



# **Sustainability as Part of Your Story – Branding 101**



## 8: Sustainability as Part of Your Story – Branding 101

Now, that you're all set up and ready to go, you can get back to the fun stuff and the reason you started this adventure – to serve your customers!

If you are a small sustainable business with a great story but are short on time and limited in resources, branding can be a powerful tool in helping you distinguish yourself from others, reach customers, and drive sales. With some proper thought and development at the outset, branding can help you launch strong, underpin your core message about sustainability, and potentially reap rewards for years to come.

### What is a brand?

Branding is a notion that can be tricky to comprehend. That's because a good branding definition is hard to come by. Is branding your logo? Your product? Is it the colours you use for your marketing materials? Is it how your business talks to people through social media or where you advertise? It's actually none of these things. And yet, it's all of these things.

**A brand is a feeling.** What? A feeling? Yup, that's right! It's the emotional response people have when they hear your business mentioned. Your name, logo and values, your design, products, and messaging – all the ingredients that make up your business fuse together and create an impression.

Another way to think about a brand is to imagine it as a person. Much like an individual, a brand is an identity, with its own voice, values, personality, story, and style. And the process behind how we perceive a brand is very similar to how we form opinions about people. When encountering someone for the first time, we observe what they say, and how they act and present themselves, all before subconsciously forming an opinion of them. In the same way that we cultivate a gut instinct about a person, the marketplace cultivates a gut instinct about your business – this is your brand.

As Amazon's CEO, Jeff Bezos says, *"your brand is what people say about you when you're not in the room."*

Your brand is the feeling that your business inspires in others, and ultimately influences whether a potential customer engages with you.

As a green business, it is important that the values of environmental responsibility and social inclusion are included in your branding strategy, and that customers identify your brand with these values. This will attract consumers that share these values, and these are the consumers that you can enlist as champions to help promote your brand and build your business.

## Branding 101

Whether you're big or small, established or emerging, the underlying pillars of great brands stay the same.

### Great brands...

#### ...know what they're really selling.

Great brands express an authentic perspective, lifestyle, or idea. They drive desire and encourage loyalty by developing a strong emotional connection with their customers.

Sure, they're selling a product or service, but this isn't their sole focus. As acclaimed business coach, Marie Forleo says, "*the best way to close sales is by opening hearts.*"



- [Nike](#) sells feelings of courage, ambition, and achieving greatness – alongside running shoes<sup>58</sup>
- [Fiji](#) sells feelings of happiness, connection, and peace – alongside a travel destination<sup>59</sup>
- [Apple](#) sells feelings of creativity and innovation – alongside digital devices<sup>60</sup>

#### ...focus on their why.

Great brands are super clear on their purpose. Not only is it the core mission, guiding their culture, decisions, hiring, partnerships, and more, it influences every aspect of how they represent themselves to the world. When expressing themselves, great brands lead with their why, and always incorporate it into their messaging and materials.

As a green business, your brand should identify your business as one that is part of the solution to the particular environmental or social challenge you are helping to solve.

#### ...highlight their humanity.

Have you heard of the old business adage that people buy from those they “know, like, and trust”?

Great brands transform what would otherwise be a faceless business entity, into a living, breathing personality that consumers can resonate with. Great brands draw back the curtain and tell their story. They attach faces to names, purpose to products, and vision to history. They share and celebrate their wins, are transparent about their challenges, and honest with their mistakes.

Great brands apply the words of renowned thought leader, Seth Godin, “*marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but the stories you tell.*”

If your story is about repurposing waste and transforming it into a new product, this becomes a key part of the story you tell.

#### ...zig, when others zag.

In a crowded, loud marketplace, consumers are subjected to thousands of brands and ads every day, and as a result, have become very good at putting on blinders to shut out the noise. Great brands know they need to stand out and get noticed. Rather than join the onslaught of copycats and lookalikes, they get crystal clear on

58 YouTube video: NikeHongKong, “Nike: Find Your Greatness,” 25 July 2012, [https://youtu.be/O6ywRUmS\\_4w](https://youtu.be/O6ywRUmS_4w).

