

Taking on Sustainability

Monthly Design Perspective
October 2010

Creating and managing
brand value™

Interbrand



BART
VAUBE
ARTHOE

Where do you start?

We tried to be green, then greener. We became environmentally friendly, embraced tree huggers, watched where we stepped with our carbon footprints, and tried to comprehend the cradle-to-grave model. Now it is all about sustainability.

Having lived for years in Europe I am more than familiar with recycling and other programs to protect the environment. I am also very aware that countries have different takes on what it means to "go green." On a recent trip to Asia, for example, I was stunned at the air pollution smothering the landscape yet, at street level, intrigued by how every product seemed to have at least one use beyond its original intent.

The sustainability conversation is far larger and more complex than "recycle, reduce, reuse." Also, the sustainability model (whichever of the 300+ versions you choose) is a myth. While the principle behind the concept is well-intentioned, on a day-to-day level it has little to no meaning to the average consumer.

In terms of mass production and consumption our culture has created a "chicken and the egg" scenario that will be difficult to reverse. The gulf between developed countries and those playing catch-up (with China and India leading the way) is rapidly closing; consumers in these emerging nations are becoming more affluent and developing an appetite for high-end items such as cars, refrigerators, microwaves, computers. This, in turn, is ramping up production and transportation of finished goods and having a profound – largely negative – impact on the earth's resources and environment.

The basic problem/challenge to attaining true sustainability is changing human behavior which, as we know, is never easy.

Interbrand has studied behavioral change in California for the past two years and has concluded that barriers to change are numerous – knowledge, indifference, "I've done enough," it's someone else's problem, etc. Change in behavior will only happen if consumers change their self view, realize that their actions have consequences and understand that they can effect change. Without a reorientation of "self" no campaign, label, legislature or personality will create a profound and sustained behavioral shift that creates new social norms.

All of us need to think about sustainability from both a local and global perspective, with a deeper understanding of the decisions we make – before and after a purchase – and the impact they have on our world. This means finding out where a product was made, how it was made, by whom, when, and so on. How large a carbon footprint does the product you are consuming leave behind?

Consider, for example, the liquid detergent category. Why have we been conditioned to purchase huge bottles of detergent in club stores or retail chains? We are paying for weighty liquids to be shipped multiple times. The more sustainable model would be to ship detergent powder in a larger container and have the consumer add water at home to create the liquid. Shipping smaller, lighter-weight amounts of powder that can be activated at home could reduce fuel costs (as well as pollution) considerably. Seems reasonable enough to me. However, compaction and liquid concentration solve only part of the problem. Do consumers really trust that so little liquid can deliver the same cleaning power as the original amount? Chances are they overdose on each load just to make sure, which defeats the whole purpose of the purchase. Educating consumers is the other half of the sustainability equation.

So what has to happen to make true sustainability a reality? Waiting for governments to act appears pointless. The climate summit in Denmark shone a spotlight on the widening gulf between those states that want to champion environmental responsibility and those that want to develop and grow, despite the cost to their piece of the planet. Counting on consumers – spearheaded by activist groups – to take action could prove more fruitful. Anti-smoking groups that cited the rising toll of lung cancer deaths clearly paved the way for consumer outrage about the dangers of cigarettes and spurred political leaders to act. Unfortunately, however, I think it will take a drastic event to force consumers and legislators to join forces to protect the environment; for example, the shortage of a basic food item or a cataclysmic environmental disaster that directly affects political leaders in their own back yards. A tsunami in Washington DC with eight-foot-deep water on the White House lawn might send a strong signal to the powers that be.

Tracing the successful growth and evolution of early “socially responsible” brands like Body Shop and Greenpeace makes me realize that similar stories are few and far between. Who are the new radicals, the upstarts, the thought-breakers and -makers? What companies or brands will become the standard-bearers for protecting the environment...for explaining the dangers we are facing and the potential outcome for all of us? Al Gore made a very compelling argument but can we really act on what he said? The sustainability message and action model has to be simple enough for everyone to understand and rally around.

What we need are companies and brands that have a sustainable message that can be demonstrated and understood, and which offer an immediate benefit to consumers and their communities. The first brand that can truly and meaningfully demonstrate this ability will win.

Sustainability is about harvesting, creating, planning, growing, energy, time, consumption, recycling, ethics, compassion and common sense. Think about it: Do we really need to consume water in a bottle from halfway around the world when we can get it (less expensively!) from a tap in our house? Why do we buy fruit and vegetables out of season from faraway lands, driving up prices and transportation costs and lowering their nutritional value?

In her book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*, author Barbara Kingsolver describes the environmental and health benefits her family reaped after “...our first year of deliberately eating food produced from the same place where we worked, went to school, loved our neighbors, drank and water, and breathed the air.”

Perhaps it's time for all of us to more carefully consider our purchasing habits; to abandon the industrial-food pipeline in favor of more purposeful and responsible consumerism. Try buying fruits and vegetables from local farmers markets or foodstuffs from your grocery store that are raised, grown and harvested locally. Buy something because you need it; not because it's there. Large-scale change results from the cumulative effects of small, daily acts. So take public transportation. Wear a sweater in your house and turn down the thermostat. Walk to and from the market. These long-term, sustainable actions are the true drivers of sustainability.

Interbrand started in 1974 when the world still thought of brands as just another word for logo. We have changed the world's view of branding and brand management by creating and managing brands as valuable business assets.

We now have nearly 40 offices and are the world's largest brand consultancy. We bring together a diverse range of insightful thinkers making our business both rigorously analytical and highly creative. Interbrand has the broadest geographical presence – offering more people, more disciplines, and more knowledge tailored to our clients. Our work goes deeper and further. We create and manage brand value by making the brand central to the business's strategic aims. We're not interested in simply being the world's biggest brand consultancy. We want to be the most valued.

Packaging is often the first and most regular contact people have with your brand. More than just a face to the brand, packaging is a powerful selling tool. It influences market position and consumer behavior by triggering purchase and creating loyalty. We ensure packaging solutions work seamlessly with brand strategy. Our packaging work brings brands to life in accessible and engaging ways, from the way they look, feel, and function, to how the packaging works competitively and complements a wider portfolio.

Our design teams have a deep understanding of shoppers. We work across all sectors to develop packaging design systems that deliver consistent, powerful, and enticing messages from the first moment they're seen on the shelf.

For more information on Interbrand please contact:

Scott Lucas

Executive Director
4000 Smith Road
Cincinnati Ohio 45209
United States of America
scott.lucas@interbrand.com

Bertrand Chovet

Managing Director -
Branding and Packaging
28 rue Broca
75005 Paris France
bertrand.chovet@interbrand.fr

Richard Veit

Managing Director Hamburg
Management Board Central and
Eastern Europe
Brandstwierte 4
20457 Hamburg Germany
richard.veit@interbrand.de

Philip Stevenson

Client Director
85 Stand
London WC2R 0DW
Britain
p Stevenson@interbrand.co.uk

Stuart Green

CEO, Asia Pacific
25 Church Street, #02-02
Capital Square Three, 049482
Singapore
stuart@interbrand.com.sg

Hiroyuki Okada

Executive Consultant
Osaka Office
2-6-11 Kitahama Chuo-ku
Osaka 541-0041 Japan
h.okada@interbrand.co.jp

Thomas Chen

Executive Strategy Director
Managing Director, China
101-102, C7, Red Town
No. 570 West Huaihai Rd.
Shanghai 200052 PR China
jonathan@interbrandcn.com

Brad Green

Managing Director
Level 3, 80 Greys Avenue
PO Box 91193
Auckland New Zealand
brad.green@interbrand.co.nz