer that specializes in wood products and feel that there is enough interest in sustainable products that you can make that budget back in less than two years based on increased sales. But on that budget, an EPD is not attainable for one solo credit; luckily other credits are well within reach.

FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL
Companies with a sustainability goal will also follow the same steps as the building products’ manufacturers because I believe knowing where you stand in the marketplace is invaluable to choosing the correct initiatives and thus not wasting money. For this example, we will examine the Levi's jean company and their market segment. I am a little fascinated by them for a few reasons, first being they pretty much invented the blue jean market and lost it, so they need a Hail Mary to gain it back and a year or so ago they were looking for a sustainability manager which means they are open to sustainability initiatives (which will help them re-develop their story, thus helping revamp their brand in an oversaturated jean producing market). Now, what I will present here are examples only and they are my personal/professional opinions regarding this one example. For full disclosure for the sake of objectivity, I have never worked with them (I would love to) so all that I am proposing are just my thoughts and those thoughts are used to illustrate the 6-step process for good. I am not here to bash their name. I sincerely believe they can win the market back with the help of sustainability in their story. I also am not hiding their name because I am sure they could care less about little old me. As for the wood products industry- I know the players personally.

The Competitive Analysis
In this first step, you can just open an excel spreadsheet and jot down your competition’s names in the first column. Who do you compete against? In the Levi’s example I am going to reference Clayton’ Christensen’s work because Levi’s needs more than just a good sustainability initiative to revitalize their brand; they also need innovation; at the intersection of the two ideals I believe that we must answer Christensen’s question “What job do customers hire Levi’s apparel to do?” Also remember Levi’s sells more than just jeans so when choosing the competitors, we must keep that in mind. In the traditional fashion jean category let’s choose Lucky brand jeans and True Religion. They are trendy and sell jeans, tops, belts, etc. like Levi's. Next, how about casual pants? You can hire your Levi's to be a casual pant and even sometimes wear them to the office on casual Fridays. For this, we will choose two different competitors. First Dockers, they are the first brand that comes to mind when I think of casual pants. Levi's owns Dockers, so we can also see how the division fairs in sustainability against the mothership. And secondly, let's go to H&M. If you want some casual clothes this also might be the place you would go to find casual clothes. And lastly, can you hire your Levi's jeans as leisurewear when you hang out on a Sunday morning reading the latest news online? I think so; therefore, the last competitor we will add is Lululemon. Yes, Lululemon is a yoga apparel but if you have ever shopped this brand you would know that a good portion of their business is extended beyond athleticwear to leisurewear. There are 50 or more companies that we could add, who is one way or another, are competing against Levi’s for the job of specialty apparel but for the sake of the example we will just choose these four.

Now that we have our competitors it’s time to start searching for the information, they make available to their stakeholders about their sustainability initiatives. Across the top columns (B through whatever) of your excel sheet place sustainability initiatives as they appear on the competitive websites or in PR literature. Green means that there is credible evidence to support their claim and red is just an empty statement (opportunity knocks).

Know Your Limit
In this case we are pretending that we are Levi’s so we can work with a much more robust budget than a medium-sized manufacturer. We want too steep outside of the box and think like an industry leader and innovator. With that being said, just because we have a sizable budget, the focus still needs to be on initiatives that have a good return on investment and ones that will strengthen their license to operate i.e. increase sales globally. If you are a small to medium manufacturer keep in mind your budget here and you will have an opportunity to work on it further in the exercises at the end of the chapter.

The Budget Review with Solutions
In the solution phase is where Levi’s can be a game changer and influence the entire market within any given industry, they strive to reclaim a top spot as a global force once again. A company like Levi’s doesn’t need to be a follower and should develop a strategy much like the luxury marketing strategy to not only differentiate themselves from their competition but also to drive the whole market with their forward-thinking initiatives. The key to developing those initiatives is to analyze what the competitor is doing. Although they should not be a follower, they don’t want to stray too far away from what their customers want or else they could be leading and when they turn around, they are in a whole different world than their customers. It is a delicate balance like a tightrope they must walk.

When examining the initiatives posted on each of the manufacturer's websites, Levi’s is the only one that highlights water savings and water initiatives. This is a super important part of the supply chain resources used so here is an opportunity to differentiate themselves. All companies are listing some sort of social responsibility program to improve worker's lives but almost all of them are simply statements without any real documentation. Bingo! Another opportunity.

Now that we have examined the competition and looked at Levi’s own initiatives, we have identified two opportunities that are worth building an initiative and a campaign around. The water is cutting edge and can make a great tangible initiative that has metrics and the social responsibility piece that is a “me too” with all the other companies so Levi’s needs to be creative in their approach to create a difference that will have their competitors chasing their lead.

FOR ALL COMPANIES

STEP 2: Solicit the ideas of “Experts”
Now that you have an idea about current initiatives in your industry sector, you know how your product relates, and you have a basic idea of what you want to accomplish, it's time to start talking to people. This was also discussed in Chapter 2, helping you understand the tests and standards available for each initiative you can perform. There will be some overlap here between the list you created in Chapter 1, Practical Sustainability initiatives, and the list of LEED v4 credits or sustainability initiatives your market cares about as in the apparel example and social responsibility. The difference between the two lists is that the Chapter 1 list is company -wide while this list is much more product specific and correlational to what your competitors are doing. When I say solicit the idea of "experts" I am not suggesting you call every sustainability consulting firm out there and ask for a quote. You may want to talk to a few, but you also want to talk to companies not related to your product to see how they accomplished their sustainability goals. Speakers who specialize in one or a part of your possible credits, trade organizations, other sustainability organizations, book authors on the subject, and anyone you think might have valuable insight in how you can achieve your sustainability initiatives. Everyone will have an opinion on what you should do so ask their opinion.
Once you have collected all the data, it's time to start compiling the possible credits or initiatives that your product can achieve while sticking to your budget AND being true to your corporate message. In this case, a consultant may have given you the best ideas, and if so, go with them. If they have met your goals and your budget, you have a winner. If you are still struggling to find the right fit, keep talking to people. It will come.

The Idea Review
Now that you have found an expert you can trust, or you have developed your own internal committee, start your idea review. Your spreadsheet will help to organize the information and costs so that you can make a final decision. This is a journey and often your budget may cover only a portion but not the complete journey. Keep the end goal in mind but also make sure for your budget you are at least creating tangible credit documentation or initiative. If you have enough for only 1/2 of a lighting replacement project that will reduce your GHG emissions, and only half will produce minimal results it may be wise to pick a different initiative. Only half a project will not get your employees or customers excited and in up and coming steps that are important to create momentum. That momentum will help drive further innovation and give your customers something to talk about. Remember here that the emotional attachment to the initiative and not the actual project will win you market share.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS

STEP 3: Look for the Low Hanging Fruit
The Credit Process
Look back to the original competitive analysis in Figure 1 and note the empty statements each manufacturer made. The easiest first step for Manufacturer A is to make their FSC declaration credible. This is a painless process, it's relatively free, and requires few resources to complete. FSC provides a database of certified companies at info.fsc.org as well as copies of their current licenses. If Manufacturer A is already a member as stated, then adding this information to their website would increase their credibility.

Additionally, the recycled content credit claim needs documentation. Each manufacturer uses a core board with recycled content. They are relying on the recycled content in the core material manufactured by a third party to meet this credit. Placing that core manufacturer's documentation on the website in the form of a downloadable PDF also adds to the recycled content claim. Now Manufacturer A has documentation for two of their credit claims with little to no resources used and virtually free of cost. This is the low-hanging fruit they can start with and build upon from there. Every company should have at least one initiative that is considered low-hanging fruit. It may not be free, but it will be easily achievable and a great place to start. Look for your low-hanging fruit. Success early in the process will help the team stay motivated and excited about the initiatives.

Manufacturers A, B, and D all claimed the low VOC credit without documentation on their websites. While any one of their products may be low VOC, none have been tested to the standard required for the LEED v4 Low-Emitting Materials credit. This credit declaration is greenwashing for all three manufacturers. It requires a very specific TVOC (Total Volatile Organic Compounds) test. This test must be performed by a certified lab with very specific guidelines. Don't stretch your claims to include credits and facts that lack documentation no matter how good it sounds. Always back your claims in science.
FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL
As a company who asked their employees about sustainability initiatives there may be a few on your list that are free to low cost. Look at your list and rank them by cost. There are so many great places to start from eliminating waste to creating a company-wide policy to reduce energy usage. Think smarter, not harder, and take those easy wins regarding objectives you can complete quickly, therefore boosting the initial morale of your company as you build up towards more challenging or expensive tasks. Initiatives that are easy to track make great “number stories” (or “wins” amongst colleagues) on a company’s website but look deeper to see what you can find. There is always room for improvement within any business if you look hard enough.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS
STEP 4: Test Your Product with Science
Testing your product or range of products can be expensive but there is no substitute. It is the only way to prove your claims and to make sure that your statements are truly backed in science. The biggest budget item in our example with a $14,000 to spend is the TVOC testing of the product(s). Each product line is $2500, and Manufacturer A would need to test 4 variations of their products. The total for all four is $10,000. Yes, this is a big budget item but let's compare it to the cost to perform just one EPD on approximately one product or product line, at $25,000. With this option, Manufacturer A has documentation for an additional credit for all their products and their grand total so far is three LEED points for which they will have complete documentation. This is a huge win for Manufacturer A and they still have $4000 in their budget.

Testing and science will help you to understand what your product is made of and what it releases in the form of waste or emissions. You may discover some interesting attributes or negatives to your product in testing. Either way, beyond a LEED credit, this knowledge will help you to shape the story that you tell your customers. You can never know too much about the physical and chemical properties of your product and it is always good to know more than you will ever need. It can be your safety net in times of crisis.

This is the step where you may be relying on your sustainability consultant or even a testing laboratory to guide you in the right direction. Double check all the tests they are recommending and make sure that they comply with the credit completely. This is the largest expenditure in your budget, therefore, there is little room for mistakes. There is no substitute for the science of what you make and investing in this is a smart move.

FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL
STEP 4: Using Science to Create Credibility
Looking at our example on the Levi's website it looks like they have developed some standards and training programs. They have an entire page with lots of text and links to standards they have developed around recycling water and how to conserve it in the manufacturing process but nowhere on the page could I find graphics or statements about their water reduction targets or goals. In reality, I am not sure who would even read all that text; it was way too much on a webpage. They even make a loose statement with the word goal in it but without any real metric or way to be held accountable to that goal. Again, there is no graphics or anything that delivers a message of progress.
In this case, the first initiative that Levi's should perform is to start to measure water in their products, through their suppliers and their own manufacturing facilities. To do this, they will need to conduct some extensive product life cycles. They need to communicate this to their customers whether they understand it or not. Much like creating a sustainability label as featured in the next chapter, they need to lead the market and start putting hard numbers to their initiatives. Once they have a starting metric, they can then set targets and track their progress. This should also be made available to customers on their website. If they are already measuring water then again, make this available on their website in graphics and not just text. Maybe all this information was there but if I was looking for it and could not find it imagine what a customer would do, and I can assure you they would never find it.

Social responsibility is not a hard science and its metrics are much harder to prove or measure. Complete compliance by a manufacturer in China may be even harder to measure. In the early 2000s, Walmart wanted to audit its suppliers in Asia for instances of child labor and safe working conditions. One of the auditors told a story to my graduate school class that you could go to the factory one day, perform the audit, and if you showed up unannounced 4 days later it would be as if you were in a different factory with all the violations you just audited against just a few days before. Walmart eventually realized the difficulty of such a program and canceled it due to an inability to monitor the real conditions of the factory.

Levi's adding real social responsibility programs to their brand need to focus on the workers and not the factory. Walmart tried a top-down approach to compliance, and it was disastrous. Instead, I think Levi's should try a bottom-up approach. In this case, I would tell the stories of the workers that work in the factories. Where do they live, what are their lives like? In asking these types of questions and telling their story, you can indirectly affect the conditions of the factory. Video interviews could be featured on the website and add to the emotional connection customers can establish with the brand.

