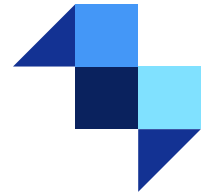


MASB SPRING SUMMIT 2025

Turning Negative Disruption Positive Through Sustainable Marketing

Neil Bendle

Professor, University of Georgia



**Marketing
Accountability**
Standards
Board

March 20-21 ◦ SMU Cox School of Business

Project	Sustainable Marketing Accountability (Neil Bendle, Sarah Colamarino)	Strategy Provide expert advice to the ISO TC289 Brand Sustainability Reporting initiative. Compile sustainability definitions for the Universal Marketing Dictionary. Work with suppliers in the space to create and disseminate a resource guide.
Issue Addressed	Marketing is being called upon to play a central role on corporate sustainability initiatives. This includes brand purpose, compliance, communication, adoption areas, product development & go-to-market strategy. Yet, there remains a lack of clarity in how marketing can fulfill its sustainability role.	
Project Objective	Provide tools/solutions for marketers to address sustainability and contribute to & measure the impact and perception.	
Expected Outcome	ISO Standard for Brand Sustainability Reporting, definitions for sustainability terms, a white paper with cases, and a Marketing Sustainability Resource Guide	
When	2024 - 2025	



Team Members

1. **Neil Bendle, UGA, Co-Lead**
2. **Sarah Colamarino, Presciant Co-Lead**
3. **Johanna Frösén, Aalto University School of Business**
4. **Alison Pepper, 4As**
5. **Alfred DuPuy, Brand Finance**
6. **Marissa Jarratt, 7-Eleven**
7. **Alan Hart, Deloitte**
8. **Gerhard Hrebicek, European Brand Institute and ISO TC289**



Question

What do you think when you hear "sustainability"?

- Common definition (from UN Brundtland Report in 1987):
 - *Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present*
- *without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*



Sustainability is meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

which implies

Sustainability is much broader than just traditional environmental concerns

You need to succeed environmentally, socially, and economically

Can't have a good quality of life while damaging environment

- E.g., air pollution kills ~7m annually worldwide (WHO)

Environmental problems require societal solutions

- E.g., people must feel preserving rainforest is in their interest

Won't achieve societal goals without economic progress

- E.g., poor people won't voluntarily stay poor



Why is this something MASB can aid in?

1. **Sustainable Marketing has a major accountability challenge**
 1. **Consumers often don't believe claims**
 2. **Managers don't know how to financially justify their decisions**
 3. **Investors are sometimes skeptical**
2. **Sustainability is surprisingly data heavy**
 1. **At the heart of sustainability is knowing whether it works and for whom**
3. **Governance, the G of ESG, speaks to effective marketing and brand management**
4. **Key to success is likely to be linking environmental and social aspects of sustainability with commercial/economic aspect of sustainability**
 1. **A lot of potential for this in marketing, e.g., how brand equity is impacted by sustainability**
5. **Sustainable marketing accountability & broader marketing accountability share problems**
 1. **Why is it hard to show the value of marketing?**
 2. **Often for same reasons it is hard to show value of sustainability**



Why is it hard to seize opportunities in Sustainable Marketing?

Sustainable marketing is all about the long-term and investing in this

- Note many common marketing approaches have similar characteristics
- When you are investing for the long-term in sustainability you face problems
- Even when things are commercially beneficial you might pursue them
- Why do you think that might be?



Why might commercially successful sustainability opportunities be missed?

A. Our Impatience

- Human beings like rewards now, we over-discount

B. Job Insecurity

- Managers don't want to lose their jobs while waiting for long-term benefits to arrive

C. Foolishness of Common Sense

- People often think it wise to take small safer wins versus much bigger less certain wins

D. Trap of Political Polarization

- Sustainability can be seen as "political" & marketers don't want to risk being seen as political

E. Managing can't persuade investors of benefits

- Managers might see benefits but can't credibly demonstrate them to external parties/investors

F. The Impact Of Financial Accounting

- Mostly malign



MASB and financial accounting

Much of MASB's work has been to try & understand how to support marketing/achieve marketing accountability in a world where financial accounting doesn't do us any favors

- 1. Increased brand value is a major way to show the benefits of marketing & sustainability**
 - 1. This is not really something financial accounting captures well**
- 2. Greater customer loyalty is a major way to show the benefits of marketing & sustainability**
 - 1. This is not really something financial accounting captures well**
- 3. Higher customer WTP is a major way to show the benefits of marketing & sustainability**
 - 1. This is not really something financial accounting captures well**
- 4. Increased awareness is a major way to show the benefits of marketing & sustainability**
 - 1. This is not really something financial accounting captures well**
- 5. Innovations/opportunities/partnerships.... are major ways to show benefits**
 - 1. These and many more things are not really something financial accounting captures well**

What can MASB do?

