

Sustainable Success:

Make Ecological & Social Responsibility Part of Your Brand

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A Trend Towards Responsibility

Sustainability is no longer just a buzzword. A 2014 Nielsen survey found that 55 percent of global online consumers across 60 countries are willing to pay more for products and services from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact.

Whereas once it was little more than a feel-good idea, largely ignored by the general public, now it's part of a new global standard, one in which consumers are not only requesting an ecologically friendly commitment from the companies they support, but in fact, demanding it.



Sustainability Matters

With such a strong movement towards corporate responsibility, it can sometimes be difficult to discern. Is it recycling? Is it responsible sourcing and manufacturing? Is it biodegradable or reusable materials? Shortly put, yes. It's all of these things. The most quoted definition comes from the UN Brundtland Commission: "(Sustainability) is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."¹

The sustainable movement is a response to growing consciousness about the manner in which things are produced, how they are used and what happens to them at the end of their life-cycle. Consider the following statistic: during the course of a lifetime, the average American will throw away 600 times his or her weight in garbage. That means a legacy of 90,000 pounds of trash per person for future generations to deal with.²

As consumers become increasingly aware of the negative impacts of overconsumption, more and more people are insisting the organizations they support embrace sustainability as a core value. And it's not just your product or service offerings being scrutinized. It's everything connected to your organization including branded merchandise, giveaways and anything else bearing your logo.

Sustainability Makes Good Business Sense

Successful and forward-thinking organizations have understood the benefits of a disciplined approach to business practices for some time, including cost savings, tax incentives and consumer goodwill. By adding sustainability to business goals most companies can achieve substantial results in the form of environmental, social and financial rewards.



Save Green by Going Green

For most businesses, the driving force behind any decision is the bottom line. In most cases, green initiatives are no more expensive than other options and can often save money. In fact, Diversey, a global provider of commercial cleaning and hygiene solutions, claimed that for every \$1 they invested in 2008, they expected to recoup \$2 in 2013.³

For many companies this return on investment is most readily apparent in energy savings. Making a switch to recycling can reap huge rewards. For example, recycling plastic requires only half the energy to recycle that is required to burn it.⁴

Further, a study by McKinsey & Co. shows that 40 percent of North American carbon cuts required to meet Kyoto Protocol targets would generate a profit.⁵

Coca-Cola, for example, claims a 20 percent internal rate of return on their energy savings investments.⁶

And going green doesn't always require a large expenditure. Simply turning off PCs at night saved Dell \$1.8 million per year. That's considerable savings for very little investment.



Tax Incentives Make Sustainability a Win-Win

In addition to cost savings on an organizational level, the government rewards eco-friendly practices by offering tax breaks to companies that meet certain benchmarks. There are hundreds of government programs that can help you qualify for advantageous tax treatment, including investing in energy-efficient buildings or equipment, manufacturing with recycled materials, using alternative energy sources like wind or solar, or powering company vehicles with alternative fuels. Some of these projects can qualify for as much as 30 percent in federal incentives, with another 30 percent at the state level.

Consumers Vote Green with Their Dollars

Another area in which companies can benefit financially from going green is in improved sales from eco-conscious customers. As the sustainability movement continues to grow in scope and momentum, more and more consumers are demanding the companies they support behave in an ecologically- and socially-responsible manner.

