

Marketing

While it's important to green your operations in an effort to move toward sustainability, it's just as crucial to know your customers and communicate your efforts to them. According to Bob Willard, author of *The Sustainability Advantage*, consumer demand has driven environmental efforts in 18% of small Canadian businesses and 25% of medium-size enterprises. Your website, printed materials, advertising and signage should all communicate your values-while meeting and exceeding customer expectations. Keep your messages brief, clear, relevant and fun. Your clients will feel that they are making a difference, too.

Quick Start



Detail your sustainability policy and/or efforts on the "About Us" page of your company's website. Tell your customers the practices you've put in place, and the policies and values behind them. Snap some photos and include a slide presentation, quotes and/or testimonials.

Try This!

Before you launch your marketing campaign, check out what your competitors are doing-and not just the guy down the street. Many countries are aggressively moving ahead with sustainable tourism practices, and your new competition could be located halfway around the world. To get a competitive snapshot, check out [this article from National Geographic](#); it ranks 115 global destinations for their sustainable practices.

Promote Your Sustainable Practices

- ◆ Research all the market-related instruments at your disposal, including contests, awards, pilot projects and third-party certification programs.
- ◆ Create marketing products targeted at your customer segments (advertisements, brand-building keepsakes, etc.); try to evaluate their effectiveness.

How DMOs Can Help

In a recent study, 77% of surveyed Canadian travellers indicated that they believe it is the responsibility of businesses that market and sell tourism to ensure that sustainable and responsible choices are made available to potential travellers.

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) can play a critical role in encouraging small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to reflect environmental and social values in their operations. Some examples of DMOs include city, regional and provincial tourism organizations, visitor & convention bureaus, as well as chambers of commerce. DMOs can also assist sustainable SMEs in promoting their products and services as responsible travel options for those seeking guilt-free and small-footprint holidays.

Find out what your DMOs are doing to foster sustainable tourism and participate in its programs. If your regional organization is not engaged in this area, encourage it to do so.

Connect with Allies

- ◆ Two heads are better than one; so are two companies! Collaborate with others-think cross-promotion and co-marketing-to leverage your combined resources, expertise and reputations. This strategy affords you access to new markets, strengthens your brand, reduces costs and increases customer loyalty.

Case Study: The Greening of Fundy

The [Bay of Fundy Tourism Partnership](#) encompasses 60 New Brunswick- and Nova Scotia-based operators. The members collectively support sustainability and conservation initiatives through a variety of marketing programs, including a code of ethics, a sustainability "mystery shopping" program, a set of guidelines for environmentally responsible tourism, and an eco-business program for all their business members.

Avoid Greenwashing

- ◆ "Greenwashing" occurs when organizations attempt to make themselves appear green by making environmental claims that are misleading, superficial or blatantly false.
- ◆ Any benefits of greenwashing are likely to be short-lived and counterproductive; customers will ultimately discover the truth, and the damage to your brand and company may be irreversible.

The Six Sins of Greenwashing

Environmental marketing agency Terra Choice offers the following quick guide to greenwashing to help you spot it and avoid the practice yourself.

Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off-committed when a product, company or service is classified as "sustainable" based on a single factor, without attention to the big picture.

Sin of No Proof-committed when a claim cannot be substantiated by accessible information or independent certification.

Sin of Vagueness-committed by a claim that is broad or poorly defined, with a high probability that its real meaning will be misunderstood. Examples include: "chemical-free," "non-toxic," "all natural" or "green."

Sin of Irrelevance-committed by a claim that is true but unhelpful to consumers. The most common example in products is a "CFC-free" label. Chlorofluorocarbons (an ozone-depleting substance) were banned in 1987.

Sin of Lesser of Two Evils-committed by a claim that may be true but only serves to distract the consumer from the greater environmental impacts of the product category as a whole. For example, "green" insecticides and herbicides may be a slightly better alternative to others in their product category, but in the big picture context are truly no better for the environment.

Sin of Fibbing-committed by a claim that is completely untrue.

Clarity Counts

- ◆ Give your customers clear and accurate information about your sustainability policies and goals. Be as specific as possible, and try to make the information meaningful.

Get Listed

- ◆ The internet is brimming with blogs, portals, indexes and purchasing networks devoted to green business practices and sustainable tourism. Apply to get listed and connect directly with other organizations that have like-minded consumers. Here's a quick sampling of some of the opportunities just a few clicks away.
 - ◆ [Social Purchasing Portal Canada](#): A responsible purchasing organization working to create local economic and social value in eight Canadian markets.
 - ◆ [Sustainability Purchasing Network](#): A learning resource assisting corporate, not-for-profit, academic, government, public sector, labour and co-operative organizations with sustainability purchasing efforts.
 - ◆ [Ethiquette](#): A Quebec-based service highlighting responsible product and service choices for consumers.
 - ◆ [Responsible Travel](#): This consumer portal offers "the largest selection of responsible holidays" on the Web.
 - ◆ [Green Ontario](#): A regional network of ecotourism operators and sustainable tourism enterprises.
 - ◆ [It's a Green Green World](#): A global listing of eco-friendly hospitality destinations.

Try This!

You can find even more places to register your business online. There are several industry-sector specific lists and rating systems for everything from accommodations to restaurants. To get started, try a Web search using keywords such as "sustainable tourism," "responsible travel," "eco-friendly," "ecotourism" and "ratings."

Scenario: The Reinvention of a Cowtown Classic

After 30 years spent operating a successful Calgary restaurant, Luigi Parducci and his son Marco decide that they want to make a few changes.

Noting an untapped opportunity in the fast-food market, the co-owners of Luigi's Pizza commit to transforming their family eatery into an eco-friendly dining experience. They begin with their signature product, specifying locally sourced whole grains for their dough mix, and topping the baked pies with fresh organic cheese and as many locally sourced ingredients as possible. They replace their gas-guzzling delivery vehicle with a fuel-sipping Smart Car, and begin purchasing 100% recycled, post-consumer paper products, including take-out pizza boxes.

"I realized that our pizzeria, while small, could be part of the solution," says Luigi.

Emboldened by their initial changes, and after receiving overwhelmingly positive feedback from customers, father and son begin a green retrofit of the restaurant. They replace the worn vinyl floors with sustainably harvested bamboo, install ceiling panels made in part from recycled aluminum cans, and swap out the toilets with dual-flush models. Luigi's kitchen is already set up with energy-efficient commercial ovens and refrigerators, so the owners look to their energy footprint and decide to purchase renewable electricity through a wind-power supplier.

"Calgary is a city that draws in many young people and young families—a generation that values health and the environment," explains Marco. "All we needed to do was sit down with Dad and talk numbers. He saw the potential right away."

On the Luigi's Pizza website and on all printed materials—such as takeout menus and boxes—the Parduccis communicate their green steps to their customers. They use plain jargon-free language that doesn't exaggerate or overstate their achievements.

Marco knows that increasing numbers of tourists and consumers are deliberately seeking out businesses that embrace sustainable practices. As the market grows, the partners want to make sure they are positioned where these customers will find them. So Marco works to have the restaurant added on websites featuring sustainable businesses. He also investigates affiliation with a new and prestigious "green-seal" program, one that publishes an online directory of its members.

Calgary's daily newspaper profiles the "new" Luigi's Pizza, and green travel bloggers take note of the place as well. Luigi and Marco revitalize their business, and get together with their staff to brainstorm other new and creative ways to make their little corner of the world even more sustainable.