



3 WAYS TO BECOME A TRUSTED SUSTAINABILITY ADVISOR FOR YOUR CUSTOMERS

Sustainability is now a mainstream business imperative with opportunities for channel partners of every size to capitalize and drive change well into the future.

By **Anneliese Olson**, Vice President, Global Head of Print Category at HP



Sustainability is now a mainstream business imperative with opportunities for channel partners of every size to capitalize and drive change well into the future.

For evidence of this new reality, look no further than the investment community, which is integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) concerns into long-term risk assessments and strategic planning. BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, who heads the world's largest money-management firm, is arguably also leading the way on social causes with his [annual letters](#) challenging CEOs to make sustainability a key part of their mission in addition to growth and profitability. [More than 800](#) investment houses also now monitor CDP (formerly known as the Carbon Disclosure Project) rankings on companies' sustainability efforts.

The markets are listening, and consumers are responding. For example, HP's most recent [Sustainable Impact Report](#) shows its sustainable impact programs drove \$900 million of new revenue last year, up 35 percent from 2017. Meantime, nearly 80 percent of Americans surveyed by [Cone/Porter Novelli](#) in 2018 said companies should make a positive social impact, not just turn a profit. Millennial and Generation Z populations, in particular, tend to favor brands that [show they stand for something](#).

Increasingly, businesses of all shapes and sizes recognize they must elevate their commitment to sustainable practices if they hope to thrive on the right side of history. But even when senior leadership is determined to make a difference, they're not always certain where to begin.

This is where channel partners can play the role as trusted advisors – helping customers identify how to be more sustainable amid continual regulatory and technology changes. Here are three ways partners can get started.

1. Put sustainability at the center of your business strategy

A corporate demonstration of purpose can boost sales along with reputation. In a recent study, [nine out of 10](#) consumers say they would buy a product from a sustainability-minded firm, and 77 percent would try a new product from a name they already support. Perhaps more surprising: At least half of those people would go out of their way to pay more for a product from a purpose-driven brand, or even consider switching from another firm's product.

You can see why you might be missing an opportunity if your business strategies don't align to the sustainable offerings and products consumers are seeking, and don't include differentiating messages about your commitment to sustainability. Sustainability should cut across every piece of physical and digital collateral you produce – every brochure, sign, newsletter, blog, website and social media feed. Craft each word and image to align with and support your view. And don't hesitate to associate yourself with the good work being done through vendor recycling programs, such as [HP Planet Partners](#). At the end of the day, you have every right to bask in the glow of partnering with a recognized sustainability leader.

In fact, HP encourages its partners to celebrate these activities. We don't mind letting people know what we're doing, either, when partnering with storied organizations such as the [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#), Conservation International,

Lonely Whale, National Geographic and the Forest Stewardship Council among others. Sustainable impact is a guiding force for HP — it is more than a simple commitment and goals to be achieved. It sits at the core of our business strategy and helps us market our organization while also shining a brighter light on the very admirable sustainability causes that we think more businesses should know about and support.

Of course, you must be judicious with how much self-promotion you do around sustainability. There is always the risk of being accused of “[green washing](#),” or embracing environmental causes with no real sincerity to help the planet. You must not only talk the talk but walk the walk. Tracking both internal and external metrics is important to keeping a business focused on advancing and delivering on its sustainability business strategy. To do business with HP, our suppliers establish targets for shared sustainability goals and agree to regularly measure our collective progress and impact. We are also partnering with WWF in the development of science-based targets for forests and external tools to help companies estimate the climate, water and biodiversity benefits associated with various conservation efforts. Measurement is required to drive systemic change.

2. Hire people to drive change at every level

Making ESG part of your company’s DNA will be exponentially more effective if you hire people aligned professionally with those values. After all, embracing sustainability is vital to employee recruitment, retention and loyalty, and workers in leadership companies often report feeling happier and more productive. An [HP Workforce Sustainability Survey](#) (PDF) released this past spring bears that out: Nearly six in 10 office workers across 10 global markets called sustainability “vital” to engaging the future workforce.

Pepper job listings with bullet points about what you hope to achieve in ESG, and then watch candidates’ resumes for signs of compatibility. In an interview, you might identify a change agent by asking specific questions about things like energy efficiency, waste or product design for the environment.

Once you have like minds on the payroll, their enthusiasm may help to do the recruitment work for you: Nine in 10 who view their employer’s sustainability practices as ahead of the curve said they would recommend that workplace to others, compared with only six in 10 if their company lagged behind. Not only that, but 40 percent would consider changing jobs if their employer was a sustainability laggard.

The message is clear: Sustainability helps to attract and retain a high-quality workforce. Values-led efforts should be stated as part of your mission and company culture, but they also need to reach workers’ desks in concrete ways. Employee engagement programs encouraging good behaviors from recycling to volunteering are one way to put the principles into action.

3. Invest in training

Now that you have a dynamic workforce of change agents, from the C-suite on down, keep them informed and engaged. Just as corporate movements toward diversity and safety accelerated with the help of in-house trainings at individual firms, channel partners can bake in sustainability by educating their workforce. There’s no shortage of consultants, and online training includes Natural Logic’s [Sustainability in Practice](#) courses to help you get on track. Keep your management up to date by regularly distributing corporate responsibility articles and blogs. Your staff will stand out when they can hold their own discussing carbon footprints and circular product design.

For HP partners specifically, [HP University](#) trainings and [HP Sales Central](#) can help you craft meaningful stories around sustainability that will resonate with customers. Partners can also gather marketing best practices at various industry events, such as our [HP Reinvent forums](#).

As a channel partner, you may not be completely convinced yet of the need to focus on sustainability. However, as HP has found, if you commit to it, it probably won’t be long before you reap rewards in terms of new customer relationships and more closed deals at the end of the year while investing in the sustainability of our natural world.

Climate change is the challenge of our generation, and sustainable business practices are what will soon set industry laggards and adopters apart. Help your customers go down a greener path – show them the way – and you can position yourself as their trusted sustainability advisor for life.