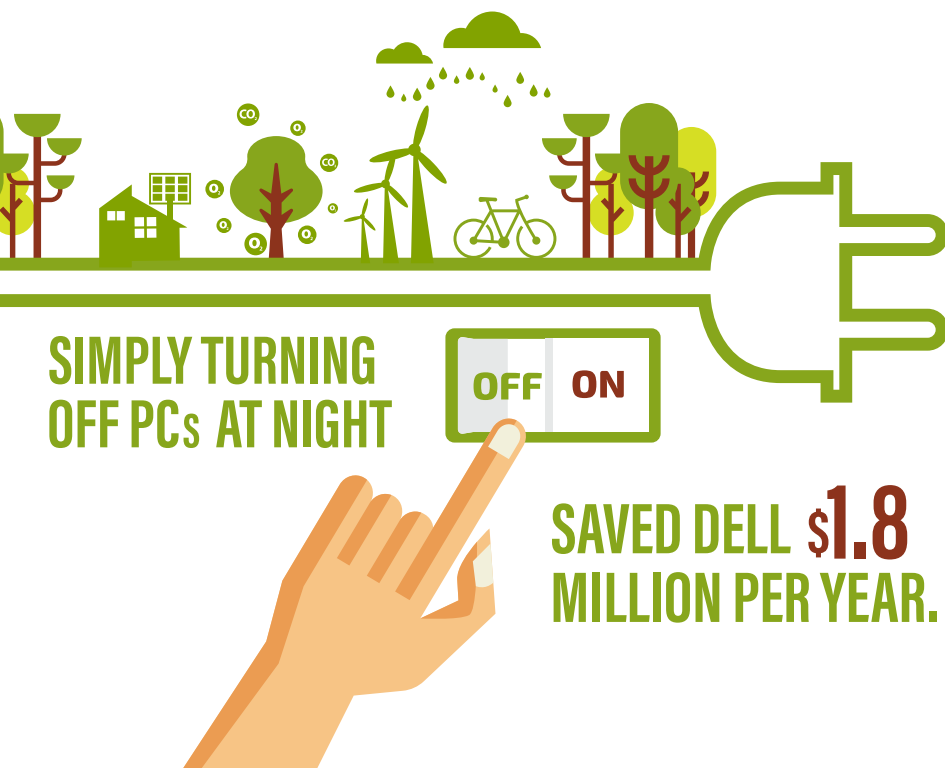
A 2014 Nielsen survey found that 55 percent of global online consumers across 60 countries are willing to pay more for products and services from companies committed to positive social and environmental impact.⁹

And it's more than just the product that they are considering. The same survey found that 52 percent of consumers base at least part of their purchasing decisions on packaging, and that they check labeling to ensure the brand is committed to responsible production.¹⁰

Sustainability is an Asset

The evidence is clear – increasing organizational commitments to sustainability is hugely beneficial and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. In addition to the warm, fuzzy feeling of knowing your company is helping, rather than hurting the environment, investments in sustainability reap significant rewards over time.

They provide the perfect opportunity to showcase a commitment to responsible business while still continuing to meet business goals, improve profitability, and increase overall visibility.