FOR ALL COMPANIES

STEP 5: Take Breaks and Promote Your Successes

Now here is where I tell you to take a “sustainability break”. Wait- what? You may be wondering why I am asking you to stop when you are just getting the hang of this sustainability thing. All your efforts mean nothing if you don’t incorporate them into the story you tell your customers. Here is the crucial step in Practical Sustainability: start telling your customers your new amazing story. You need your engineer/sustainability champion/consultant/whoever to talk with marketing and to help craft your next chapter. This is so important and without this step, all the effort and money spent so far is wasted. This is also the step few consultants will tell you to take.

You must create a convergence of your company message and your new sustainability message, so the processes you have been developing on your brand’s story begin to come full circle. Now maybe that is easy because at your company's core you are as sustainable as Patagonia. But in case you are not, here is where you become Patagonia-like. Nothing fake will work here. Your customers are smart and savvy, and they will judge your success in this convergence with their sales. No pressure but you need to get it right. Adapt here and make your story your own.

Here are a few Do’s and Don’ts to help you to find your union:
• DON'T make your new sustainability message solely about the credits or initiatives. There must be a human element if you want anyone to remember your message at all.
• DO look for something that makes you different when telling your new story to your customers, and it can even be a mistake. I once toured a Herman Miller furniture plant in Zeeland, Michigan. At the end of the tour, we all received little jars of honey from their on-staff beekeeper. This sounds super cool and amazing until you hear why they have a beekeeper on staff. Someone thought it would be a great idea to remove the lawn around the facility and plant wildflowers. They thought it would be pretty and support the local fauna. Well, those flowers attracted wasps and employees were being stung. Now they can't spray pesticides to kill the wasps because that is not very sustainable, so someone figured out that honey bees are a natural enemy of wasps (who knew?). They brought in honey bees, which make honey, and hired a beekeeper to extract the honey, which they now give to their guests. I never forgot their sustainability efforts, even if I knew what a big mistake they once made. **Be different.**
• DO use a multitude of platforms to tell your story. This may mean that your normal print advertising has an environmental element to it, and your Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn updates all share and educate about your new successes. To get more likes, shares, and retweets, make sure you are crediting the people and organizations that helped you to achieve this new level of sustainability success. People love to share when someone mentions them.
• DO create digital content that will engage your customers without selling them on your new strategy. Just performed the TVOC test and still not sure what TVOCs are? Chances are you are not the only one and I’ll bet some of your customers do not either. Why not interview one of the engineers who conducted the test and post it on social media? This is called content marketing. We will have more on this in a later chapter.
• DON'T just post it on your web page and think that will be enough. Get your sales people involved, get your secretary involved, and your plant employees too. Sustainability is a story best shared by all.

The point of taking a break is so that you can work sustainability into your product’s story and your corporate culture. And that brings us to STEP 6: Preach Sustainability Throughout Your Organization. 3M and Google are both known for innovation and they both create a culture where new ideas are embraced and even mistakes are often new products. There are debates on whether a culture of sustainability should start from the top down or the bottom up. Regardless of how it starts, opening employees’ minds to sustainability to save resources just might create, not only an amazing story, but maybe the next best innovative product.

**FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS**

We need to finish our work with Manufacturer A and their revival from greenwashing manufacturer to LEED superstar. We have $4000 left in the original budget and the next proposed credit is HPDs. Health Product Declarations are an invention of the USGBC but well worth the time and money spent to create. HPDs are a cross between a recipe and a company’s MSDS sheets. It is a chemical inventory of all product ingredients with their health hazards as reported by more than 15 U.S. and global health agencies. The work to complete an HPD is minimal compared to conducting an EPD but there is a great need for accuracy and attention to detail. Architects are using HPDs and believing in their need so much that having a product HPD is becoming a prerequisite for manufacturers to enter the door in some large architectural firms.
They only want to deal with manufacturers who are knowledgeable about their product, transparent, and committed to quality materials free of hazardous chemicals. HPDs would be the choice and with four product categories that need calculating, our grand total reaches $2000. This brings our project total to $12,000 and $2000 under our budget.

The scenario of Manufacturer A has been detailed throughout this chapter to illustrate that you do not need a huge budget to be sustainable, to comply with the LEED Rating System, or to make a difference in your product or industry. What you need are proper planning and a goal. As a manufacturer, you could follow the path of Manufacturer C and purchase on EPD. If that is your strategy, you have the company resources, and you are a global powerhouse, publish an EPD. I personally love performing EPDs and I believe in the information they convey. But if you are a company whose resources are more limited, this chapter can serve as inspiration for you. Note how Manufacturer A achieved four LEED credits, made their budget, and caused a change in their organization. This is what sustainability and LEED are all about. The idea that you need to “pay to play” or “break the bank” are old beliefs. Practical sustainability is about using your strengths to create your unique story and helping the environment along the way.

FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

In our Levi's example, we started with identifying two major areas for sustainability initiatives: water savings and social responsibility at Levi's global factories. In our first initiative, water, Levi's conducts life cycle analyses of their products by groups to identify their fresh water use. They then post these numbers on their website and create goals and interactive charts to help customers to understand the apparel process. Because I could not find a water metric from any other apparel company, Levi's will not be judged. Is that amount of water used per garment good or bad- it just is? From this starting point and if Levi's conducts the initiative correctly thus meeting their targets, it will be the standard and the number to beat for the next company who wants to measure their water consumption and as more and more in the industry do the customers will place value in the results. By that point, Levi's will be well ahead of the mark and creating innovative processes for their suppliers.

We decided when discussing the social responsibility piece that we would do a bottom-up approach and not a top-down one. To really give credibility to our message of fair labor practices and safe conditions we will create a video series that outlines the lives of select employees from Levi's global factories. In addition to their story, each employee can promote a program in their area that would make a difference for people there. For instance, a village near one factory in Uttar Pradesh, India needs access to clean drinking water. After watching the video customers can donate to the project in a Go Fund Me-like process administered by Levi’s. You can even sign up for the newsletter and receive a special code that when input you can see if Levi’s will match your donation. This can create an emotional connection and increase sales at the same time.

Section 4 EXERCISE:
If you didn't follow the steps and create the spreadsheet of your competition as you read along do that now. Follow each step and complete the exercises for your company and their competition so you can select your initiatives before moving on to the next chapter.
5: Give Your Customers Something to Grab Onto

You need a keystone species

FOR ALL COMPANIES

By now you may recognize the power of the sustainability message to your target audience or you want to weave your LEED credits or your initiative into your overall customer story. In either instance understanding the formula that conservationists and non-profits saving the environment have used to raise awareness and get more donations for decades will give you new insight in telling your specific story to whoever you call a customer. In their campaigns, they feature what is called a keystone species to help donors associate with the cause. You would recognize their efforts as great marketing pieces with cute panda bears or one lone North American prairie dog that reminds you of your favorite family pet. What they have effectively done is to bring their cause to the forefront of your thoughts and pocketbook by empathy association. When you are saving the panda, you are saving the smaller mammals, insects, and hundreds of other species who reside in that same environment. "Give us money to save a tiny insect" just doesn't have the same appeal as a cute panda bear. This is entirely why we have discussed repeatedly the importance of crafting and implementing a positive and engaging story to enhance your brand in the past four chapters. Without a story, you're going to struggle to communicate your brand as well as giving customers a reason to not only become loyal returning customers but unpaid advocates for you. After all, word of mouth is at the end of the day the most effective form of advertising in the world because customers may not trust you on your own accord for whatever reason you can contrive, but they will trust their friends, family, and co-workers more than any advertisement they see on TV or hear on the radio on the way to work.

The process of selecting your keystone concept begins by embracing two ideas. First, what is the purpose of the campaign? This needs to be defined before identifying the target audience. Second, understand that your keystone concept may be pure marketing association that defies logic. The success of your efforts depends on embracing these two ideas regardless of how unconventional they seem.

Start with the sustainability initiative first to create your keystone concept. Next, create the association that will resonate with your target audience. Your goal is to produce a unique campaign that sets your product, initiative, and company apart. Focus on the unique in your message to give your target audience a fresh view on your keystone concept. I repeat, be unique. Limit any negative associations customers may have from similar campaigns or from other companies with the same message. For example, everyone knows the GEICO Gecko, but if you have a gecko/lizard that looks the same in your commercials, do you think people will still be captivated by your message, or will they be distracted by the thought that you ripped off the GEICO Gecko? At best they got distracted and forget about you entirely, at worst they think you are cheap and unoriginal, therefore undeserving of their business. If all of this has you confused, read on as I outline a process for defining your keystone concept and provide a business example of how this worked for a manufacturer of office furniture.

STEP 1: What is the initiative that will help to fulfill your purpose?

Look back at your list of initiatives that you made in Chapter 1. Which initiative(s) will help you to fulfill your purpose and more importantly which ones can be woven into the message you
want to tell your customers? If you are tired of all this talk about the story you tell your customers, then you need to really think about why your customers buy from you? Is it solely on price because you are a commodity? If that is the case, then all this work may or may not yield impressive results. But if you have a product that some customer may buy because they can identify with the story you are telling, then keep going and tell an even bigger story with sustainability.

1. What incentive will fulfill your purpose?
2. Define the target audience. Be specific.
3. Create differentiation for your product by using your knowledge of your customers.
4. Define your marketing mix: Product, Promotion, Place, and Price.
5. Implement the strategy.
6. Evaluate the marketing efforts through quantitative methods that measure sales.
7. If the campaign was a success and sales are increased, identify the next initiative that defines your purpose.
   - If the campaign failed to increase sales re-evaluate the values of your target audience and how well your initiative aligned with their values.

Figure 1: Adapted from “Toward a systematic approach for identifying conservation flagships”, Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, 2010. (2)

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS
To illustrate this 7-step process, I will introduce you to a real story about a company named Miller Office Furniture (the name has been changed). They had a dilemma about which sustainability initiatives to perform and how to communicate them. They are a small family owned company with a story to tell. Their purpose was to sell more office furniture by showing their customers that they embraced real sustainability and were not relying on certifications and fluff to be “green.” They embraced the 7th Generation Principles and embedded sustainability in all aspects of their business. They were not sure how they were going to market it, but they were open to ideas.

Did you set your purpose yet? If not, stop right here and jot down a purpose for your campaign. It doesn't need to be too broad, picking a small part of your business to focus on may help to measure your results quicker thus creating more momentum in your organization. Think of an area of your business you can improve with sustainability; a product that could use a new, greener image; or even a LEED credit you need to compete in your sector. Once you have that
purpose, you are ready to pick the sustainability initiative that will fulfill that purpose but don't forget to be open to the process as we go through the steps.

Miller furniture decided to champion waste in their product and business by conducting a life cycle analysis of one of their products and a greenhouse gas audit of their facilities. By knowing what they make and waste in all areas of their business they could then set goals to eliminate waste and tell the story of how they were saving resources. Select your sustainability initiative and write it below your purpose.

FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

In the case of Levi's, they have many sustainability efforts, but they have struggled to get their customers to "grab onto them" and create a preference for their product because those initiatives do not tie back into the product. For Levi's, I suggest adding the human element. Again, they may be saving water and they may be doing all the right things but where is their keystone species? Adding the human element will help make them more relatable and current with potential customers. Let's plan their campaign with that in mind.

STEP 2: Define your target audience, be specific.

When we look at Levi’s and their possible competitors and revisit their “job to do” in the apparel category, we can see that the market is concentrated on younger customers. This is exciting because younger customers are more likely to embrace a global message and be concerned about the effects of their purchase on the world as a whole. This is not to say that older customers are not so concerned, just that the younger generations are more conscious of it through their use of social media and other digital platforms. If you are jumping out of your seat right now thinking of ways to engage your customers, then stop and jot them down. We don’t want to waste any creativity here.