59 YouTube video: etbnewstv, “Tourism Fiji – Where Happiness Finds You,” 3 October 2013, <https://youtu.be/gdLGZQnhLRs>.

60 YouTube video: kreftovich1, “Apple – Think Different – Full Version,” 21 August 2010, <https://youtu.be/cFEarBzelBs>.



what makes them different. Then they embrace this distinct edge like a superpower. In a sea of sameness, human beings are hardwired to **only notice what is different...**

As a green business, a key point of difference is likely to be the way in which your product actively strives to solve environmental challenges and achieve the higher environmental standards that you've set for the business. Ensure that you spend time crafting these messages and using them consistently.

**...are consistent.**

Each interaction a potential customer has with you – every social media post they read or storefront they pass, every comment they hear or brochure they see – are “straws and scraps” getting woven together into your brand. Being consistent helps great brands stay sticky, memorable in the minds of their audience.

As a green business, your sustainability credentials must permeate through all your marketing messages. For example, if you are selling a substitute to plastic plates made from compostable material, producing throwaway glossy brochures undermines the credibility of your brand.

## Cultivate a brand toolkit

A brand promises relevant, different, and desirable benefits. Everything a business does should focus on enhancing the delivery of its brand's promise. Brand management aims to ensure that these impressions are consistent, attractive, and returning old and gaining new customers, hence promoting business growth.

The best way to achieve consistency is by putting together a handy toolkit of brand assets. As a small business, you may not have much to start with. Don't worry, your toolkit can grow as you do.

At a minimum your brand toolkit should contain the following:

- **Logo** – You may want to have your logo in several versions (full colour, black and white, vertical/horizontal versions, and social avatars). The different versions of the logo should be available in multiple formats (JPEG, PNG, EPS, and PDF).
- **Stationery** – Your electronic stationery design is an important part of consistent communication and is generally derived from your logo. Colour choices that have been made roll through into your stationery and other materials. Most small businesses start with a business card design, but depending on your needs, you may also decide on additional items such as letterhead.
- **Email address** – At first glance this may seem insignificant, but it is important to have a professional, easy-to-remember email address. This helps with building credibility and trust, and branding your business. For example, which legal practice would you choose to contact given the following email addresses: info@smartlawyers.com or tom\_thelawyer\_78@gmail.com?

The good news is that getting a good email address is inexpensive! One of the most common ways to setup a branded email address is via G-Suite, the business arm of Gmail. For more information, head to <https://gsuite.google.com/>.

- **Website** – Your business website is an important part of your brand identity and it shouldn't be overlooked. Facebook and other social media platforms are excellent tools. They help you get started and as you progress, extend your brand reach and following. However, keep in mind that these are third-party services and you have no control over their platforms. If Instagram's algorithm changes and suddenly restricts the reach of your posts, you can't do anything about it. If Twitter closes down



tomorrow, you'll lose the fan base you've built there.

As soon as you're able, be sure to get your website live and start growing visitors. Writing regular blog posts or news articles, and sharing them with relevant social media groups or news outlets, is a good way to promote your website.

- **Images** – We live in a visual world. From Facebook to Instagram, websites to brochures, even the smallest of businesses will find that photography comes into play. Having a ready-made collection of professional photographs will save you time when you have to promote or feature your product or service, online or offline.

If you have some budget, investing in a professional photographer can do wonders for presenting your brand in an authentic, professional, and consistent manner. Or find that friend who is passionate about photography and keen to help! But since having access to a professional photographer isn't always achievable, there are some useful links in Annex 1 on do-it-yourself photography.

- **Brand guidelines** – Last but not least, put together your brand guidelines. This is a document or page on your website outlining exactly how your brand assets should be used – an effective resource when you're working with creative contractors, media outlets, or partners.

To start, this may just include your logo, its use cases (preferred sizing, layout, etc.), colour palette, and if you're using a distinct typeface, your font choices.

But remember this is a live document! As you progress, you may add other considerations such as your favourite hero images, details on photographic or language style, and any other elements that are important to you. Refer to Annex 1 for some examples of brand guidelines.