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# STB Marketing College Masterclass Series The Case for Sustainability in Tourism Marketing

Q&A Highlights



This document is a collation of questions answered by session speaker, Ashik Ashokan, Head of Advisory, APAC, WARC on 27 September 2022's Masterclass.

	<p><b>For businesses totally new to sustainability marketing, what are some possible content angles that can be considered as a start?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>It is important to first focus on the experience or product that your business offers more than the content. Thus, the question can be rephrased as “Based on the products/experiences offered to consumers, what content can I then create?”</p> <p>For example, if you are an experience provider in Singapore promoting beach activities – that is a good context for you to frame around the potential content you would like to create. If your activities rely on the location (the beach), then you should ensure your sustainability efforts are focused on the location instead of promoting other irrelevant sustainability messages (e.g., reducing CO2 emissions).</p> <p>If you are new to this, my suggestion is for you to first review your product offerings, then connect it with 3 of the closest sustainability factors that can be tied into your business and finally, create content around these factors. This can help you to create content that is relevant and applicable to your brand.</p>
	<p><b>Sustainability has become the latest buzzword; however, the lack of labelling standards and consistency has led to greenwashing. How should this be mitigated and how can businesses increase credibility?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>One of the key things to do to avoid greenwashing, is to tap on the 5 foundations of sustainability communications that was previously shared (e.g., make substantiated claims). If you cannot remember any frameworks, being honest and true and knowing what you are communicating to consumers can be substantiated will help your business in avoiding greenwashing.</p> <p>Improving credibility is also important and strategic partnerships can help in this area. Partnering does not necessarily have to be with reputable organisations, it can also be with adjacent brands. You must ask yourself what do you need</p>

	credibility in and what are the brands that can help in this area? What is the value-add of the partnership and if there is shared value between brands, then it can make a good partnership and improve credibility.
	<b>Will Purpose be the de facto reason to drive Sustainable opportunity instead of Planet?</b>
A:	<p>If you take look at the 3Ps framework (The Triple Bottom Line of Profit-Planet-Purpose), you can see an intersection where one factor cannot seem to exist without the others. I don't think you can divorce Purpose from Planet. Planet broadly covers people, climate, environment, local communities' survivability, and a whole host of factors. Without planet, it would cause a total collapse of the 3Ps framework as your business would only be purposeful about profits.</p> <p>Purpose and planet must go hand in hand and the question to ask yourself is – is your purpose beyond profit that helps the planet in the new economy?</p>
	<b>Are there any tools available to calculate carbon emissions? (e.g., for a trip)</b>
A:	You can search for CoolClimate or look at WWF (World Wildlife Fund) for the many tools available for calculating of carbon emissions. It is just one google search away but there are aplenty of options out there.
	<b>Sustainability marketing can't yield immediate, tangible results from consumers or in terms of sales and this is usually an issue that impacts the management/bosses. How can we overcome this?</b>
A:	<p>In the Triple Jeopardy theory for marketers, there is the vortex of short-termism which is exactly what this question is asking. We are forced to think in quarters and not in years and this is a recurring problem. So, to everyone out there facing this, we are all in the same boat.</p> <p>How do we combat the impacts of short-termism? A lot of this boils down to communication, managing your bosses' and stakeholders' expectations. In the Les Binet and Peter Field Marketing Framework, it shows that long term brand building happens over years, but it is super important to drive short term sales activation to keep the business afloat. Both efforts need to go hand in hand, in fact, the split that they recommended was 60:40 (60 for brand building and 40 for short term sales activations).</p> <p>The idea is not for you to chase after sustainability. The core of your business should still be driving sales, but you should consider having sustainability initiatives as it is likely to take centre-stage of your business in time.</p> <p>For those who are struggling to communicate with your bosses on this topic, do let them know that sustainability marketing is very relevant, but it does not have to be the main priority of the business right now. Sustainability initiatives should be on your radar, or this would negatively impact your business in the long run.</p>
	<b>How do you convince the change of behaviour in consumers? E.g., getting hotel guests to take shorter showers, having local food etc.</b>
A:	From my personal experience, during my travels I have seen some interesting activations. In some hotels, there are booklets providing information on experiences you can find within the vicinity – so that is one way.