The customer in this example is defined as globally conscious with a daily habit of using social media to inform themselves about the world around them and what others are engaged in. So, the challenge becomes tying your initiative to their mindset and habits. Here is also an example of Levi's doing the right things but no one knows or cares; on their website, you can download a list of their global manufacturing locations: [https://levistrauss.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Levi-Strauss-Co-Factory-Mills-List-December-2018.pdf](https://levistrauss.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Levi-Strauss-Co-Factory-Mills-List-December-2018.pdf). Wow. I was floored and amazed.

Now how do they use their information to INFORM their target audience?

STEP 3: Create differentiation for your product by using your knowledge of your target customer.

Now that you know your audience as defined in STEP 2, it is time to design your plan to reach them. When examining the list of manufacturing locations, I notice that there are many in developing countries that often lack resources for their poorer populations, and it is those populations that are often forced to work in factories for a meager salary. Now, remember we are here to highlight the positive so let's say that we pick a factory or two on each habitable continent.

Levi’s has an initiative to reduce harmful chemicals at their factories and ones that workers are exposed to. Now they currently have initiatives for music, for skate parks and many other great projects. The problem with these initiatives is that they are not tied to their brand, product, or main message. In addition to these, let’s look at an opportunity to tie the lower harmful
chemicals to their product. Now let’s expand that social responsibility idea we have been developing further. We have videos on the website with the ability to donate to their clean water project but what if buying a Levi’s product gets you a whole new set of initiatives and videos? Exclusivity is enticing.

On each new apparel tag a customer buys there is a barcode that they can scan to watch videos about their product being made and interviews with the people who make it. From there you can watch a story about a mom in Bangladesh who works for Levi’s factory to support her 6 children and their education. Want to help further? There is a link so that you can donate to their school and help all children in the area. You even get a thank you note from the kids at the school. Now the exclusivity comes in that you can only get access to this content if you purchase the product and it’s available only through social media which the target audience is a big part of. An additional feature is surprising because there are several versions of the videos and content so never know what content you will get. Now you may be wondering what happens if someone then finds a way to make the content available for all. It’s like fake Gucci bags, yes you can get the experience, but it’s not the same as buying the real thing. This concept is extended in STEP 4.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS

STEP 2: Define your target audience, be specific.
Miller Office Furniture wanted to be specified by more designers in large projects and they wanted the attention of large corporations. Although this sounds like their target audience, it is not specific enough. Not all designers working on large projects are concerned about the products they specify, and some large corporations could care less about the environment. A better target audience for MOF to engage with were designers who were working on large projects for corporations where the owner of the office space was concerned about the environment and gave preferential treatment to products that can back their sustainability story by science. This way Miller Office Furniture was less likely to get into a price war over a product and lose to cheaper goods imported from China.

Now it’s time to define your target audience. First look at your customer base. Is there a subset of that base that you would like to increase sales to? For Pottery Barn this was likely the children’s furniture market. Is there a part of that base that your competitors are not reaching well? Or in the case of the LEED credit initiative, are you just looking to capture more LEED project business? Be specific, if you want LEED projects, define what building type, or location, or the architect firm who designs the project. Whoever you want your target to be- define them in detail. I feel that PBteen completely missed their mark on their message if they wanted to market to parents buying youth furniture who care about the environment and the air that their children breathe. Once you know your target write their description below your sustainability initiative(s). Again, please be specific.

STEP 3: Create differentiation for your product by using your knowledge of your target customer. (and your product)
In this case, your knowledge does not need to be longstanding because once you define your target audience you should research them. Yes, you may know a lot about them already but in looking for their values, beliefs, trade organizations, and professional attitudes you may learn a lot more. You also want to look for their barriers to change. This can be within their group or it can be in the organizations that they participate in. The first example that comes to mind for this
is the Vinyl Institute and their crusade to try to change the reputation of vinyl products. A barrier to change currently exists in the interior design and architect trade organizations that is illogical and unfounded. Although I am not here to advocate for vinyl products, I have witnessed the barriers the Vinyl Institute is up against and felt sincere empathy for their fight. I’m assuming you picked less of a rowdy target audience, or at least one that is not completely opposed to your product, therefore they will be more open to the differentiation that you are creating through your sustainability story.

Miller Office Furniture decided to use the greenhouse gas audits of their facilities and the improvement projects that stemmed from those audits as a starting point. Once they got involved in lowering their GHG emissions, they joined The Climate Registry where they reported their emissions and became part of a collective of companies who care about GHG emissions. And guess what? Those member companies were just the types of customers they were looking for. The Climate Registry attracted large corporations who were concerned about being socially and environmentally responsible. What a suitable place for an office furniture company who manufacturers all their furniture domestically, doesn’t outsource to China, employs two generations of a family because they pay a living wage, AND has a public statement about lowering their GHG emissions. Miller Office Furniture had found their audience by differentiating their product from their competitors. Not one other manufacturer they named as a competitor was a member.

Look at your list so far. It should start with your purpose, then your initiative, and then your target audience. Can you see a way to differentiate your product from your competitor's goods? Is there an attribute or spin to your story that is different? If you chose a LEED credit as your initiative, you may still be a "me too" product at this point. Your breakthrough will come in the next step where you define your story in your marketing message and where it is presented. If you cannot come up with anything here, just write "Differentiation ??" for this step.

FOR ALL COMPANIES

STEP 4: Define your marketing mix: Product, Promotion, Place, and Price. And perform it.

(STEP 5)

Promotion

In this step, you need to define the most desirable attributes of your keystone concept your target audience values. By focusing on the attributes and not the initiatives, you are switching to storytelling mode instead of just describing your initiatives. This is probably the step that is the biggest change from what you are doing now. Miller Office Furniture evaluated their initiative for lowering their GHGs and decided since they were reporting their emissions and hoped to connect with other companies focused on the same, their attribute needed to align with monitoring and reporting GHG emissions. With the knowledge of their product, they decided their target audience valued transparency and made transparency the attribute they would promote. Levi’s can take a good story and make it great by adding the human element, placing content on social media and by connecting the customer to the world of Levi’s. They can make it viral by adding exclusivity.

Place

The marketing mix you are preparing here is based on further defining the product, promotion, place, and price. In both cases, product transparency is the key to “hooking” the customer into making a preference for your product. Next, you need to define where and how you will tell your target audience. This is the place. A few Dos and DON'Ts for how to choose a place to include:
• DO be creative in how you are promoting your initiative (product). Out of the box thinking here is rewarded by a better campaign and a greater likelihood of success. Creating an experience which involves your customers and the community at large will always be a positive ROI long term, this can be done in-person or via a coordinated social media campaign.

• DON’T rely solely on your website. Driving your audience to your website for additional information and story details is critical but don’t rely on just posting your promotion there. Therefore, a social media consultant can help you branch out, so you spend less time hoping customers come to you, and you go directly to your customers.

• DO use a multitude of platforms to tell your story. This may mean that your print advertising has an environmental element to it, and your Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn updates all share and educate about your new promotion. Like marketing your LEED credits, this is critical for marketing success with the younger generation of architects, designers, and specifiers. With a consultant or dedicated social media coordinator, you’ll be able to develop the right battle plan and rhythm, so you spend less time searching for clients, and more time servicing your clients.

Miller Office Furniture chose a multi-platform approach with some out of the box thinking. First, they created a GHG label resembling a nutritional label that listed the GHG emissions created during the manufacturing of their product. It was created from the full GHG audit at their chair facility measuring Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions. (See example below) This label took shape because the emissions reporting loosely resembled an ingredient list and they made a prototype which everyone loved. It was a stretch, but the marketing team took a chance in creating it. Remember in the very beginning of the process I mentioned that you need to be open to ideas on how to market it based on your audience’s knowledge and values- not yours. You may be hung up on trying to explain what Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions are and kill the idea. Believe it or not, customers loved the labels too, even though they had no idea what they truly communicated. Notwithstanding their complete understanding of all aspects of the label, they applauded the level of transparency Miller Office Furniture was communicating. These labels were hung on every chair they sold thus reaching the companies who purchased the chair, given to architects and interior designers by sales reps during their sales calls, and the campaign was further explained on the company website. The campaign placement aligned perfectly with their target audience identified in step 2. Where will you place your initiative to gain the greatest exposure to your target audience?
Figure 2: Example of the hang tag created by Miller Office Furniture to communicate their transparency to their customers.

Although the above example is for office furniture, imagine what a tag on apparel could look like for Levi’s? How could they profess their message across multiple platforms and in social media? How could they talk about the projects that their customers are funding through purchases of their brand? All of these areas make it cool to shop Levi’s because you are doing more than buying jeans, you are supporting a school in China or a clean water project in India; whatever the initiative, tying it to your brand and creating engagement is the key to success.

Price
Defining the price does not necessarily mean the price of your chair or good your company makes. In this case, your price is the cost of the initiative in terms of time and money to perform. How much did Miller Office Furniture pay to create those hang tags? Take your "Place" list and next to each item write in an estimate of employee resource hours and capital that it will cost to perform. Then look at the entire campaign to decide how long it should run. It could be event-driven, a rollout campaign at a trade show, or a steady message you tell your customers to try to influence specifications over time. If you choose the former, then select a time limit so that you
can test your strategy and adjust if necessary. A campaign time of no longer than 4 months should allow for adjustment in the same fiscal year which is preferable since the capital is spent in that same year. Also, remember that we must abide by the two-year payback rule so time for adjustment is needed.

**STEP 6: Evaluate marketing efforts through quantitative methods.**

This book would not be called Practical Sustainability if I did not advise that you should measure your ROI (again). I believe in the principle stating companies are in business to make money and although I also advocate environmental and social responsibility, I am still operating on the opinion that you need to make money AND do all the good stuff. Plus, unless you own the company and you answer to no one, then you answer to someone and they are not going to continue to allow you to spend money unless there is an ROI.

While the marketing effort is underway, you need to define your metrics for declaring it a success. Use what is right for your company culture or you can adopt a version of what was used in Chapter 2. If you chose a LEED credit as your initiative and you have a long sales cycle, increased sales are not a good target because that is years away. Use an increase in the number of specifications instead. If you cycle to create new apparel products in a year or more, measure the number of hits to your social media sites or the number of times your content gets referenced on others. Measure your efforts so you can visually see if they were worth the price you paid and defined in step 4. Define your metrics at the planning stage so everyone involved knows in advance what is expected. This will help to communicate the company's commitment to sustainability to all levels of the corporate culture.

**STEP 7: Success or Adjust.**

If the campaign was a success and sales are increased (if that was your metric), identify the next initiative that defines your purpose OR if the campaign failed, re-evaluate the values of your target audience and how well your initiative aligned with their values.

This is either the end of your journey or a new beginning. I feel that we are at the end of one of those "choose your own adventure" books where the choices you made throughout your journey decided how it ended. Did you make your metric or not? If you did, congratulations. Celebrate your success corporate-wide and make sure to thank everyone involved. You have come a long way since chapter 1 when you walked the manufacturing floor and talked to all levels of employees about sustainability. It was a team effort and the team did an excellent job. If by chance you missed your metric, first I applaud your effort and I am positive that you are more educated about sustainability initiatives in your company than you were 3-6 months ago. All that effort is not wasted. You may just need to tweak a few details before you experience success. First, look back and analyze what you think went wrong. Ask the opinions of each team member involved in the campaign. Each person had a different view of the campaign, so their perspective may shed light on what got missed. A commonplace companies’ misstep is in step 3 where they align their target audience’s values, attitudes, and perceived barriers to their initiative. One way to give your project a renewed vision may be to ask a few of your target audience members what they value and how they recognize that value in a product’s marketing literature. This could be the boost to get you back on track and onto a successful campaign future.

Once you reidentified step 3 follow steps 4-7 as if you were doing the project for the first time. Do not stick to the same message and medium you used in the previous campaign. Try
something new and be open on how to communicate with your audience. Your next big idea may be the secret to campaign success.

