

Brands and Retailers Holding Back on Green Message

Wilton, CT (June 5, 2013] New research indicates manufacturers and retailers may be a lot greener than they're letting on. Worried that sustainability messages will come across as a mere marketing ploy, companies aren't sharing all the good news about their eco business practices.

The Ryan Partnership Sustainability Study, fielded in collaboration with Sustainable Brands and Market LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) Research, focused on how leading organizations are communicating sustainability. The research, highlighted in a white paper included 27 in-depth interviews with manufacturing and retail executives.

"We found that even organizations that have been focused on sustainability for some time are still grappling with the right level of consumer communications," said Kim Finnerty, SVP of Research and Insights, Ryan Partnership.

Over three-quarters of respondents mentioned concerns about greenwashing and half mentioned a lack of consistency in sustainability measurements. These challenges have held them back from engaging shoppers in the sustainability conversation. As for what's motivating sustainability, a large majority cited "the environment" or altruistic reasons: "It's just the right thing to do." Half pointed to supply chain optimization and operational efficiency as the business drivers.

Notably, markedly few executives (less than one in six) felt sustainability was being driven by consumer demand. Communication (or lack thereof) continues to be at the core of this issue.

According to the Market LOHAS Research and Insight Team, "What this means is that shoppers remain unaware of the growing range of sustainable options across category and channel. They may not be able to put their money where their hearts are as much as they'd like."

The study also found that, whether they consider themselves "conventional" or "sustainable," manufacturers and retailers have different but interconnecting roles to play in delivering a compelling sustainability message to shoppers. A number of brands are communicating sustainability from the inside out, engaging employees as ambassadors, while others believe a "soft sell" (not making sustainability the main message) works best. Retailers use the in-store environment, as well as digital tools, to varying extents to get their message across.

Given the complexity of sustainability, it is critical that manufacturers and retailers innovate new ways to work together to deliver the right parts of the message to the shopper at the right time in the path to purchase.

The Communicating Sustainability Interview Conversations were fielded in late 2012 by [Ryan Partnership](#) and [Market LOHAS](#) (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability), leaders in digital and direct shopper marketing, promotion and retail marketing services and health/natural product and eco brand research and market visibility, in partnership with Sustainable Brands and laz pr.

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