Sustainability's not extinct. Or too dangerous to talk about. It's what your customers need.

The heatwaves are over. Greenwashing legislation is coming... time to get back to work and be quiet on sustainability, right? Wrong!

On September 27, the EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition directive comes into force, penalising companies that greenwash with fines of up to 4% of their annual turnover in each member state.

Generic, uncertified 'eco-friendly', 'green', 'sustainable' and 'natural' claims are all banned, as well as 'carbon neutral' assertions based upon offsetting.

Other prohibited approaches include own-brand sustainability symbols and baseless, unsubstantiated claims regarding both future targets and comparative performances against peer brands.

So how *do* we talk about sustainability?

...and should we even be bothering to?

After the wild west, a new era of realism

Brands were already being increasingly reprimanded by countries' advertising standards agencies and courts. In the UK, the idea of "environmentally friendly" died in 2022 with the banning of Innocent's ad suggesting that consumers could "get fixing up the planet" simply by buying its drinks.

Purposeful piss-taking peaked the following year with what Lufthansa called an "open to interpretation campaign" equating boarding its planes with "protecting" the world.

Last summer a German court called time on Apple Watch's offset-based "CO2 neutral" claims, ruling that they were not ensured by the "continued existence" of the forests that they depended upon.

For one thing, this concerted tightening of restrictions will mean death to what I call contextless 'dinosaur metrics', borne out of Mars Wrigley 2021 claim that the removal of the black PE liner in its Maltesers boxes, would see 82 tonnes of plastic eliminated every single year, "equating to 13 Tyrannosaurus Rexes".

It will also discourage brands from overpromising, as they will no longer be able to make boasts then move the goalposts, as Coca Cola did in 2024, when it deleted pledges to have 25% of its drinks sold in refillable or returnable bottles and to have at least 50% recycled content across its packaging by 2030.

23%

Of EcoVox respondents admit admit "I sometimes feel guilty about buying or doing things that might be bad for the environment".

Embrace transparency and imperfection to build trust

The template for doing this right has been there all along. Patagonia's supremacy as a sustainable brand stems from its transparency and fallibility - including its *Footprint Chronicles* blog explaining its impacts and its case study explaining why it uses plastic packaging.

Being transparent about fallibilities can build trust and will resonate with the 23% of EcoVox respondents who admit "I sometimes feel guilty about buying or doing things that might be bad for the environment".

Patagonia's Plastic Packaging: A Study on the Challenges of Garment Delivery

Nellie Cohen / July 11, 2014 / Our Footprint, Planet

Recognise "sustainability" as a popular need for protection and prudence

The sheer breadth of greenwashing categories (rinsing, lighting, labelling…) and legislation makes keeping your head down and staying silent to avoid scrutiny look tempting.

That would be a mistake because it would ignore some fundamental truths about the environment - namely that it is something that people want protecting and protecting *from*: 42% regularly interact with their local habitats, whilst 18% have experienced heat levels where they live that made them concerned for their health.

44%

Of EcoVox respondents see certain foods becoming too expensive to buy as much as before.

Sell "sustainability" as superiority, savviness and togetherness

The best way to maximise a ROI on your responsible compliance, investment and innovation is to shout about the superior value, efficiency, longevity, performance, nourishment and taste that comes from your sustainable sourcing, production and distribution.

Waterless personal care products from The Hair Edit and Luonkos are a case in point, pushing savvy messages around "more active ingredients – no water as a filler" .

In communications, there should be a clear hierarchy of "me benefits" and then "we benefits" ahead of environmental ones.

Amazon's campaign celebrating a milestone of 10,000 electric vehicles used for deliveries in Europe in 2026 achieves "global-local" impact and everyday, tangibility for its customers: cleaner air where they live.

Along the way there's a challenge to head off the threats of division, depression and disempowerment by using metrics that champion abundance, momentum and "collective efficacy".