Miller Office Furniture's hang tag campaign was a success. As a private company, they did not disclose the numbers but by the standards they set in step 6, they declared the campaign a winner. In addition to meeting their quantitative target, they had tremendous success stories with customers old and new. They were invited to present their manufactured products to architects and designers who had previously not considered them. These specifiers were curious about the new tag and the transparency it revealed. The CEO received speaking engagement opportunities that were completely unsolicited simply because people wanted to hear more about Miller Office Furniture's sustainability story. Overall the campaign was a launching point for Miller Office Furniture as they set their sights higher and higher on being an amazing company focused on the environment, its people, and making profits. Sometimes you can have all three.

Section 5 EXERCISE:
If you didn't go through the steps to define your purpose, initiative, and marketing mix as you read through this chapter, go back and do so now. This should provide a clear picture of how to design a campaign that is more than just a statement on a web page. It's about creating a story to set you apart from your competition. Follow along with the examples and make notes about your own organization. One of my favorite books about defining a sales strategy has so many notes in the margins from when I read the book and that it is almost funny. This is called a workbook for a reason- do the work.
6: Using ISO to Strengthen Your Message

FOR ALL COMPANIES

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) works with standards institutes from over 150 countries to develop technology and product standards. These standards lead to a more efficient, safer, and cleaner development of products. It also leads to more standardized products for consumers. It allows people to have greater confidence in a company or product that has weathered the certification process and to trust in the product claims that they make following an ISO standard.

In this chapter, we are going to review a few of the ISO standards that can be used to make claims about your product thereby improving the reputation of your company. These are not in any way a complete list of all the standards that apply to your product or industry but are just a select few that I use on a weekly basis and ones that I find deliver value (and credibility) to your story.


These standards provide guidance on developing a life cycle analysis. They do not determine rules for the declared or functional unit. ISO 14040:2016 is concerned with:

“the principles and framework for life cycle assessment (LCA) including: definition of the goal and scope of the LCA, the life cycle inventory analysis (LCI) phase, the life cycle impact assessment (LCIA) phase, the life cycle interpretation phase, reporting and critical review of the LCA, limitations of the LCA, the relationship between the LCA phases, and conditions for use of value choices and optional elements.” (ISO 14040:2016)

ISO 14044:2006 provides the requirements and guidelines for life cycle assessment.

“ISO 14044:2006 specifies requirements and provides guidelines for life cycle assessment (LCA) including: definition of the goal and scope of the LCA, the life cycle inventory analysis (LCI) phase, the life cycle impact assessment (LCIA) phase, the life cycle interpretation phase, reporting and critical review of the LCA, limitations of the LCA, relationship between the LCA phases, and conditions for use of value choices and optional elements.” (ISO 14044:2006)

You must follow these standards in order to create a credible life cycle assessment (LCA) for your product, especially if you would like to make environmental claims based on that study. Credible life cycle practitioners would only work with these standards but if you are planning to work with someone please ask. In order to make Type I or Type III Environmental claims your LCA needs to follow this framework.

The life cycle process for a product can take many months to complete. It all depends on how quickly and efficiently your company gets the practitioner the required information they need to complete the study. I always tell my clients that we are literally counting molecules in this process because it starts from the creation of your raw materials.
To draw on one of our previous examples, let's examine apparel. When you conduct an LCA, there is a study called "cradle to gate" or "cradle to cradle". The difference between the two is the endpoint. In both studies, you start with the first molecule but in the "to gate" study you stop at the manufacturer's gate and at the point that it is waiting for a truck to pick up the finished clothing ready to be shipped to a distributor. In a “to cradle” study your LCA continues on after the apparel leaves the warehouse and you document its method of transportation to a distributor or store, its time in the store as it waits to be purchased, the purchasing, the use of the clothing by the consumer, how long it is anticipated to be used, is it landfilled or recycled either to another user or recycled into another product. The study ends as the product enters its grave. The more popular study by manufacturers is “cradle to gate” because manufacturers are interested in what they can control, measure, and reduce.

In the "cradle to gate" study you start at the first molecule and you follow it all the way through each process recording the resources used and focusing on energy, water, and waste. Back to the apparel example. First, you need to grow the cotton from seed. Resources used are the conversion of the land to agriculture, water, electricity to pump the water, every pesticide, fertilizer or any other additives that are out on the crops, the machinery to help the crop to thrive, and even fossil fuels used to run generators that may be needed in the process. An example of all the unit process just growing cotton to produce fabric to make jeans is listed below and that is just the growing of the cotton.

Table 1: List of unit process for growing cotton in the Ecoinvent database for life cycle assessments.

- [sulfonyl]urea-compound
- [thio]carbamate-compound
- acetamide-anilide-compound, unspecified
- ammonium nitrate, as N
- Averaged from local datasets. See general comment.
- benzoic-compound
- butane - MX
- Carbon dioxide, in air
- cyclic N-compound
- diazole-compound
- diesel
- dinitroaniline-compound
- electricity, low voltage
- Energy, gross calorific value, in biomass
- glyphosate
- heat, district or industrial, natural gas
- irrigation
- lime
- lubricating oil
- mancozeb
- metolachlor
nitrogen fertilizer, as N  
Occupation, annual crop  
organophosphorus-compound, unspecified  
pesticide, unspecified  
petrol, unleaded  
phosphate fertilizer, as P2O5  
potassium chloride, as K2O  
pyrethroid-compound  
pyridine-compound  
sulfur  
sulfuric acid  
Transformation, from annual crop  
Transformation, to annual crop  
triazine-compound, unspecified  
urea, as N

Next there is the transportation of the cotton to mills, processing of the cotton once it arrives at the mills, chemicals that are used to dye the fabric, more transportation if the processing plant and the mills are not in the same location, all the transportation of substances and their individual manufacturing processes to make the pesticides, fertilizers, and dyes, Sewing and making the actual jeans, packaging the jeans for shipment to a distributor/store, and the cradle to gate stops there. Measuring each process, inputs, and outputs is what a life cycle analysis is and why when it is done you will learn more about your product than ever before.

**ISO 14025:2016**

ISO 14025:2006 is the development of Type III environmental product declarations or EPDs from ISO 14040/14044 developed LCAs. This standard is meant to enhance the creation of the LCA so that different LCAs across the same industry are not necessarily comparable but have a common format. ISO 14025:2016

> “establishes the principles and specifies the procedures for developing Type III environmental declaration programmes and Type III environmental declarations. It specifically establishes the use of the ISO 14040 series of standards in the development of Type III environmental declaration programmes and Type III environmental declarations.  
Type III environmental declarations as described in ISO 14025:2006 are primarily intended for use in business-to-business communication, but their use in business-to-consumer communication under certain conditions is not precluded.” (ISO 14025:2016)

One big drawback of the ISO 14040/14044 standards are that the LCA practitioner gets to pick the declared unit and as long as they explain the reasoning behind the unit, it is completely within the framework. That creates a problem across the industry for similar products in business to business communications. Imagine you need to buy steel for your project in Germany and you can buy it from either China or France. You want to pick an environmentally preferable product,
so you ask for their LCAs. Without a standard to standardize (I know that sounds silly), two similar products can have two completely different LCA studies based on their different declared units.

Let's look at an example to illustrate my point. Imagine you make water bottles and you want to conduct an LCA. You hire a practitioner and discuss what will be your declared unit. In this case, you decide that you are going to model the bottle and the cap; these are the two main parts to the bottle and therefore you write your declared unit that way. Your competitors also are conducting an LCA of their product. They have chosen their declared unit and it includes the bottle, the cap, and the label. There is a third company who is conducting their LCA and their water bottle has a 100% recycled plastic cap, so they decided that they are going to conduct a study on the bottle only. Now if all three companies follow the ISO 14040/14044 standards and are compliant to that standard are the studies similar?

This is why ISO 14025 is important; It creates rules, actually called Product Category Rules or PCRs, for how the LCA should be conducted within a product category so that similar products follow the same methodology and format.

Type III environmental product declarations have grown in popularity thanks to the LEED v4.0 standard for green building and with the increased exposure more companies are choosing to make this statement. One big benefit of an EPD over just an LCA is that an EPD is a mere marketing document and within that framework, you can protect your secret sauce. In an LCA you need to disclose everything about your product. LCAs are not usually documents that I tell companies to hand out to their customers. In an LCA I am documenting my every input of raw materials in the exact quantity and every process in the manufacturing of the product. I, as a practitioner, need to list every step that I conduct so that if someone read my LCA or 5 years from now the company wants to create another LCA to compare the two to see if they have improved, they can follow my previous LCA like a recipe to create a new one. This is, not the kind of data most manufacturers want to hand their competition through a downloadable file on a website. If you would like to look up real examples please visit www.epdregistracion.com.mx.

In comparison an EPD lists some main company data that you could find out from the company’s website, ditto on the product data, most of it is on a technical sheet, and some final impact numbers. That is it. The power is in the fact that it is third-party verified; therefore, the information is considered credible. And because it is credible, you can make environmental claims or set targets based on the results. Those claims are Type II environmental claims covered under ISO 14021 which is next, so read on.

ISO 14021:2016
This standard is for making self-declared environmental claims. This standard advises how and what to consider when making claims or labelling a product with an environmental statement.

“ISO 14021:2016 specifies requirements for self-declared environmental claims, including statements, symbols and graphics, regarding products. It further describes selected terms commonly used in environmental claims and gives qualifications for their use. This International Standard also describes a general evaluation and verification methodology for self-declared environmental claims and specific evaluation and verification methods for the selected claims in this International Standard.
ISO 14021:2016 does not preclude, override, or in any way change, legally required environmental information, claims or labelling, or any other applicable legal requirements. ” (ISO 14021:2016)

There are a few key points to making self-declared claims that you need to remember. First, they need to be backed in science, meaning that you need to have a quantitative reason for making your claim that is verifiable; Next you need to make a complete statement that takes into account the whole product as a finished goods; and finally, you need to pay special attention to the terms that you use in your claim. ISO 14021 has very specific guidelines for some of the most used environmental statements that give guidance on the use of terms like recycled content. And I almost forgot, your statement should not be general or use general wording such as "environmentally friendly". With this clear understanding of the standard, let's examine some claims made by manufacturers.

Claim 1, Levi’s water claim: Levi’s developed a water reduction program for its suppliers. On its website Levi’s projects that by adopting this standard the apparel industry as a whole can save at least 50 billion liters of water by 2020. They call the program Water-Less™ innovations. They have pledged to increase their own products made with this technique to eighty percent by 2020. While neither of these statements counts as a direct self-claim, they are making statements about their products. I would never allow any manufacturer to make such statements without direct links to actual measurements and a yearly report card on how they are doing. I am not sure when these statements were written and how they are doing because there is no other follow up. To me, these border on greenwashing and tarnish the integrity of some very helpful programs.

Claim 2, H&M’s water claim: The apparel industry struggles with water reduction because of outsourcing. Most clothing is manufactured or processed in third world countries with little oversight such as China or India. Another water reduction example where a company has made a little better headway in backing their somewhat vague claims is H&M. On their website, they claim that they have helped suppliers to reduce water, saved river basins, and helped educate farmers to use less chemicals in their production to save freshwater resources from agricultural runoff. As a supplement to these claims, H&M publishes a water outcome report which does include key performance indicators (KPIs) and benchmarks. This is an improvement, but they could still do more to communicate this to their customers and thus increase their market share.

As you can see ISO 14021 can be used as a guidebook on ALL statements that you make claiming either directly or indirectly that your company is doing the right thing for the environment. So how could Levi’s and H&M really bring more credibility into their statements? The easiest way I can think of off the top of my head is to add graphics that depict their progress. Graphs with yearly savings could add a lot to Levi’s statements. And for H&M, they should make videos for their key initiatives. Just saying they have a partnership and they are working on it is very washy- borderline greenwashing. If they are monitoring and measuring, then adding some easy to read graphics should be simple. It would also put into perspective the timeline. Levi’s only had a water report for 2014 and if they have a 2020 goal, I wonder how are they doing? H&M had a 2016-2018 water report which is more current, but it is a report that you are putting the responsibility on the customer to read. With simple charts, graphics and videos you could get the point across much easier. The target market of H&M is a much younger generation that lives and breathes social media. They are not the generation of long reports. Keep this in mind when reporting your metrics and your statements. What is the platform most used by your
customers? I can tell both H&M and Levi’s their target customers are not searching the internet and reading lengthy reports, that is a failure in the message.