Make Sustainability Part of Your Brand

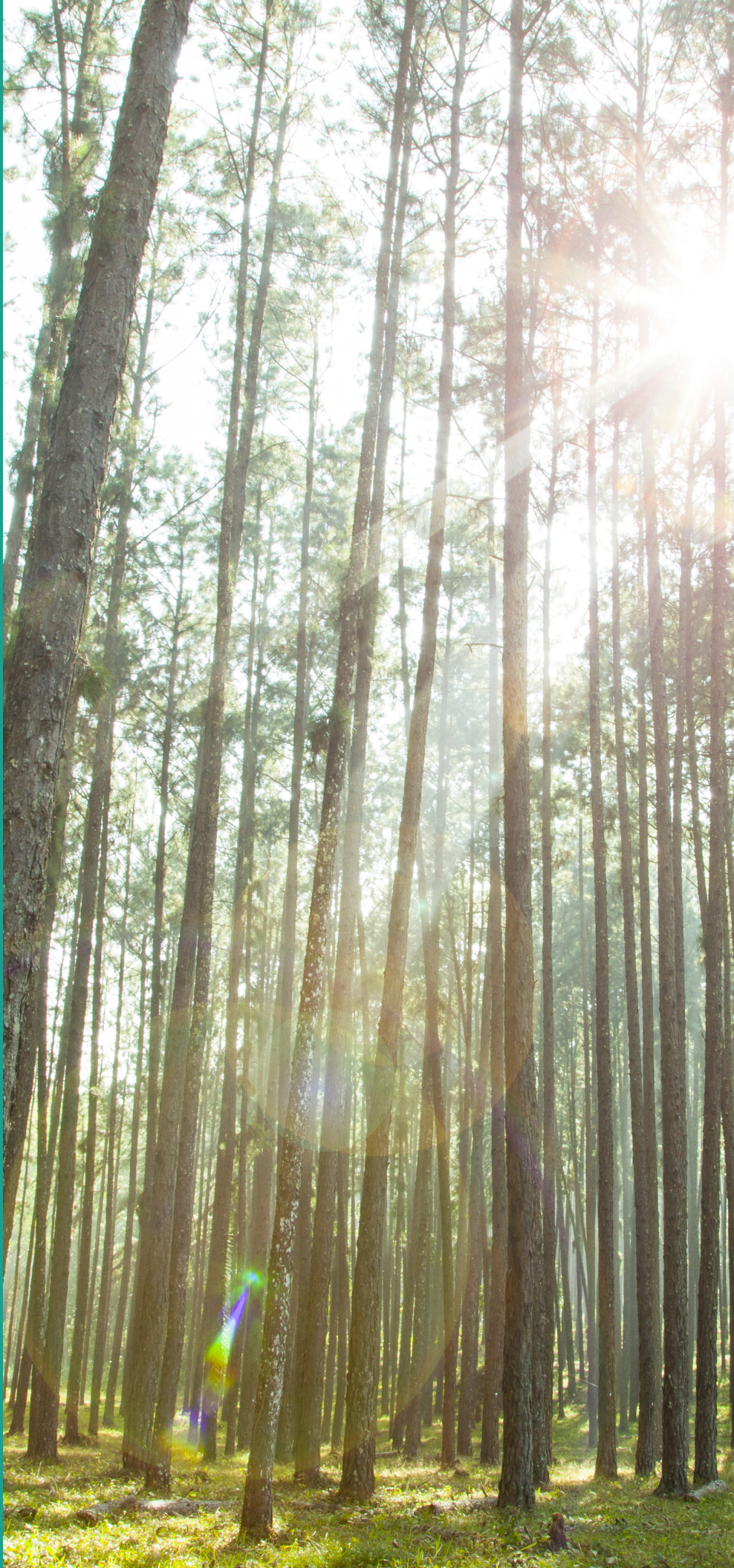
Going green is an admirable goal, but figuring out how to start can be overwhelming. This is because it's difficult to know what is produced in an environmentally and socially conscious manner. This is especially true with promotional products. Green and socially responsible branded items not only promote your company, but also leave consumers with a positive impression of your organization. When choosing promotional products that mirror your organization's commitment to sustainability, here are some things to consider:

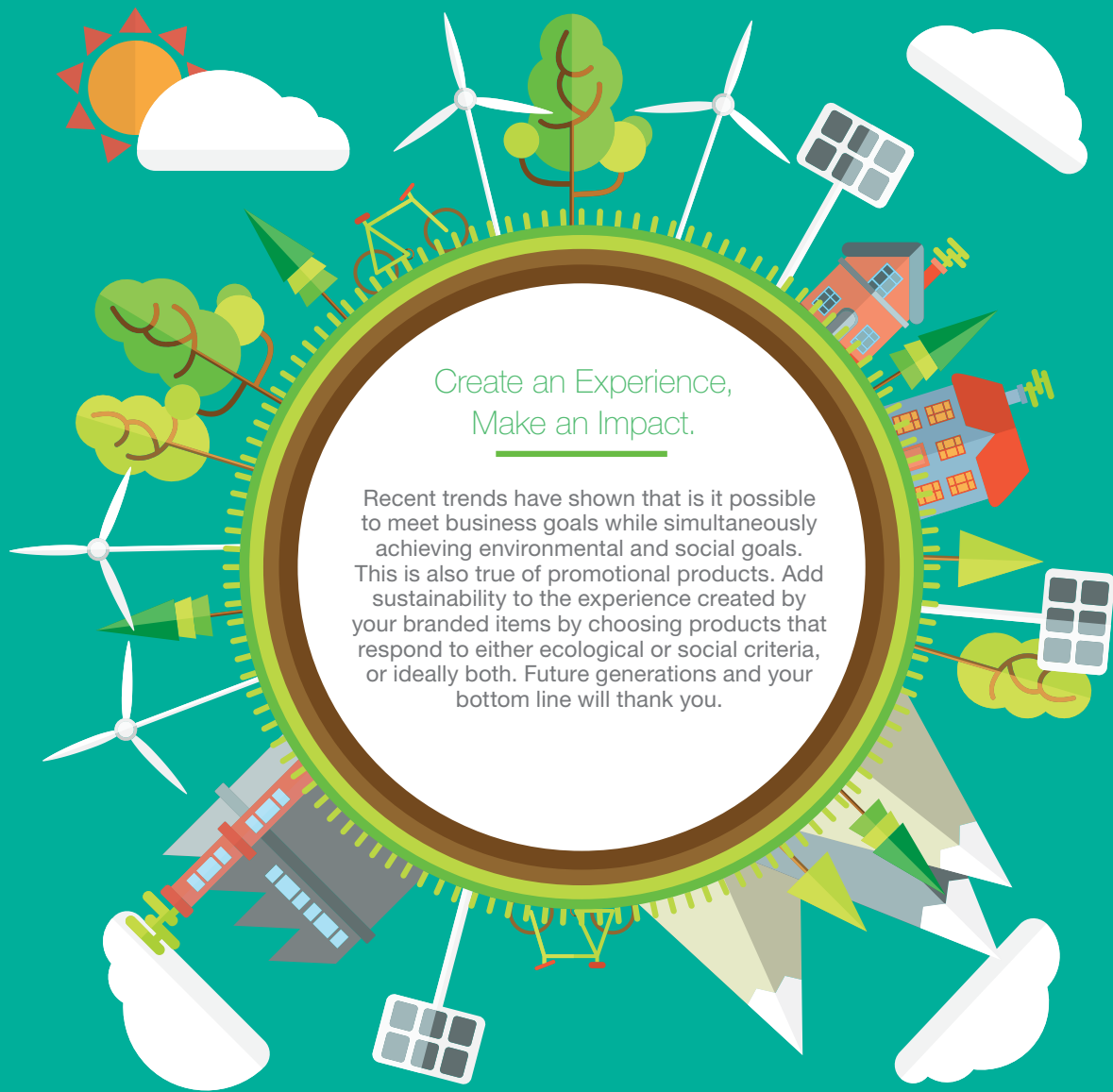
Life cycle – How long should the product last? Solid, quality products tend to have a longer life than those made from fragile and easily-damaged plastics. This not only reduces the amount of waste generated by consumers, but also leads to more impressions! It's a win-win.

Materials – What is it made from? Sustainable materials can be produced without depleting non-renewable resources and with less harm to the ecosystem. Consider choosing materials that grow quickly, for things like notebooks or pens. T-shirts and garments made from cotton grown without pesticides is another great choice, as it doesn't pollute water with toxic runoff. Don't forget to consider how it is packaged.

Certifications – How do you know it's a sustainable product? Has a respected third-party organization certified the product? There are many types of certifications. Make sure the product you choose meets or exceeds your organizational goals.

Production – Where is the product made? Is it made in a socially responsible manner, one that empowers the workers who manufacture it? Many manufacturers demonstrate a strict adherence to workers' rights.





Create an Experience, Make an Impact.

Recent trends have shown that it is possible to meet business goals while simultaneously achieving environmental and social goals. This is also true of promotional products. Add sustainability to the experience created by your branded items by choosing products that respond to either ecological or social criteria, or ideally both. Future generations and your bottom line will thank you.

¹ <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2014/global-consumers-are-willing-to-put-their-money-where-their-heart-is.html>

² <http://www.sustain.ucla.edu/about-us/what-is-sustainability/>

³ <http://www.bc.edu/offices/sustainability/what-you-can-do/know-facts.html>

⁴ <http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2009/11/23/8-myths-about-sustainability-business>

⁵ <http://www.bc.edu/offices/sustainability/what-you-can-do/know-facts.html>

⁶ <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2012/03/05/six-surprising-sustainability-facts/>

⁷ <http://www.greenbiz.com/blog/2009/11/23/8-myths-about-sustainability-business>

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/small-business-energy-efficiency-solutions>

⁹ <https://www.qsmagazine.com/funding-growth/incentives-green>

¹⁰ <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/press-room/2014/global-consumers-are-willing-to-put-their-money-where-their-heart-is.html>

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