In Canada for example, LOOP Mission dispels any sense of disempowerment by celebrating the number of customers buying its' upcycled health drink products.

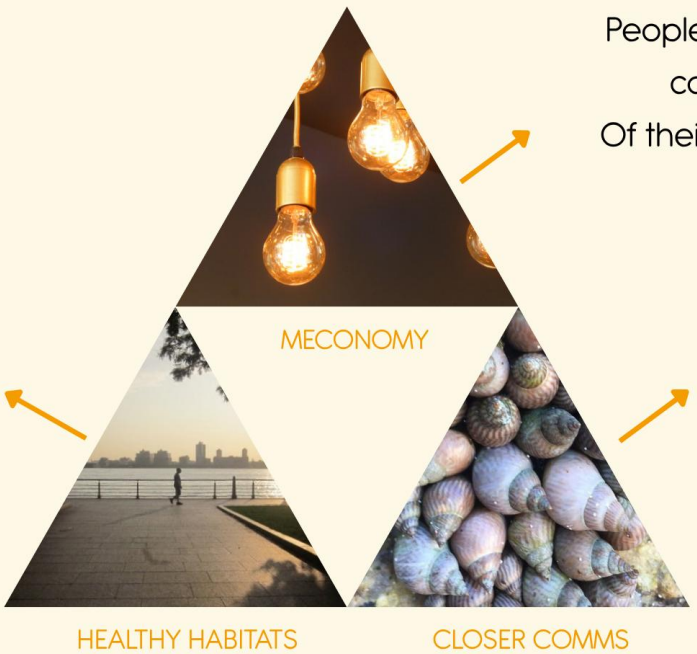
#1

Thing people want to see when it comes to environmental product credentials is "proof that it was made locally"

Work with us and what we know

People are focused on conservation.
Of their own resources

Protecting the bodies and environments that people live in is what counts



People want messages and metrics delivering visibility, tangibility and immediacy

Your needs → **Our services**

A business-wide resource on how to achieve popular engagement on eco issues

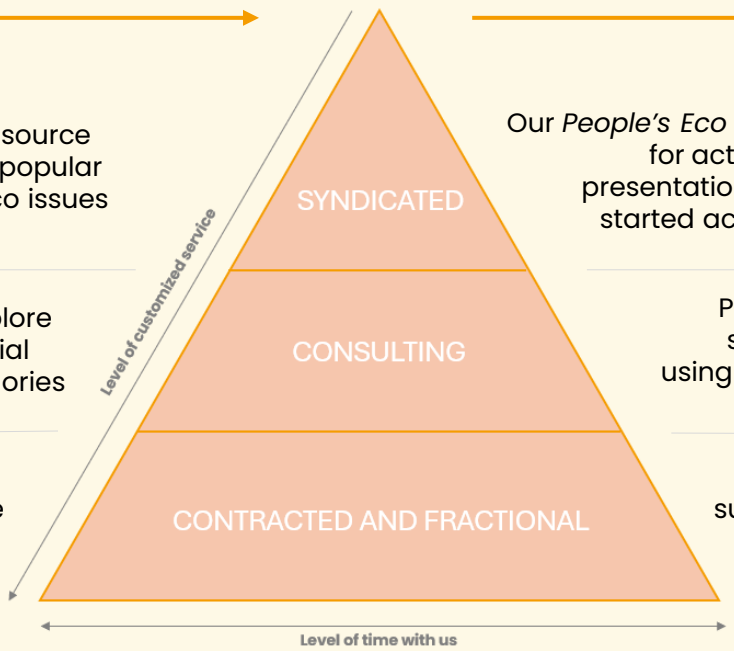
Our *People's Eco* report is a playbook for action with customized presentation options to get you started activating its insights

Fresh insight to explore current and potential markets and categories

Project deliverables scoped to your briefs using syndicated, primary and desk research

Integration of our insights & expertise into your functions and teams

Ongoing, scheduled support & training, set to your targets and deadlines



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