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The Low Carbon Agenda

No.15 / April 2009

Happy New (Financial) Year

April is always a funny month if you subscribe to the Apr-Mar financial year system. It's a bit like the two faced Roman God Janus - one face looking back at the accounts and taxes for last year, the other looking forward to this year's investments. And with the world's financial stimulus packages having hundreds of billions of dollars of low carbon measures (see news below) this is a superb time to start exploiting low carbon markets.



To do this it is essential to improve the communication of your efforts, so this month our theme is communication, whether internal, to external stakeholders or our potential customers.

All the very best,

Gareth

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Communication, Communication, Communication

There's a number of forms of communication when it comes to your environmental performance:

- General environmental performance: this is to give a warm feeling to all interested parties employees, potential employees, regulators, clients/customers, investors, local communities etc;
- Stakeholder Engagement: a two way communication on a particular issue (for example planning a new facility);
- Targeted marketing of your products and/or services as green.

This month we will look at general communication issues. This is a dangerous area and many large businesses have come a cropper, including Monsanto, Shell and Ryanair as we shall see. There's nothing that the press and public like more than seeing pride before a fall.

The Hyenas Will Circle

There are many people out there who love to see 'green' or 'low carbon' businesses exposed as un-green. I call them hyenas as they hang about smirking, looking for any sign of weakness before they strike. They include:

- Fundamentalist greens who believe that business is intrinsically bad environmentally and sees any attempt to build a low carbon business as 'greenwash' (more on this next month);
- The sensationalist press who know that a story entitled, say, "Organic Food Exposed!" will sell newspapers and magazines;
- Reactionary smart-alecs who just want to be cleverer than everyone else;
- Unscrupulous business rivals who see green companies starting to eat into their market share and want to undermine them.

In my experience, none of these types is particularly bothered about the accuracy of their claims. I

recommend you use them as a spur to make sure that your low carbon offering is as robust as possible and rebut any unfounded allegations in a sober manner, using third party assessments and/or accreditations wherever possible.

Available media

You can use a wide range of media to communicate your environmental performance:

- Annual Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environmental or Sustainability Reports;
- On-line: websites, blogs, on-line, viral marketing methods;
- Internal communication channels: intranets, e-mails, company circulars, on-site display boards and screens;
- Keynote speeches at conferences (or indeed sponsoring/ hosting conferences);
- Traditional media: press releases, press conferences, advertising on TV, radio and hoardings;
- Information on packaging and product documentation;
- Information on transactional collateral eg tickets, bills, packaging, invoices and receipts.

Choice of Language

It is a truism that different words mean different things to different people. Meanings and understanding evolve constantly. For example, the term carbon footprint is now constantly bandied about in the media, but five years ago it would have been met with a wall of incomprehension. Choose your words carefully to resonate with all levels of understanding - this is easier said than done as you need to balance readability with robustness. One tip is to keep the language simple in your main copy and refer to hard data (say on a website) for those who require the facts and figures in detail. This gives you some protection against the hyenas.

Next Month

Next month we'll be taking a closer look at one aspect of communication - marketing.

Low Carbon News

HSBC has released data on the ['greenness' of different countries' economic stimulus packages](#). China came out top in absolute terms with \$221bn (40% of the package), but were beaten in % terms by South Korea with a whopping 81%. The US with \$112bn (12%) and the UK \$2bn (7%) looked a bit weedy in comparison.

However, the [UK budget contained an additional £1bn worth of low carbon measures](#) including boosts for renewable energy and cleaner manufacturing processes. These will be offset somewhat by the effect of the car scrappage scheme and some leniency on North Sea Oil extraction.

The UK Government has announced, after months of speculation, that new coal fired power station will after all [be required to have carbon capture and storage \(CCS\)](#) as soon as they are commission, although at a minimum level of 25%.

Tip of the Month

Eco-clichés turn people off. Personally I never want to see a picture of hands cupping a sapling ever again. Use strong confident language and images to communicate your low carbon achievements.

The small print:
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