



# ETHICAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

The advertising, marketing and PR industries are some of the most influential drivers in today's society. Their impacts often extend beyond influencing purchasing decisions and lifestyle choices to shaping cultural trends and influencing public opinion on critical issues.

Research into consumer action shows that the perception of a brand is often influenced by its sustainability practices.

Communications therefore hold critical importance for businesses in helping to effectively and accurately communicate to customers and clients the sustainability of a brand or product.

However, creating sustainable communications involves the consideration of multiple factors, such as ensuring:

1. The information or messaging shared is accurate and transparent
2. The messaging or information shared has an ethical intent
3. The assets are sustainably produced.
4. The medium in which assets are shared is considered carefully, to ensure the use of sustainable materials

This guide highlights the key areas businesses should consider when integrating sustainable considerations into their advertising, marketing and PR campaigns. We offer practical guidance and strategies for how businesses can integrate each of the four key areas above into their future communications.

## CONCEPTS & MESSAGING

When developing a concept for a sustainable communications campaign, your approach should involve crafting strategies that are not only effective in reaching target audiences but are also rooted in factual, ethical, and sustainable principles.

Sustainable communications transcend the traditional objectives of promotion and sales and aim to foster a positive impact on society and the environment.

**Does your messaging foster positive environmental or social behaviours, or does it encourage practices that may have negative impacts on the environment or people?**



Consider the impact of your communication across FuturePlus' five key themes. Are your communications encouraging behaviours that:

- Align with global carbon emission reduction targets (Climate)
- Support the sustainable use of natural materials (Environment)
- Encourage actions to minimise negative environmental impacts (Environment)
- Foster inclusivity and brings diverse groups together, rather than encouraging division (Diversity & Inclusion)
- Are safe and legal (Economic)
- Are financially responsible (Economic)
- Are **not** associated with detrimental mental and physical health impacts (Social)
- Have a positive impact on communities (Social)

It's important to think about the key messages that your communications are trying to deliver, and what behaviours or actions you are hoping to influence your audience to adopt. Your messaging should promote honesty and transparency, ensuring that communications are not just tools for brand promotion but also vehicles for disseminating truthful information and promoting responsible consumer behaviour.

## CONSIDERING SUSTAINABLE SOURCING

When crafting communications, the sustainability of the entire supply chain from concept through to delivery plays a crucial role in reinforcing a brand's commitment to responsible business practices. This encompasses every aspect of the campaign's development, including the materials used to design sets, the purchase of merchandise, the selection of mediums for message dissemination, and even the choice of partners, such as PR agencies.

When taking this holistic view, sustainable sourcing ensures that the impact of every element of the communication strategy is considered.

## INCORPORATING IMPACT INTO YOUR COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

**Assess Current Practices:** Evaluate the current practices of your organisation and identify areas for improvement and opportunities for sustainability. What steps are in place to ensure your concept and messaging are inclusive and support environmental and social goals?

**Set Goals:** Establish clear and measurable goals for your communications strategy that align with your organisation's values and overall sustainability strategy. Think about how success will be measured.



**Sustainable Sourcing Strategies:** Identify sustainable sourcing options and practices by researching sustainable materials, suppliers and production methods.

**Communicate Expectations:** Develop sustainable sourcing criteria and guidelines for suppliers, establishing your expectations in a supplier code of conduct.

**Engagement and Collaboration:** Building sustainable supply chains and processes takes time. Engage with your suppliers and partners to encourage and support their individual sustainability journeys. Stronger relationships give your business more influence and can help drive change.

**Measuring and Reporting:** How do your achievements and progress measure against your targets? Is further action and engagement required? Regular, accurate reporting on progress can demonstrate the transparency and integrity of an organisation.

## AVOIDING GREENWASHING

'Greenwashing' is a term used to describe misleading claims or untrue actions published or advertised by an organisation. These statements often allude to the positive impact of goods or services on the environment or the climate.

Companies that engage in greenwashing not only mislead consumers but also risk damaging the credibility of genuine sustainability initiatives. Greenwashing also poses a big reputational risk to brands, as seen by the many companies who have received substantial levels of negative press for advertising unsubstantiated or misleading sustainability claims.

To maintain public trust, it is imperative that organisations prioritise transparency, provide accurate information, and back up their claims with concrete actions, fostering a culture of authenticity and responsibility in their communications.

## NEED MORE HELP?

FuturePlus has a number of tools in place to support businesses looking to work on measuring the impact of their operations and engaging with their suppliers.

If you would like to speak with us about the ways we can support your business, please email us at: [info@future-plus.co.uk](mailto:info@future-plus.co.uk).