	<p>In the example shared earlier on behavioural science principle – Category Heuristics e.g., turning off your shower for X no. of minutes would save you X amount of water – it would be more effective if you can reframe your communications to if you turn off your shower for X minutes, that is equivalent to X litres of water a child can drink in a day.</p> <p>A lot of this is about contextualising and all of marketing sells either love or fear – that is the way to change consumer behaviour. If you think about chocolate brands, they are selling you love. If you think about insurance brands, they are selling you fear.</p> <p>So, you should think about what behavioural cues can introduced within your experience that encourages behaviour – instead of just driving awareness. Is it through partnerships, using the right behavioural science principles, a smart gimmick or activation? If it all fails, maybe it is about turning off the shower.</p>
	<p><b>How else can we integrate sustainability into tourism and to make it more appealing for our consumers?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>The rise of eco-conscious travellers is one of the massive ways that is helping us with this situation. With the embedded sustainable behaviours in them, the more eco-conscious travellers there are, the better it is.</p> <p>On the other hand, there are consumers who do not care about sustainability at all. They should not fall under your consideration set – you do not have to convince the unconvinced. Changing everyone to become a green/eco-conscious consumer is not the reason to incorporate sustainability into your business. The real reason why we are changing our business’s sustainability efforts is to speak to the new form of travellers and the emerging group of conscious consumers that will become very important in the next 1 – 2 years.</p> <p>Don’t take it on yourself to change the world or change the consumers – that is not your role as a marketer. Your key role as a marketer is to speak to your consumers who already has a higher consideration set for eco-consciousness.</p>
	<p><b>There is consumer perception/biassness that sustainable products/services may not be on par in terms of value and benefits when compared to regular products/services. How can marketers tackle this challenge?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>This goes back to the important point of a marketer’s job which is communicating value or perceived value. For example, luxury brands – they go through perceived value. Marketers who are selling experiences will try to increase the value of the experience. For example, what used to be just an elephant ride in Thailand is now being marketed as “If you do this experience, X no. of elephants will benefit from it.”</p> <p>Or the experience of buying a souvenir – a lower quality souvenir could be rebranded differently. “If you buy this souvenir, it will feed a family of 4...” So, what did the marketer do there? The product may remain the same or even be of inferior quality but the value of it has gone up. And I think that value differentiator is purely a communication differentiator.</p>

	<p>How can we increase the perceived value of a product falls on the communication. If you are selling a product/experience, don't reinvent the wheel and change the whole product experience but rethink about how you can change the communications around it - wrap it around with a new wrapper that appeals more to your consumers.</p> <p>What exactly the wrapper is – I am unable to tell you now. But if you can share with me what exactly your product/experience is, I can share different ideas or case studies that can help guide you along.</p>
	<p><b>How can businesses who may be very established with strong brand presence dial up their sustainability marketing efforts – especially when if it is going to impact their brand positioning?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>With the rise of eco-conscious travellers, brands can be caught in a vortex where they would like to change up their product offerings/experiences but at the same time, they are worried about losing travellers in other segments if too many changes are made.</p> <p>It is a dilemma but as an established brand the solution to the business is clear – you must shape your experience in a sustainable manner. You must review your experiences or products to shape it in a new way. As an established brand, you can lead profits over a few quarters, and you can even run pilots around sustainability initiatives.</p> <p>What really worked out for some tourism brand examples that I've seen is that they ran pilots/programs by trialling it with different consumer segments and they saw what worked and what did not work. This really brings to the point where using a feedback loop is super important.</p> <p>If you are an established brand looking to grow your business further, the answer is to try out pilots before reshaping your entire experience because you never know what works.</p>
	<p><b>What does sustainability mean to you?</b></p>
<p>A:</p>	<p>This is a personal question for me. When I went to Northern Pakistan, what really shocked me was how much the glaciers have retreated and how the local communities were affected. If you think about the floods happening to the developing countries recently, they are not even countries with the largest carbon emissions, but they were most deeply hit by the activities of the developed countries.</p> <p>Seeing that really struck a chord with me, the victims are not the same as the perpetrators. So, sustainability for me means when a brand or an organisation puts people who are not within the vicinity in their minds when they run their business.</p> <p>The conventional way of thinking is to put people first. What I am saying is, don't just put people first. Put people who are not within your sight, in far off areas, within your sight when you do business or policy planning and that's what sustainability means to me. Make the invisible, visible.</p>