1. We can work to help marketers produce a business case for sustainability
2. This might be a business case for a specific investment
 1. E.g., contracting with a renewable energy provider
3. Or showing the value of an entire strategy of sustainability
 1. E.g., is there a financial return to being a mission-driven organization?
4. Or showing the value of a certification/joining a standard
 1. E.g., becoming a Living Wage Employee or B Corp Certification

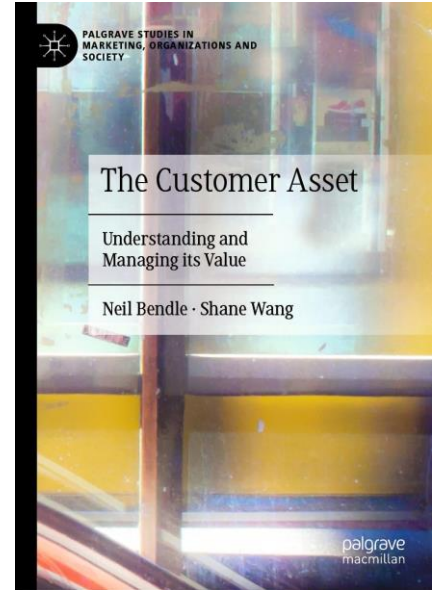


The business case approach

There are positive examples we can draw upon

1. At the last summit Brand Finance outlined how they link sustainability to commercial outcomes
2. We can link to customer metrics like CLV to show an increase in the value of the customer asset
3. Trust matters to business success, sustainability and good governance can be critical to building this

We can provide assistance to marketers in this



My SPECCS model

I have produced a SPECCS model to help people see financial benefits of sustainability

Note

Business case must be holistic often works through benefits in multiple areas

Beware double counting

Key factors, like risk mitigation, can appear in several places, e.g., lowering discount rates & helping partnerships

See my MASB webinar:

<https://themasb.org/valuing-sustainability-investments-sep-25-webinar/>



Strategic Partnerships

Creates trust & ability to plan
Lowers legal \$ & reputational risk
Helps coordinate
Generates demand for partners helping regulatory goals
But benefits long-term, irregular, & hard to measure

Products

Stakeholder consultation creates additional insights
New needs to address
Less price competition
Spurs innovation
Benefits significant, but take time

Employees

Lowers recruitment, retention costs
Access to talented employees
Motivation increases productivity
Limits HR failures
But benefits rarely measured & spread over many years

Customers

Lowers acquisition, retention, & development costs
Increases customer lifetime value
Increases brand value
Customer management easier
But \$ impact harder to see in short-term, assumptions help, e.g., CLV

Community

Smooth permits/regulator attitude
Philanthropy shows purpose
Reduces lawsuits
Impacts other elements, e.g., employee relations
But tend to be very long-term effects, felt over generations

Savings

Create less waste
Fewer inputs/energy needed
Often easiest benefits to see & part of wider justification
Some savings arise quickly but likely full benefit felt over many years, e.g., 10% off energy bill

Challenges to address

We only expect interest related to sustainable marketing accounting to increase

- **What can drive pace of adoption of sustainable practices?**
- **How to market sustainability (and sustainable marketing) so it resonates**
 - Need for creative & credible marketing
- **Reporting issues arising: how will US businesses square conflicting pressures?**
 - California reporting rules impacting many firms that operate in the US
 - EU CSRD (although a small delay) is putting in more reporting requirements
 - US federal government going opposite direction
- **Fighting both greenwashing and greenhushing (MASB definitions)**
 - Greenwashing is the act of misleading others into believing that a product, service, or other offering is more sustainable than it is
 - Greenhushing occurs when actions that are genuinely sustainable are deliberately downplayed



What next?

1. **We are producing a white paper to help elevate the idea of sustainable marketing accountability**
2. **We will input definitions to the Universal Language Dictionary**
3. **We will seek to collect examples of best practices**
4. **We want to stimulate discussions on showing the value of sustainability**
5. **We will contribute to MASB's other activity, such as work with ISO**



Reading homework

'A rallying cry and a toolkit for change'
— Douglas Laurent, Chief Sustainability Officer at Bayer, *Chief Executive*
— Former CEO of Innocent Drinks