All statements that you make should align with your strategy, thus developing ways to increase your market share. Use the science of what you make to develop clear goals and statements that you can back with metrics and then communicate those to your customers in a way that they can understand. Let’s go back and examine the two statements again and align them with the goals that each company projects and see how differently the messages might be.

I picked on Levi’s, but they are doing a lot of things right and they have a lot of information about their processes because of their LCA and some GHG emission calculations. Along with the supplier water initiative, Levi’s also has an initiative for cotton. In 2005 Levi’s developed an initiative called BCI or Better Cotton Initiative that aims to reduce the environmental impacts from growing cotton; this includes water. They plan to use 100% of the cotton for their products sourced from BCI member companies by 2020. In 2015 they sourced 12% but there is not a metric beyond that listed. This metric is super important, and it is buried in pages and pages of text. I say that this is a super important metric for them because of additional reports on their website.

Levi’s conducted an LCA of a pair of their famous jeans. They did not post the report from the LCA, so I don't know a lot of the specifics, but they did post a slide deck of some of the results. The LCA was cradle to grave which I find not only disappointing but unnecessary. From their findings 68% of the water usage was from growing the cotton, 23% was from customer washing of their jeans, and 6% was from the dyeing and finishing of the product. I say that I found these results to be disappointing because I don't like that they included the customer washing as a metric in the water usage of their product. Both Levi’s and H&M cite customer washing of their clothes to be a huge environmental impact, and while it is, this is out of the manufacturer’s control and I feel a little bit of scapegoating. They are placing some water blame on the customer for washing their clothes. Instead, I would rather have them conduct a cradle to gate LCA, so they can make statements and changes within their operational control.

I especially would have liked to see the comparison number for the finishing of the fabric as a result of the dyeing and bleaching to the cotton growing. If they are going to make a huge initiative for having the suppliers reduce water and save 50 billion liters and that is only 6% of the overall total, it seems a little less important. In my professional opinion, I think they would have better internal information if they had conducted a cradle to gate LCA and used it as a starting point for their initiatives in both supplier water reduction and cotton production.

As for H&M, their clothing lines vary and are not, as I suspect, heavily weighted to cotton as Levi’s. In their case I suggest that they start their initiative by keeping track of their fiber mixes in their products over 6 months, then from there, they can decide what types of fabrics appear in a majority of their clothing, and then conduct several LCAs from those mixes. They could even do a comparative LCA of several fabric types to see which has the best overall environmental impact and why. Maybe the water for nonagricultural products is much better and therefore they could make decisions on what to purchase based not only on fashion but environmental preferences. In both cases, conducting the LCA with a cradle to gate scope is absolutely necessary to understand the impact they are making. Let the washing machine industry worry about how to make their products more efficient, the apparel industry needs to concentrate on what they can control.

ISO 26000:2010
The best way to use ISO 26000 is an add-on to an existing standard or program. What I will discuss is a program that I co-wrote with a former professor and friend, Dr. Robert Pojasek for companies to complete documentation for the LEED rating system v4.1, but this tool can be used by any company who wants to provide ISO standardization and certification to their supply chain. Dr. Pojasek is an ISO wizard, and I am grateful for his permission to outline this program for you. For this, we mixed ISO standards but kept the focus on supply chain management.

The goal of this proposed tool is for raw material suppliers to accept responsibility for the environmental burdens caused by their activities, products, and services and to act to improve their performance. Within ISO 26000, guidance on social responsibility is a section on the environment. The proposed tool for achieving the goals of not only ISO 26000 but for the LEED v4.1 credit involves describing actions from which a maturity grid can be a self-assessment tool. Based on the cohesion of these two, and ISO 9004 that includes the maturity grid, is the hierarchical list below in which the objectives of the LEED v4 credit as described above are the category headers for actions in fulfilling the guidance as suggested in ISO 26000.

1. Raw material supplier extraction locations

   1.1. Include a Google map of the extraction locations

2. A commitment to long-term ecologically responsible land use by the raw material supplier

   2.1. Use sustainable, renewable resources whenever possible

   2.2. Protect and restore the natural environment

3. A commitment to reducing environmental harms from extraction and manufacturing processes by the raw material supplier

   3.1. Prevent pollution, or reduce emissions of pollutants into the air, water and soil as much as possible

   3.2. Look to advance technologies which may increase efficiency and thus decrease the harm of extraction

4. A commitment to meeting applicable standards or programs voluntarily that responsibly address sourcing by the raw material supplier

   4.1. Act to limit greenhouse gas emissions, which cause climate change; consider ways to reduce and adapt to the climate change that is already occurring

   4.2. Conserve water throughout all business operations

   4.3. Practice life-cycle management – consider all the steps of the process, and all the supply processes including waste; look for ways to make these steps as environmentally friendly as possible

The ISO-certified tool I am proposing here is from the ISO 9004 standard. Since ISO 26000 is a guidance document, it cannot certify its contents. Adding the ISO 9004 tool that is fully certifiable allows for the verification of a company's self-assessment report. Resources support the operation of all processes in an organization and are critical for ensuring effective and efficient performance and its sustained success. Companies with the responsibility of extracting
materials for the production of sustainable products should lead the way to determine and manage the all of the resources needed for the achievement of its objectives, considering the associated potential adverse effects (threats) and possible beneficial effects (opportunities) of our efforts. The natural resource extractor organization (raw material supplier) must maintain a self-assessment and maturity program to assure the customers that the above commitments have been recognized and maintained. The self-assessment matrix and a brief description of what is being done to preserve the continual improvement of the efforts shall be submitted to the customers every quarter. The extractor organization should be audited on an annual basis by an organization agreed to by the customers. Each year, the wording of the self-assessment form will be reviewed and upgraded as necessary. Below is a sample matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>MATURITY LEVEL</th>
<th>FINDINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is no managing of the number of resources extracted. Our organization extracts natural resources as required by the purchasing demand of our customers without considering the potential impacts of this practice into the future.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Our organization implements some good practices to monitor and preserve the number of natural resources in place and to address the sustainable use of our resources in our extraction processes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Our management of natural resource extraction and processing aligns with our organization's environmental management system strategy. There is some evidence of improving the actual extraction and processing by minimizing the potential impact of our ability to provide our customers with these natural resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Our organization recognizes its responsibilities to society for Managing the extraction and processing of natural resources. Our organization has implemented some ‘best practices’ in the current operation to extract and process natural resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Our organization recognized its responsibilities to society for managing the natural resources that we extract and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
process as an essential part of the life cycle of the products produced by our customers, and we work closely with our customers as they seek to improve their life cycle maintained in their LEED building program. The managing of extracted resources is widespread in all areas of our organization. Our organization addresses both current and future extraction and processing of natural resources and talk to our customers about our progress. Our organization is aware of new trends and techniques for efficient removal.

### How to use the matrix

The raw material supplier must pick one action from each of the four actionable categories as encouraged through the ISO 26000 guidance document. The actionable items as suggested above are suggestions, and a raw material supplier may list their essential items as long as they have one from each of the four categories. For this tool, you can self-declare, but there must also be an independent auditor involved. It is always good to have a third-party verifier to make sure that your work is correct.

Those categories include:

- Raw material supplier extraction locations
- Commitment to long-term ecologically responsible land use
- Commitment to reducing environmental harms from extraction and manufacturing processes
- Commitment to meeting voluntary standards or programs that address responsible sourcing

Once a raw material supplier has selected one action item from each category, they are to complete the maturity grid for each action and list all their key findings. Next, the four completed matrices shall be sent to the primary product manufacturer. The manufacturer shall collect all matrices from their raw material suppliers and make them available to the auditor once a year. The auditor shall review all matrices and inform the product manufacturer of their findings. For raw material suppliers with questionable findings, the auditor may request an in-person audit. Otherwise, the audit can be conducted at the primary product manufacturer's office. Once the audit is complete, and the auditor is satisfied with the performance of the manufacturer's suppliers, a report is prepared and signed off on by the auditor as a third-party verifier of the information and process as presented by the manufacturer. The auditor will be the person responsible for making the conformity assessment based on the information in the declaration. The auditor will review the monthly report to make sure that the company remains
on target with continual improvement. Additionally, the raw material suppliers must "sign off" that they follow all local and federal environmental regulations.

Section 6 EXERCISE:
As you can now see after reviewing all the examples of the different possible ISO programs that can add credibility to your message and initiatives. Look through your list of initiatives and consider how you can strengthen your message using ISO. Is there room in your budget for an LCA, or maybe ISO 26000 supplier audits? The key here is to focus on strengthening what you have, and to make it blend with your current course. This is not an exhaustive list of all ISO standards, so if there is not something here that you can use, research it further to find the right standard for your company and message.
7: Add Content Marketing to Your Mix

FOR ALL COMPANIES
Currently manufacturers have pressure to put their best green foot forward. The problem with this is that it is often product based and not reflective of the whole organization’s commitment to sustainability. This to me is once again a message versus a story. The green message is often based on a product’s green attributes. An example would be “our product is made of 100% recycled content”; this is a message. A story on the other hand is how your company is using recycled material sourced locally from local recycling facilities that not only puts people to work but saves waste plastic from entering a local river. This is a story that highlights your neighbors, your community, and strengthens your license to operate in that community.

This is a simple guide to creating your content marketing strategy with a story. We have talked about it throughout this chapter and even calculated some ROI from an initiative, but until now, we have not entirely defined how to run a content marketing strategy. Your company's sustainability initiatives will give your product a boost in relevance as customers want to know the newest chatter about what's going, but to really get them engaged they need to buy your story. Maximize that exposure with these steps to create customer engagement that lasts beyond your marketing campaign and creates an increase in market share. In each level, there will be a brief explanation as well as a referenced example from the book. If you are struggling to find relevance in a step as it relates to your company, re-read the book passage mentioned in the example. Don’t forget to take notes. It is organized into levels so that you can progress through them to the end with a plan.

Step 1: Align with Values Not Needs
Outline what your customers value and brainstorm how you can tap into it. Think about how you can create content about your product or sustainability message that will address those values. Content marketing is a conversation you are trying to have with your customers, and their engagement is key. Remember a common misstep in the keystone concept that contributed to campaign failure did not truly understand the customer's values. Everyone knows what customers need. That is why they made the product, but to know what they value is the key to engagement. Content marketing is an overarching experience and not a sale. Yes, this will help to increase sales, but the focus of content marketing is on the experience. It is the exchange between your company and the customer, rooted in shared value that will create loyalty and drive market share.

Example from the book: Sales from the LEC 2.0 chair (Chapter 8) contributed to the company's corporate forest. Children explored the area on nature walks, customers were invited to take pictures with "their trees," and there was a live web camera to check in on the local fauna. These are examples of aligning the company's values with the customers to create an experience beyond selling chairs. In this example, what does the customer value?

Step 2: Who Are You?
Define your brand, give it a personality, a language, and a voice. As you are looking for inspiration to define your brand, look at your company’s heritage, unique product features, and overall industry knowledge in your market segment. Take cues from the luxury market. If your company has a great brand history, find a way to leverage that to tell your story. If not, choose a new identity.
**Examples from the book:** Miller Office Furniture (Chapter 5) chose, lowering their greenhouse gas emissions, as their sustainability initiative. They joined a community of like-minded companies when they registered their GHG emissions with the Climate Registry. With their shared vision, Miller Office Furniture now aligned with companies they previously did not have a connection with. They found their voice. What does your new sustainability initiative say about you?

