

Is Green Marketing Right for Your Business?



4-minute read

What Is Green Marketing?

[Green marketing](#) refers to the practice of developing and advertising products based on their real or perceived environmental sustainability.

Examples of green marketing include advertising the reduced emissions associated with a product's manufacturing process, or the use of post-consumer recycled materials for a product's packaging. Some companies also may market themselves as being environmentally-conscious companies by [donating](#) a portion of their sales proceeds to environmental initiatives, such as tree planting.

5 tips for using your green credentials to attract customers

[Green marketing](#) promotes products or services as being eco-friendly and sustainable. It can be a great way to reach customers who want to reduce the environmental impact of their purchases.

However, before you opt for green marketing, you have to make sure your words are backed up with a sincere commitment to the environment both in your offerings and operations.

"Green marketing is about your whole company," *BDC Business Consultant Chris O'Shea* says. "You really have to be authentic. If you're not, people will accuse you of greenwashing and your reputation will suffer."

O'Shea, who advises entrepreneurs on marketing challenges, offers the following five tips for a strong green [marketing strategy](#).

→ **Start with a great product**

O'Shea says before you market a product as green, you have to be able to market it as great—excellent for what it does, separate from its environmental benefits. He points to [Kicking Horse Coffee](#) as an example. The Canadian company markets its various coffees as organic, fair trade and sustainable, but is successful because, in O'Shea's words, "their coffee is really good."

→ **Make sure green fits with your brand**

Having a green product has to make sense coming from a company like yours. "If you have a whole line of products that aren't green, and your business operates very traditionally, then coming out with a single green product can make customers wonder if you're really serious about it," O'Shea says. "It may not compute with the rest of your brand."

The more your business is built around being green, either based on what you sell or how you operate, the more authentic people will see you as being.

In a world based on social media reviews and Google searches, people will sniff out manipulative marketing ploys and expose greenwashing for what it is.

→ **Do the maths**

Going green can add costs. This is why organic and products are often more expensive than conventional alternatives.

Before you decide to take a product or service, you need to make sure the market will pay what you charge to make a



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"As a business, you have to be able to recoup your costs," O'Shea says. "If you're selling an organic cleaning product, but customers really only want something cheap that gets the job done, you may have to find other ways to make the planet a better place."

→ **Use green to differentiate**

Being sustainable and eco-friendly used to be something that made a company or product stand out. Now there are lots of businesses dedicated to being green.

"Think about innovative ways to be different from other green marketers in your space," O'Shea says.

He points out that the Canadian apparel company [Tentree](#) built its business by planting 10 trees for every sale. In the years since, the marketplace has become saturated with companies that "give when they get"—making some kind of green donation for their sales.

“Tentree has been extremely successful,” *O’Shea* says. “If they were starting out today, they might do something completely different than tree planting to make sure their green offer stands out from the crowd.”

→ **Be transparent**

Most importantly, you have to be sincere and transparent as a business to be successfully green.

“Most environmentally conscious consumers do a lot of research before buying,” *O’Shea* says. “They will do searches on your products and company and ask social media contacts if they have any experience with you. If they find your product or service doesn’t live up to your claims, they will take you to task on social media.”

He says reputable third-party certifications can help reassure consumers and give you an edge over competitors. Just make sure the certification is coming from a credible organization and your products live up to the claims.

“And if there’s a problem with a product, if it isn’t living up to what you said it would do, acknowledge it, address it and move on,” *O’Shea* says. “Don’t hide from it. Instead, be transparent about what you are doing to improve. Your green buyers will appreciate that.”

What is greenwashing?

Some brands and marketers have attempted to capitalize on consumer demand for environmental consciousness by taking a green marketing approach to products or services that are not necessarily green or sustainable. This practice is known as "greenwashing." Some popular examples of greenwashing include:

- Employing unregulated terms like "green" or "natural" to describe products
- Using the color green or environmental symbols like leaves or trees on packaging
- Promoting misleading studies or statistics to support an eco-marketing message
- Portraying cost-cutting measures as motivated by environmental sustainability

Using [greenwashing](#) to falsely market your products as environmentally conscious is not only misleading to consumers: it can also be hazardous to a company's health. For example, following its 2015 scandal involving falsified emissions reports for its vehicle, Volkswagen's stock price tumbled more than 50 percent—and took six years to completely recover.



If you plan to build a sustainable brand and practice green marketing in your business, be sure that the claims you're making about your products are clear and factual.