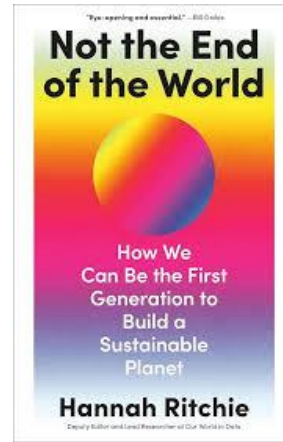


How Change Brands
are Changing the World

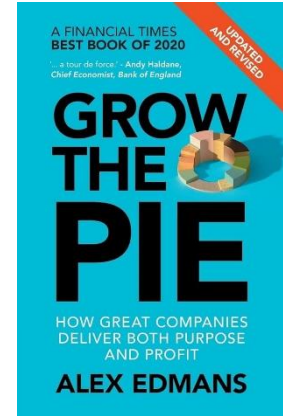
Chris Baker

BOOKS BY

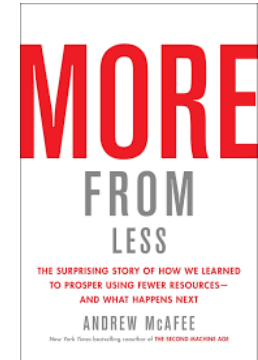
THE
RESPONSIBLE
COMPANY
WHAT WE'VE
LEARNED FROM
PATAGONIA'S
FIRST 40 YEARS
YVON CHOUINARD
& VINCENT STANLEY



If lazy here
is a



BILL GATES
HOW TO
AVOID A
CLIMATE
DISASTER
THE SOLUTIONS WE HAVE AND THE
BREAKTHROUGHS WE NEED



← Bit more radical

Bit less radical →

Thank You!
For (much, much) more visit my
Marketing Thought website
<https://neilbendle.com/>

Neil BendlePopular Marketing Metrics: How Not To Mess Them UpMarketing Metrics 4th Edition BookMarketing PhD Applications

Advice For The Marketing Academic: Job MarketSustainable Marketing StrategySustainable Business Reading List

Public Policy, Behavioral Economics and MarketingUSA On Sustainable Business

Search Results for: sustainability

Posted on January 12, 2025 by neilbendle

Mapping Corporate Sustainability Research

How has marketing strategy research focused on sustainability changed over time? This is an important question for researchers that also matters for those who use academic research but aren't academics themselves. (Often there are not as many of these nonacademic users of research as we'd like but one can always hope). To better understand marketing...

Posted on October 20, 2024 by neilbendle

Are We Making Any Progress On Sustainability?

I recently discussed Christopher Marquis's HBR article "In Defense of Degrowth", see here. As seems to happen in work from a degrowth perspective, Marquis' article spent some time implying that we aren't making any progress on sustainability. It was pretty depressing stuff. The idea seems to be that to motivate radical change we need to...

Posted on February 25, 2024 by neilbendle

Roots Of Unsustainability

A major paper in the history of sustainability is Lynn White, Jr's "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis. This sought to describe the roots of unsustainability. His conclusion zeroed in on religion – specifically Western Christianity – as the culprit. Start By Putting Off The Reader Academic writing has changed a lot in the...

Posted on February 11, 2024 by neilbendle

Profound Market Shifts Towards Sustainability

John Elkington is a leading thinker in business sustainability. He is likely best known for advancing the idea of the Triple Bottom Line, see here. He has a somewhat positive take on where humanity is going regarding sustainability. He sees profound market shifts towards sustainability coming. He calls these Green Swans, Black Swans,...

Posted on November 19, 2023 by neilbendle

History Of Sustainability

Jeremy Caradonne wrote a history of sustainability in his book, Sustainability. (I read the revised edition from 2020). This work draws linkages from early ideas of sustainability and looks at where we are now. Things have moved forward, and back, on the sustainability front. There is some interesting history. As someone who lives in Georgia...

Posted on April 7, 2023 by neilbendle

Messaging About Sustainability

Jason Hickel wants a fundamentally changed world which he discusses in Less is More. Other poets have noted technical and historical challenges in his work. For this post let us consider how Hickel thinks his ideas can be implemented. What is his messaging about sustainability? For the sake of argument let's assume that you think...

sustainability

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MASB'S UNIVERSAL MARKETING DICTIONARY

Need a marketing definition? Use MASB's Universal Marketing Dictionary. Click for the [MASB Universal Marketing Dictionary](#)

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Advice For The Marketing Academic: Job Market

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Popular Marketing Metrics: How Not To Mess Them Up

Brand Valuation: Progress But Lots More Needed

Customer Equity: Nice Idea, Bit Of A Mess In Execution

How To Use, And Misuse, Customer Lifetime Value (CLV)

Is ROI The Most Abused Term In Marketing?

Market Share: Always An Indicator Never A Target

Marketing Accounts: A Better Way To Measure Marketing Performance

Measuring Competition With The Bendle Parity Index

Net Promoter Score: Sadly Not As Magical As Supporters Suggest

Profit Measurement: Choose Your Own Level Is Problematic

Tobin's Q: Why Academics Should Listen To Managers

Total Q: A New Improved Tobin's Q? Not By Much

Value Of A Like: Do Not Use For Budgeting

Public Policy, Behavioral Economics and Marketing