

COLUMNS

Seeing mobile as a sustainable solution

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By [James Orsini](#)

At Interbrand's recent "True Stories Sustainability Conference" in New York, I was inspired by some of the great work shared by the companies that included Unilever and Patagonia. I sat attentively in a room where 90 percent of the attendees appeared under 30, curious students seeking grey-haired wisdom from the panel of speakers.

Throughout the conference smartphones were buzzing, snapping pictures of the charts while tweeting images and hashtags to social media followers. During all this activity, I could not help but notice not one mention from the podium of regarding mobile as a part of the sustainable solution. How could this be?

To quote Gary Hirshberg, chairman of Stonyfield Farm, "Sustainability is like the word natural; deeply overused and extremely confusing."

Verbalizing

Sustainability is a verb, not a noun. It is a process, a process that at its core should include mobile tactics.

A recent Hartman group survey showed there is a widening gap in this process.

While 74 percent of the folks surveyed were familiar with the term sustainability, only 23

percent could identify a sustainable product and less than 15 percent could identify a sustainable company.

I assure you, put your sustainable solutions on a mobile device that is in their hand, a device that now follows them to their bathroom and bedroom, and I assure you they will remember your company.

I could not help but hear a cry for mobile with each speaker who shared a true story.

For Zady.com who referred to its customers as “a community,” is there any more intimate or personal device than the phone?

The author of “The Lazy Environmentalist” said, “Show me a sustainable way to have what I want and I’ll buy it or use it.”

No papering over

We have worked with healthcare clients to reduce multiple sheet paper compliance to mobile delivery sustainable solutions through an SMS channel.

As the targeted consumers for this sustainable awareness initiative are typically affluent, urban, educated, passionate people, there is no better demographic for the social media or smartphone user.

Even from a customer service standpoint, what you cannot say in 140 or 160 characters you can definitely say in a 90-second video embedded as a link, with no paper required.

We have seen mobile bring sustainable solutions to clients through logistics by saving fuel charges in their trucking fleets, reduced paper and printing charges for CRM or direct marketing initiatives, or cash register receipts at point of sale – the list goes on and on.

Unilever CEO Paul Polman, whose company has 400 brands in 190 countries with 180,000 employees and touches 2 billion consumers daily, was quoted as saying that “the cost of inaction is exceeding the cost of action” in this quest for sustainability.

WE MUST CHANGE the way we think before we can change the way we act. And sometimes we just do not think of mobile as a sustainable solution.

Yale professor Daylian Cain helped those who attended the conference to understand we do not always see what is right in front of our eyes. I say mobile is an actionable tactic in front of our eyes – a tactic that should be part of every company’s sustainability process.

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