Levi’s example initiative (Chapter 5) involved giving voices to employees in parts of the world far from Levi's buyer and connecting not only their story but their needs through social media and funding campaigns. You also create a legacy feeling of trust from viewing the videos. It is opening up a world few people think about and allows customers to be a part of the employee's hopes and dreams.

**Step 3: Find the Right Platform**

Where will your customers be looking for a brand like you? It may take additional research, and it may be helpful to go back to Chapter 5, step 2, where you defined your target audience for the campaign on your keystone concept. The audience of the campaign will be the same audience you build your content marketing strategy. When you are looking for the platform to engage your audience in, don't just look for the platform, but look at who commits there. If your target is facility managers who buy office furniture for an entire corporate campus, what platform do they engage? And to whom do they engage with? Defining your LinkedIn strategy to find and become connected with purchasing professionals may be the answer, but don't simply InMail them to connect. Build your influencer status on LinkedIn first, publish as you build your network, and then approach them with a credible common connection; maybe it's not LinkedIn but Twitter. Define your influencer's preferred platform first and then build your content strategy to match their preference.

**Example from the book:** Miller Office Furniture did find their voice with their fellow carbon footprint reducers, but they could not cold call all the facility managers for the member companies of the Climate Registry and expect a sale because they were also members. They needed to make a connection first and build their influencer status on the platform their audience used. In the case of Miller Office Furniture, it was Twitter. Since Twitter supports a wide variety of media sources and it is acceptable to retweet someone else's content, the floodgates were open to possibilities for their content marketing campaign. It should also note here that Miller did not abandon traditional sales tactics such as in-person marketing. They just added the content strategy to create a more significant competitive advantage once they started "following" all those facility managers they met at the networking events.

Levi's created exclusive content in our example, combined both the social media platforms and good old fashion tags on the clothing in a campaign that "spoke" to customers and told the stories of the people who created their clothes. These powerful engagement videos even had a way for customers to get involved by donating to a cause. These campaigns covered many platforms from traditional advertising to website design, to social media, and even a crowdfunding platform.

**Step 4: See Your Brand Through Your Customer's Eyes**

This step is about understanding how and why your customers experience your products today. In the previous step, you looked for where your target audience is looking to engage with companies and products like yours; in the next step you will look at how to make content to fit
into where they are seeking; but before you get there, you need to see your brand as they do. If you are a building materials manufacturer, your company spends precious marketing dollars annually making, printing, and distributing product binders. For this exercise go to the office of an architecture or design firm and try to write a technical specification for your product with the resources you find at their office. These include binders, samples, and if you must, use Google from your phone. I would bet that 80% of manufacturers do not realize how ineffective their fancy marketing literature is when specifiers are just trying to perform that simple task. If you are a non-building materials manufacturer, you can do this task sitting at your desk. Pick your top-selling product and try to buy it. If sold through distribution, call distributors. If sold on the internet, try purchasing it. Experience what the customer does when they interact with your products. Then go to your competitor and perform the same tasks. Was the experience different?

**Step 5: What kind of content are they looking for?**

You may have a few content ideas now, and you are wondering what to do with them. Based on the platform you identified in Step 3, you have options as to what the customer can view. Twitter is the most far-reaching because it can generate the most significant number of followers quickly, and it accepts all types of media through links, but LinkedIn is a valuable tool because it is more personal than Twitter. For your chosen platform ask yourself the following questions to narrow down your content options.

- What types of content will my customers find most valuable?
- Where does the content fit into the conversations about the subject my customers are already having?
- How can I link my content back to my brand and create value for my customers?

**Example from the book:** Using the hypothetical scenario of carbon offsetting at Zappos, we continue with more imaginary (but plausible) events. In our example (Chapter 9), Zappos wanted to offer their customers the option to offset the carbon emissions from their shipping choice. To make the initiative a success, they need to create shared value with their customers and to tell a story. They decided to tap fashion vloggers (video + blogging) to help. Zappos ran a video contest asking customers to send in a video telling Zappos why they should be the official vlogger for the Zappos brand. They established four categories for entry to capture the demographics of their customers. Contestants could enter in the female next generation category, the female, young professional, the over 35 with a full life female, and the male shoe lover (any age) category. A key metric of selection was the vlogger must have a six-figure following. Once selected, the vloggers got to review and preview top brands Zappos carries, highlight "behind the scenes" tours of the operations, and lastly roll out the new carbon footprint offset initiative. The vlogger's following was key to the success of this initiative because it was like earned media. The vloggers were not paid directly for their "services." They received free merchandise and other perks, but Zappos wanted them to have autonomy. They did not control the content of the vlogs except that they must highlight the sustainability initiative. Therefore, the vlogger was more of an influencer in the eyes of the customers than a paid spokesperson which earns them credibility. Along with their credibility is credibility for the sustainability initiative.

**Step 6: Set the Budget**
Yes, more about the budget. I am sure you are tired of hearing about budget and ROI by now. The planning stage is before the budget because, in a content marketing strategy, you first need to understand what kind of content you will be creating before you know how much it will cost. Writing and publishing a downloadable PDF is much less expensive than creating videos. Since this might be your first time designing your company's content strategy, proceed through this step with extra care. To move onto the next step, you need to be entirely in agreement with all stakeholders about the size of the budget.

**Step 7: Establish the Calendar**

Research the best tactics and delivery methods for your chosen platform when creating your content calendar. A bonus to digital marketing efforts is the data. Companies are in business to analyze data for social media efforts, and it is easy to find out which ones are best for you to use. Armed with this additional information, establish the calendar of what you will post and when. Include in this, the physical day and the time of day because it makes a significant difference. The best time to get your post read on LinkedIn is Monday morning around 9 AM in your audience's time zone.

**Step 8: Don't Post Yet!**

When creating your content, imagine you are creating a reality series. The video is shot months in advance with a very planned schedule of what will be played when it will be played, and how each episode will be advertised. Plus, every Instagram starlet can tell you they always have tons of pictures in Queue awaiting posting. Contrary to what the viewing audience believes, everything is staged and planned. This is your task in creating content. Unless your campaign relies on time-sensitive events, create now and get at least 14-30 days ahead of your calendar. In the beginning, you may want to be as little as two weeks ahead to make sure your campaign is catching on. If not, then you did not waste resources, including the budget, and you can readjust while moving forward. Once your campaign is in full swing and customers are engaged, you can create content further ahead. It is okay to "tease" your audience to gauge response to an upcoming campaign. It is a great way to test the waters to see if it has relevance or if your message is in the right place. Make sure not to give too much away, so you lose the WOW factor when you launch the actual campaign.

**Step 9: Start Your Campaign**

Now it's time to put your beautifully developed content out in the world. Be patient. If you are not trending on Twitter in the first 24 hours, it is okay. Hopefully, you were adding followers and trying to build your base as you were working on creating your content. It will take time, so remember to incorporate this into your calendar when planning your content, but most of all, be patient.

**Step 10: Gather Data**

As your campaign is running, you will need to keep as much data as possible. This will help you to adjust your current campaign, and it will be valuable in planning your future campaigns.

In closing, this guide is simply a roadmap to helping you develop a content marketing strategy for your sustainability initiative. What you should have noticed was that many of the steps in this PDF are like the steps in Chapter 5. They are meant to be overlapping so the processes would
Below is a chart outlining how the steps align to create a cohesive initiative for increasing your brand awareness and sales while developing and performing your sustainability initiative. There is no exercise at the end of this chapter because the whole chapter is one big exercise.

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8: Don’t Make These Mistakes

A page out of the luxury marketing playbook

FOR ALL COMPANIES

Developing a Green Marketing strategy must break traditional marketing rules if it is to be successful. It is still a relatively new industry, and we can see the science and evidence moving our cause forward every day. Therefore, we need to be just as adaptive and fluid to be relevant, marketable, and profitable. The traditional marketing approach is not set up for green products, so we need to understand that up front before imagining any grand visions of a world where people are knocking down your doors to give you their hard-earned money just because you said your product was green. Instead, try a different approach that is not new and sells billions if not trillions of dollars in products each year, all while strengthening a brand and maintaining a commitment to quality. How and what types of products could do this? A new, "green" spin, on luxury goods and their rule-breaking, luxury marketing strategies is the answer. My guess is you already see the difference you can make in your story. Here are examples to show you how to blend the previous chapters to make it more effective. Although they are "mistakes," they are learning examples that illuminate the path to environmental storytelling that sells.

The Luxury Strategy defies conventional marketing and sales’ tactics. Luxury Brand companies sell products for high prices, keep low inventory, and create a cult following. This is simple economics; when the supply is low, the cost is high regardless of the immediate demand. Companies of sustainable products may not want to follow this low demand model so how can they capitalize of their difference and still sell their products based on their differentiation?

The answer to this question is not from following all the same rules of the traditional products' approach. Instead, their goals are achieved by being different in three main ways.
- First, they never compare themselves to low end "competitors."
- Secondly, they create a brand through a story which consumers buy as part of the product.
- And thirdly, because of the first two points- they never apologize for their price

Mistake #1

You are comparing apples to oranges and then trying to convince your customer that oranges are just better apples. Your customer is going to hear this and immediately walk away because they can sense the desperation coming from you, and they know desperate salesmen will say or do anything to close a sale. The number one mistake that most companies make when marketing green products is to compare themselves to the leading brand or the entire market and point out differences between the two while stating that they are better. This creates a massive flaw in their sales strategy because now, not only do they need to sell their product, but they need to sell against a product that the customer may already be comfortable with, may have an emotional connection with, and one that they have used before with success.

Additionally, all the time and energy you have been comparing yourself to other products, you might as well have been giving them free advertising, therefore, boosting their legitimacy and downgrading your own in the process. Wouldn't you say it is better to focus your sales pitch entirely on your quality and earned reputation? You, the green manufacturer, must connect with that customer, destroy all the old warm and fuzzy emotions connected to the competitive
product, and then create a strong pull for your product to replace the old product. This sounds tough and is, but some companies make this same mistake repeatedly. It is challenging to grasp, overcome, and master, but the ROI proves that this is always the best way to ensure you are keeping potential customers engaged with you, and repeat customers pleased with you. Besides, when you have confidence in yourself, others will begin to develop confidence in you as well because the drive is a universal language in the world of business.

For this example, think of two cleaning products designed for the same purpose, multi-surface cleaning. Brand A is the traditional brand made with long-named, hard to pronounce, chemicals. It even has the warning label stating it is hazardous to humans which could mean about anything including causing cancer. Sounds great huh? It also happens to be the number one product sold nationwide in the multi-surface cleaning category. Brand N (for natural) is also a multi-surface cleaner but contains no harsh chemicals and is made from all-natural ingredients with neither warning label nor risks if it comes in contact with your skin or by inhaling fumes. The biggest marketing claim for Brand N is that it cleans like Brand A without all the harmful chemicals. This makes sense since the product performance of the national brand is reputable, by comparing to Brand A, Brand N should be doing well. It is safe for the environment, children, and is all natural. Who would not choose that? Did we mention that it costs 10% more? But still one could argue, 10% is nothing for the peace of mind in knowing that my family is exposed to less toxic chemicals or carcinogens. This argument rarely works, so let's take a closer look at the possible reasons why.

First, there is an emotional connection. Brand A has a history. Let's assume you are company N's marketing department and believe that there is such a movement for natural products that by proving your product is more natural than Brand A, people will buy your Brand N. Herein lies the flaw; You are banking on a perceived risk in the eyes of the consumer. Simply put, their product does not cause cancer, and although there may be a link to one of the chemicals and cancer, it's still a risk versus a disease. Cancer is a disease and to understand how potentially contracting a disease, is not associated with purchases made today (risks), look at smoking. We all know that smoking is bad for you, yet people buy cigarettes. If the future risk were associated with the purchases we make today, then the number one selling cleaner would be a brand like 7th Generation branded products, and no one would smoke. The problem is that neither is true. The probability that something bad may or may not happen in the future is not a deterrent to the mom who wants to pick up a good working cleaning product on sale at Walmart as her child screams in the shopping cart. The message of risk was lost in translation, as was the sale of Brand N.

