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Serious About

SUSTAINABILITY

By Barbara Wichmann

Next Generation Sustainability Messaging

It's time for sustainability messaging to come out of the 'green shadows,' to shake off the image problem that all things environmentally-friendly have long been associated with—even down to the unofficial color-scheme of greens, browns, and earth tones. It's time to recognize the innovation opportunity that sustainability represents, and celebrate the progress being made.

But first, the not so good news. After several years of concerns over the severe lack of rain hitting the headlines here in California, things recently 'got real' as the saying goes, when Governor **Jerry Brown** issued the first ever, statewide mandatory water restrictions (www.sfgate.com/news/article/California-drought-Jerry-Brown-orders-historic-6172986.php). Draft regulations to achieve the targeted 25 percent reduction in usage are expected in the coming weeks and according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, will also require 50 million square feet of lawns throughout the state to be replaced with drought-tolerant landscaping through programs with local governments.

Ideas such as tearing up lawns and replacing them with plants better suited to a drier climate are not new, and at **ARTEMIA** we often write about the variety of ways businesses can make themselves more environmentally-friendly and more efficient as a result. Because it's not just a problem for California, according to the **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA), in the last five years, nearly every region of the country has experienced water shortages. Clearly there is a significant gap between the communication of the message and achieving the desired result. According to a study from *National Geographic*, cited by *The Guardian*, although the number of global consumers who say they are very concerned about the environment (61 percent) has increased since 2012, sustainable purchasing behavior has actually

decreased. So what is the reason for the disconnect, and how can we encourage people to adopt more sustainable behaviors without having to resort to legislation?

One of the big challenges around green messaging and behavioral change is being able to engage people without preaching, or worse, chastising. There are many reports which suggest that people are turned off by 'green' messaging, including a recent one from *greenbiz.com* that puts forth the notion that people are motivated to change not by working to prevent something that may happen in the future, but by what will benefit them personally today. Therefore, instead of beating consumers with a green 'stick', it's more effective to focus on how great the 'carrot' tastes.

This shift away from overtly 'green messaging' is also becoming highly effective with Millennials, with one site with major backing leading the way. **Collectively.org** (<https://collectively.org/en/topic/collectively>) is a non-profit digital platform specifically for millennials with the backing of some serious big businesses including **Carlsberg, Unilever, BT Group, The Coca-Cola Company, PepsiCo, and Marks and Spencer**. Any fears that this is an elaborate PR exercise in sustainability for these companies should be allayed by the fact that the forum has been developed in partnership with Purpose (www.purpose.com) and **Forum for the Future** (www.forumforthefuture.org), two highly respected foundations with proven track records of driving social change. As **Jonathan Porritt** of Forum for the Future told *The Guardian*, there's a realization that Millennials don't want a daily dose of depressing environmental news, and instead there should be a focus on "a very different impulse: unconstrained excitement at the rising surge of brilliant organizations and people already crafting the solutions to today's converging crises."

The idea of sustainability solutions coming from “brilliant organizations and people” speaks to a much-needed cultural shift. Which makes **Apple’s**—that bastion of all things chic, cool and desirable—foray into innovation in sustainability at its new campus in Cupertino, California, great news indeed. As reported on *sfgate.com* (www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/How-Google-Facebook-are-altering-campus-to-6190015.php), the **Santa Clara Valley Water District** last year “approved a \$17.5 million project backed by Apple, **Cal Water** and the city of **Sunnyvale** to disinfect sewage and pump non-potable recycled water into Cupertino and the company’s new campus” which is scheduled to be finished by 2016. This initiative should provide Apple with 157,000 gallons of recycled water per day. **Facebook**, **Google**, and **Adobe** have also made huge strides in this area. For example Adobe has successfully cut water consumption in its San Francisco Bay Area buildings by 62 percent since 2000 by installing low-flow faucets, waterless urinals and using drought-resistant native plants and drip-irrigation systems.

This also provides another insight into how to make ‘green’ marketing more effective. We all want to feel good

about the companies we buy from, as the products we use become social shorthand for how we see ourselves. Businesses are increasingly attuned to this, as the growing investment in corporate social responsibility initiatives demonstrates. Additionally, it demonstrates the power of ‘keeping each other in check.’ A healthy level of ‘doing the right thing’ either at a corporate or personal level can be a strong way of influencing behavioral change - neatly captured in a recent campaign by the **Denver Public Utilities Commission** encouraging people to use water wisely and just “Don’t be *that* guy.”

Positivity drives engagement, and with the smartest brains in the sustainability game, things are really looking up!

If you’d like to discuss how you can best communicate your sustainability credentials, I’d love

to hear from you. Feel free to drop me a line at b.wichmann@artemia.com. ♦



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