**LESSON LEARNED:** Never compare yourself to the leading brand or the entire market, and never point out differences between them while stating you are better. Start with your great qualities and build your message from there.

**Mistake #2**

You have no story, or you are relying on your company message to tell your product's story. Telling a story is key in marketing and brand identity. It's the next big business buzz word in the age of the TED talk franchises. Ultimately, this is what differentiates you from your competition in a "story byte," that the consumer can remember. It can often be of value to the customer and is more than just a marketing pitch. The common mistake is when the company relies on a company-wide sustainability message to transfer to each product. The marketing department tells the consumer how green the company is because they recycle, and the products are made with power from photovoltaic panels mounted on the roof. Now, these are great sustainable attributes
but why should anyone choose your product just because of that? A story offers a flexible method for conveying boring but valuable facts.

The luxury strategy market wins in storytelling. The idea of the product and the joy of ownership is communicated through the story, and the consumer buys along with the product. So how do you create a story for a sustainable product? Sustainable products are the perfect products to do this with because what makes them sustainable is also often what separates them from their competition. Does your product have a long lifespan? Is it handcrafted? Or it’s simply made by local workers and not halfway around the world. In each of these options, there is a story.

Your sustainable products, or ones you would like to advertise as sustainable, may need additional research before you move forward. This is where a life cycle analysis (LCA), a Health Product Declaration (HPD), or even an energy audit may be in order. It is advisable first to seek the science of your product before you craft your story (heard that concept before?). With sound knowledge of what and how you make (and waste) it is easier to start crafting your story. Let's build on a previous example of office furniture and their GHG message. You make office chairs at a very sustainable company. You have a great green message but want to increase sales of a particular model of chair (Model N). Your main competition of similar chairs sells way more chairs that you do, and they are not very sustainable (Model X). To try to increase the number of chairs you sell message tells how your company has been in business for 100 years, you are sustainable, and employ people for a living wage. The competition has only been in business for 50 years, makes the parts for their chairs in China, assembles them in the US, and sells more hundreds of thousands of more chairs per year. So where is your message falling flat?

Let's be clear. A message is not a story. A sustainable company who is a good corporate citizen is not the sole reason for buying like the example of the multi-surface cleaners. Assuming your customer will buy based on those details, is a failed message. What you need to do is to create a story from those facts and weave it into something your customers can attach to (also sound familiar?). First, Model N does all their due diligence on the science of the chair. They conduct a life cycle study, source a better sustainable foam from a factory a few miles away (reduced GHG emissions from transportation), lower the amount of energy used in production by replacing the factory lighting system, and even leases Prius vehicles for the sales team. All this saves a sizable amount of GHG emissions.

Great. Now, will they beat the competition? Not quite ready to take on the competition just yet. Our renamed chair LEC 2.0 (Low Emission Chair) still only has facts that need to be crafted into form. Your factory backs up to a wilderness preserve, and the owner of this factory decides to plant a forest on the 9 acres of currently mowed grass. He decided in the redesign of LEC 2.0 that he needed to do something about all the GHG emissions that his company emitted into the air. When you buy a LEC 2.0 chair, you get a framed photo of a tree planted in your name and an official certificate. The company posts pictures of the animals in and around their "corporate forest" on their website, has a live webcam so you can check in on it, and children have guided nature walks and tours where they get to experience the forest, all thanks in part to the customers who purchased chairs.

Additionally, customers are welcomed on Customer Appreciation Day to come and take pictures with their trees, and they can even donate to help the local wildlife who call the corporate forest home. Now compare your LEC 2.0 chair to the competition who manufactures their chairs in China. They may be a nice appearing sustainable company, but they don’t have
any trees or nature walks for local school children. In other words, they may have a message, but they don’t have a happy story.

**LESSON LEARNED:** You must transform your message into a story. Try to insert as much human emotion into that story as possible. Saving a few cute animals doesn’t hurt either.

**Mistake #3**
You apologize for and justify your price by saying you are "green.” If you apologize or justify your price, you are hoping that your customers are "nice guys "and buy your product even though it costs more. When you apologize or justify your price, you have created zero value for your product and have made Mistake #1 and Mistake #2. This is another page from the luxury strategy playbook. Could you imagine if a luxury product explained that the celebrity is endorsing it was asking for a $50 million contract, therefore, your Louis Vuitton/Chanel/Prada (insert any designer) bag needed to cost $2500? That sounds ridiculous, right? Well, that's what it sounds like to your customers when you say that your product is green therefore it costs more. Luxury is a premium product and embodies a lot of the same principles as sustainable products, therefore, to be successful in marketing and consequentially selling your green product you must not commit Mistake 1 or Mistake 2. By changing the rules of the game, you can make your product marketing successful with flexibility and storytelling.

Where is your product's value? Define that and build from there. Hermes belts and bags are some of the most expensive, and coveted items in the luxury market. In their marketing message, they rely on images of nature, history, and their hand-crafted approach to manufacturing their products. Your value in buying their product is you get to experience a refined sense of craftsmanship that is lost today. One of my favorite marketing initiatives I once received as a purchaser caused me to have a huge emotional connection to the item I purchased. It had such an impact on me that I would love for a U.S. based manufacturer to do it today and although it was not an intended sustainability initiative by the company, it was social responsibility at its finest.

I don’t remember the year, and I can barely remember the car, but I will never forget what I found when I was looking through my owner’s manual. I was trying to replace my burned-out taillight, I do remember that, and I grabbed the owner’s manual for assistance. I’m originally from Youngstown, Ohio, so near my home was the plant where my car was manufactured, Lordstown, Ohio. I stood at the trunk of my car, light bulb in hand, looking for the directions when a card fell to the ground. I stopped, picked it up and looked at it. The card was about the size of a postcard and had a group picture of the assembly line employees who had manufactured my car plus a personal photo of one employee. A handwritten note from the employee, although I am sure it was printed, thanked me for my purchase and support. I can tell you a simple picture and the note of gratitude is a marketing message I still remember two decades later. I’ve never seen anything like that again, but I wish I would because it was a powerful and unexpected message. I felt connected to the actual person who built my car. She sent me a message of thank you. The fact that it did not personally send me the message did not change how special it made me feel.

Rethinking the marketing strategy for your green products requires bending the rules of a traditional approach. While you may not be able to plant trees to create an exceptional story, starting with the science of what you make is doable. Conducting a life cycle analysis (LCA) gives you the background you need to find your story. There is no perfect recipe, and it is often product dependent, but adding a story helps customers identify and internalize your brand. Don't miss the opportunity to add a human element. It helps to make sure you are not compared to your
competition based on single attributes that are an unfair comparison. Complete these ideas effectively, and you should not need to justify your price for green. It can be that easy.

Section 8 EXERCISE:
1. Write the three mistakes on a whiteboard or large paper preferably in a conference room.
2. Next, get copies of your marketing literature and screenshots printed off your website. Lay them out so each can be viewed independently.
3. Invite colleagues to read the list of mistakes, view the literature, and to circle any time your literature makes one of the errors.
4. Solicit feedback from your team on how you can change your message in those areas, so you don’t make any of the three common mistakes.
9: Being an Innovator in Your Industry No Matter What You Make

Geeks not required

FOR ALL COMPANIES

Everything you have read so far helps you to create sustainability initiatives that make sense for your company, calculate your ROI, and tell your story to your customers. In this last chapter, step back and look at the information you now possess. Ask yourself how you can be an innovator? This question is the big-picture view of sustainability that can change an industry. Talking about initiatives with employees can give you a company view, but what I am talking about here is the view from the airplane window. Where can you affect change that is bigger than your organization? Even if you are a truly innovative company, where is the ability to be more innovative in the name of sustainability? I feel this is a perfect ending to all the exercises you conducted so far because they involved asking questions of people who may not necessarily drink your corporate Kool-Aid. Their differing opinions may have sparked ideas not previously considered. Companies are often slow to innovate because upper management personnel, the ones who usually present their ideas, are rewarded for thinking like everyone else in the organization. It takes an exceptional leader to go beyond the "yes men/women" to find someone who thinks differently. There, is where innovation lives. Also, keep in mind the old saying that a million-dollar idea is only 10% new. Your innovation can’t be too farfetched to catch on and must contain elements that customers are comfortable using today.

Look at the lists you have created. Where are you different from your competition? Consider innovations in your supply chain or creating a customer centric experience for owners of your product. The shoe company Zappos sells the same shoes you can buy from thousands of other online retailers at the same prices. What makes their buying experience different is their shipping? Zappos will overnight or the 2nd day your shoes, in varied sizes to ensure a proper fit, for free. The reason why they can offer such value to their customers is that in their startup phase they invested in the newest and best inventory control system. It's the automated inventory system, linked to their order system on their website that catalogs and processes all the orders. Without that system, Zappos could not offer free overnight shipping because the time to process the request would take too long. Their completely automated system provides the advantage they need to bring value to their customers.

Zappos is good, but they can be so much more. How can they possibly expand on their innovation while increasing their competitive advantage you may be wondering? Let's start by looking at key parts of their business model. First, they have an innovative and utterly automated inventory system. To offset the electricity usage of that system, they can put solar panels on the roof of their warehouse, but if you learned anything so far, it should be that although that is nice, it adds very little to their story. (Note: They should add solar panels anyways) Any other ideas? As part of the story of Zappos, I explained they shipped their shoes either 2nd day or overnight. It is a key competitive advantage. To meet their self-imposed deadlines, Zappos does a lot of overnight shipping via air freight. If you have ever calculated your emissions, then you know greenhouse gas emissions from air travel have a huge carbon footprint.

To create value for their customers, the environment, and tell the incredible story of an online retailer discovering even more innovation in plain sight, Zappos could launch a campaign to help lower GHG emissions from their shipping. A 2016 peer-reviewed study found that when
customers were purchasing goods online, and there was an option to choose carbon offset credits, they decided it 47-91% of the time. The variance was in the default options. If the default was not to add carbon credits to the total and the customer had to add them, then customers added them 47% of the time. When the default was automatically to purchase the credits, and they needed to opt out, the rate of purchase was 91%. A similar online campaign by GoDaddy is where they allow you to round up your total for charity. A convergence of the two is a viable option for Zappos. This works because it is already a part of the process and something that customers are somewhat familiar with.

Zappos wants to sell more shoes and to increase its market share. If they can help their customers lower their carbon footprint, be more responsible environmental citizens, and look fabulous while doing it in designer shoes, all the better for everyone. To meet all these objectives, they could run a marketing campaign focused on offsetting their customer's carbon footprint. For the "stars" of the show, they can tap fashion bloggers to show how being good environmental citizens is fashionable. When checking out from zappos.com, the customer has the option in their cart to buy credits to offset their emissions based on the shipping speed and zip code. If they choose not to purchase the credits as they select "buy" button, a window will pop up with a video (fashion bloggers love video) asking them to round up the sales total to the nearest whole amount to help the environment. Featuring fashion bloggers in videos on Zappos's site could earn Zappos unpaid media because these bloggers often have millions of followers. It creates an organic campaign to offer an environmental solution AND a tremendous competitive advantage for Zappos.

I chose Zappos, not because I do not like them as a company, I adore shoes, but to illustrate that there is always room for more innovation as there is still room for more sustainability. Sustainability works in all industries and even in areas that may be deemed "definitely not sustainable" like air freight. When you perform a Life Cycle Analysis of your product, you learn your product on a level you never even considered. You know every input, source of that input, and waste stream. You learn every molecule associated with that product. This process, as you progressed from chapter one until now is that same in-depth study. I'm positive you know more about the possibilities for sustainability initiatives at your company and the story you can tell your customers than you ever thought conceivable. I hope these pages caused you to think about sustainability in a new way and to question what you read about "green." You are now at the end of your lesson here. The excel spreadsheets and lists from each exercise are the tools, along with your leadership, your company needs to accomplish great initiatives and to tell a captivating story to your customer base who is waiting to be wowed. Get to work.

This is the end. I hope that you learned a lot and have pages of notes from the exercises at the end of each chapter to guide you on your sustainability journey. I would love to hear your thoughts, comments, and frustrations. Email me at dstaaf@labelingsustainability.com and I will promise to give you insight if you are looking for direction as well as my gratitude for reading my thoughts, beliefs, and my ultimate passion. I look forward to hearing from you.

But wait, is the journey over or are you ready for a redirect?
10: Post Research, Reflection, Redirection, or Starting Anew

FOR ALL COMPANIES
There is another outcome in finding your sustainability initiative. What if your original initiative is not the best one for your organization and upon further thought, research, and examining industry views, you decide to scrap it and start again? That is perfectly okay and can be expected in some cases. Luckily all that was wasted was brain power and a little bit of employee resources. Realizing that your initial thoughts were not the best option to start and there is a better way to create your story is the point of practical sustainability. How many companies buy into an idea, spend thousands of dollars, and then realize what they expected their customers to want and value is not the reality of the market space? I don’t actually know but I can guess it is a lot. Please don’t be afraid to scrap your original ideas at any time in favor of an updated plan. In fact, test two or three to see which one might have the best ROI.

Creativity can take time to build so let it happen; organically you may open your eyes and see your sector in a whole new way that just weeks before you would never have dreamed. Take existing programs and manipulate them to fit your unique product and the story you want to tell. I also advocate tweaking existing ideas and accepted industry standards because I honestly believe, as stated in the previous chapter, customers can only accept initiatives that are 10% completely new. Bleeding edge innovation takes time to develop.

When you are starting out with practical sustainability you need a few “wins” before attempting innovation or you may lose employee moral or worst yet- customer attention. Remember the step when you were developing your initiative and giving your customers something to grab onto- find the low hanging fruit. The point of this initiative was to give you some easy wins. But easy wins are not everything. You must build on your initiatives from what you learned in each step. To continue some of our examples in the imaginative world of this book, one company decided to build from their declarations and make innovative changes while the other decided to focus in a completely different initiative. Both used what they learned and their research to find an industry leading initiative that focused on the story that they wanted to tell and placed them in the leadership position. This is what practical sustainability is all about. Read on to find out what they developed.

FOR GREEN BUILDING MANUFACTURERS
While performing the Health Product Declaration (HPD) the mid-sized manufacturer of wood products realized their stains and fire treatment contained hazardous chemicals. They tested their products and they did not off gas into the space, so occupants were not directly affected, but the hazardous substances were still there. In an effort to provide the best product to their customers and the safest environment for their employees, the manufacturer decided to find replacements for the hazardous substances.

The stain or finish material would prove much easier to replace with water-based products, but the fire treatment is known in the building products’ industry to be a necessary evil in that it contains known hazardous substances but is absolutely necessary. If a commercial building were to catch fire there needs to be time for the occupants to exit the structure. For this reason, materials need to not only resist fire for a period of time to allow the exiting of people but also, they need to produce little smoke since smoke is as deadly, in many cases, as the actual fire. Wood products in a commercial space would need to have a top applied treatment at a minimum to be installed per building code; wood burns and creates smoke.
Manufacturer A of wood building products tested their materials, declared their ingredients and then made a large industry statement. They replaced, after a lot of testing and mock-ups, all their stains and topcoats with non-hazardous options. Then they asked for help. What? They made an industry changing commitment, established themselves as a leader, and then they admitted they didn’t have all the answers? Yep. Manufacturer A did not have all the answers and instead of pretending they did, which helped no one, they humbly asked for help in finding an answer to the persistent problem of using a “necessary evil product” just because everyone else is and no one believes there is a better way. Manufacturer A committed to finding a non-hazardous fire treatment option. They concluded that European companies made wood products temporarily fire resistant and since they were legally bound to the REACH legislation which controlled hazardous chemicals in Europe, then just maybe one of those companies had an answer. This answer would then change Manufacturer A’s product, their manufacturing practices, and the spaces in which those products were installed for the better. This was their challenge. They didn’t start with this challenge but after research and reflection decided that it was the right thing to do for everyone involved.

FOR COMPANIES WITH A SUSTAINABILITY GOAL

In chapter 6 we discussed Levi’s and H&M’s water goals. I mentioned that H&M did publish some water metrics and stories which created a small emphasis for their environmental and social commitment. Well, in my example-land, H&M has decided that saving water is not enough. In researching what their market segment wants they read several blogs where hazardous chemicals were a concern of environmentally conscious purchasers. This got their environmental department thinking. Water was a big metric and hard to achieve; for years they have been working on this metric with little headway and little credit for all their efforts with consumers. What could they do that would be large, a gamechanger, achievable, and give them credit with their customers? Removing hazardous chemicals in their manufacturing processes was their answer they came up with. This is a huge undertaking but totally achievable with the right program and commitment from everyone, at all levels, in the organization.

For this lofty goal H&M needs to focus on three major keystones with social media thrown in for “fun”. First is the goal, which is to remove all hazardous chemicals in their manufacturing processes within two years. Second is the framework on how they will achieve that. Thirdly is the complete and total commitment to making the goal happen. And lastly, being transparent with their customers, the good and the bad of making that happen-think reality TV here.

First, we defined the goal and it is huge with a short timeline. I am from the building and construction sector so I really believe that there is no timeline that can’t be achieved. I have walked jobsites on a Friday where the foreman tells me the building’s grand opening is next Friday and they are still putting up drywall. I think to myself there is absolutely no way until next Friday comes and I am sitting at the ribbon cutting ceremony as the building opens. With commitment- it can be done. Now we just need to define the framework.

The framework that H&M decided to create was a hybrid of two previously discussed programs: REACH Global and the abbreviated ISO 26000 framework. The program was named REACH Global Declaration of Chemical Transparency (RGD). They chose these two programs because they allowed for transparency from the manufacturer, third party verification of that transparency statement, and a system of checks and balances. This is similar to the HPD process in the building materials’ industry with a site visit (10% new). H&M was going to start with a pilot program and then expand it out into their network of suppliers. All suppliers would need to
declare the chemicals used in the manufacturing process, screen them, and remove any hazardous substances in the supply chain. These processes start with the manufacturers and then move backwards into the raw material supply. H&M conducted an LCA of a few products and discovered that the finishing of the fabrics was a main contributor of toxic chemicals in their products. In order to keep selling to H&M as a supplier, manufacturers must remove all toxic substances from their processes. If not then they can sell to another retailer, not H&M.

H&M is actually starting this process with an advantage. Remember they have been working with the raw material suppliers and manufacturers to reduce the amount of water they use. These contacts can jumpstart the hazard-free initiative. With each shipment retailers receive the boxes must display a label that outlines the chemicals used and their certificate of transparency. Manufacturers and suppliers enter the chemicals in a database and then print the labels as the products require. Yearly auditing with performance incentives is planned to get suppliers on board.

Global commitment to this initiative must be top down and bottom up if this is to be successful. H&M must be willing to part with suppliers that refuse to be compliant. Since they are such a global powerhouse brand they will only need to “make examples” out of a few suppliers and then other suppliers will get the message to conform. Even better, as the movement grows, and H&M gains more market share, other retailers will be forced to follow along and buy from those same suppliers or be forced to have their suppliers make similar adjustments to compete. Wouldn’t that just be great? All clothing produced with non-hazardous chemicals in the processing of fibers and fabrics. Sigh. I can dream.

Lastly, one of the most controversial ideas, some have said, I have written in this whole book, the idea of making the process a reality TV experience. I must admit that it may seem very farfetched, but would you rather film the process or have protesters show up and film it for you? Think about it, it can work. Fashionistas would love to follow designs from the drawing boards through to production. It is a unique opportunity to catch H&M doing things right. In the age of the Kardashians, give them credit, they know how to manipulate the media and create a brand while doing it. Take note. Use social media to build your brand, not take away from it.

FOR ALL COMPANIES

I think this is the end, for real this time. I really do hope that this has guided you down the path to rethinking and realizing your sustainability goals. I think it was important to add these last thoughts because this process is not a fairytale always with a happy ever after ending. These ideas can change your organization and your market for good. Plan wisely and make excellent decisions. I know this book contains a lot of examples that are imagined. Yes, that is true, but they are all based in real companies, real initiatives, or actual programs in other industries. Even my most outrageous example, the creation of sustainability reality TV for H&M has a root in ladies who have made millions, if not billions, of dollars creating a brand showing the good, the bad, and the ugly of their lives. The reality show’s content can be more than chemicals and the environment. Show viewers how designs are created, the struggles with finding suppliers, and the process of manufacturing. Get the fashion influencers involved. Much like the Zappos example, they can really lead the way with a little bit of inside knowledge and 1 million followers. In the end, whatever you choose I wish you the best of luck.

Section 10 EXERCISE:
1. POST RESEARCH: Is there anything you have learned in the process or has anything occurred in your industry that causes you to rethink your initiatives? Are the ones you plan to lead with the best possible choices to help you to tell your sustainability story?
2. REFLECTION: After a few nights of sleeping on your initiatives and really thinking about their impact, are you still happy with your choices?
3. REDIRECTION: Do you think you should go a different direction?
4. STARTING ANEW: If you answered yes to the previous question go back through the exercises in this book again. Please don’t skip through them because you think you know the answers; in other words, don’t drink your own Kool-Aid. Keep looking at your ideas from the outside as your customers would. A “yes” man or woman in this process is the devil.
Practical Sustainability is sustainability that fits, nothing more, nothing less. It fits into your organizational culture; it fits into your product’s attributes, and it fits into the story that you tell your customers. Businesses today require an international reach to maintain upward growth and, in a world, where trust is the key to build a global reputation, your customers don’t want to feel small or insignificant, they want to feel that they are contributing to your success. Practical Sustainability is like a pair of jeans that you just feel good in. It is as unique as your product’s footprint and a license to embrace who you are as a company. Practical Sustainability is not the “pay to play” mentality where manufacturers with a seemingly unlimited capital race to gain the newest (and somewhat useless) certification (discussed in Chapter 2) thus creating ways to outspend each other while the small to medium manufacturers sit on the sidelines, sighing as they wonder if they are staying with the pack or if they are falling behind.

Please don’t misunderstand, Practical Sustainability is for everyone because everyone has unique needs to match their goals. You can benefit if you are a big or small manufacturer, somewhere in between, or even a company who is an advocate of green practices. Practical Sustainability is a way of thinking that will change what you spend and how you look at your sustainability initiatives. With the help of this book, I hope to guide you to consider sustainability an important part of your product’s attributes and the foundation of the connection that you make with your customer. It is the story that you tell that will drive market share and make your company a leader in your sector. Crafting that story is what Practical Sustainability does best.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Denice Viktoria Staaf is a consultant and LEED v4 Materials Consultant for Labeling Sustainability Inc with offices in Los Angeles, CA and Mexico City, Mexico. She started the firm in 2016. Denice holds 3 degrees and has been a LEED 2.0 Accredited Professional since 2002. Her passion is for teaching manufacturers the science of what they sell and helping them to tell their customers an amazing story with sustainability. Denice often borrows marketing principals from the luxury market to help her clients defy conventional tactics to create amazing results. Her science based approach has its roots in creating Type III Environmental Product declarations (EPDs), Health Product Declarations (HPDs), and through the creation of the first ever building material chemical screening program specifically for Latin America, REACH Global.

Denice started her career as an Interior Designer and LEED Professional but really honed her skills in sustainability through a Master of Environmental Management and Sustainability, with a specialization in the built environment, from Harvard University. It was there that she studied Life Cycle Analysis, ISO management systems, GHG auditing, and reporting metrics that would shape her future career. As a veteran of the architecture and design community she could see how these tools could really benefit materials’ manufacturers long before LEED 2009 or v4 made the whole design community aware they existed. Denice’s true passion and purpose comes from the idea that these reporting metrics can and will change the industry and she is planning on being in the front leading the way.