

# talk green to me



Friends and Colleagues,

This is the first in a series of essays by Frause thought leaders. Each installment is intended to shed a little light on subjects that affect you and your business. Some topics will be educational and some humorous, but I assure you that all will be thought provoking.

I hope you find these insights and musings of interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'BF', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Bob Frause  
Chairman and CEO

# Walking the Talk

## Is Key When it Comes to Marketing Sustainability

Imagine for a moment what the world would be like if businesses and governments – locally, nationally and globally – never embraced sustainable, or “green,” practices.

Here in Seattle, we’d likely be eating a lot less salmon, as habitat protection wouldn’t exist. We’d also be drinking inferior coffee, as shade grown, sustainably harvested and organic coffees whose quality is typically higher, wouldn’t be a factor in the market. We’d likely see less innovation from car manufacturers, as the very notion of a hybrid gas/electric car would still seem like science fiction.



An all too familiar smoggy day in Seattle

On top of that, many of us would be dealing with longer commutes, as urban sprawl would go unchecked. And on a global level, there would be no Kyoto Protocol. The upside, maybe, is that some of us would eventually have more waterfront property (while many of us would have more underwater property).

*“We’d be eating less salmon, drinking inferior coffee and be dealing with longer commutes.”*

It’s clearer every day that sustainable practices have a measurable, significant impact on our quality of life. We can choose environmentally sound ways to build our homes, we can lessen our personal contributions to greenhouse gas emissions by driving cleaner vehicles (or choosing single oc



single occupancy vehicles) and we can protect our health and the health of our children by avoiding toxic pesticides and cleaning products.

Many, if not most, of these gains are due in great part to the commitment businesses have made to providing more sustainable products and services. How then can a business gain market share and differentiate itself by effectively marketing its sustainable practices? It’s a matter of walking the talk and talking with great care.

Smart businesses are promoting their earth-friendly practices as a way to express their commitment to a better world and to gain market share. This makes sense, as savvy consumers are more aware of the impacts their purchase choices have on the planet, and know they can “vote” for products and companies with their wallets.

*“A business is always marketing its green practices (or lack thereof), not just via mass media, but through what it communicates to clients and employees, business partners and the public.”*

Here in Seattle, a condominium project – Mosler Lofts – launched its marketing campaign on the basis of its green design, and its sales are among the strongest in a highly competitive market while other projects are trying to catch up.

However, before launching your “It’s Easy Being Green” marketing campaign, take a step back and consider what you’re promoting. We’ve all heard the pitfalls of claiming a company or product is green when evidence (often found by curious watchdog groups) points to the contrary. Telling your green story to target audiences these days means that you need to walk the talk.

Consider this: Green practices can – and should – have benefits well beyond the good feelings they may engender in consumers. Green practices can increase employee morale, help make for more efficient operations, create better products and increase market share.

A business is always marketing its green practices (or lack thereof), not just via mass media, but through what it communicates to clients and employees, business partners and the public in the course of daily activities that can impact the environment.

### *“Does your business use Green Tags? Do you know what one is?”*

Does your business purchase recycled and/or rapidly renewable materials? Does it actively promote alternative forms of commuting to work for employees? Does it use renewable energy through the purchase of “Green Tags?”

Communicating a company’s green practices and long-term commitment towards sustainability requires a meaningful strategy. It’s good to start by analyzing the impact of current practices on the environment.

After that, it’s time to develop a plan to continually implement and improve upon sustainable practices in the short-, mid- and long-term. Emphasizing specific measures, such as introducing a new sustainable building product, can be shown as part of a broader message, such as a commitment to create a series of sustainable building products, allowing customers to understand an organization’s actions and how these actions add value.

A business must also demonstrate commitment through its practices and through the actions of its people. This means creating and implementing a strategy that includes tactics – and a rationale behind each tactic – to map out a green path that the company and its people can follow. This is typically an intense process – as it should be – but it will help an organization understand, embrace and effectively market its sustainable efforts.

These recommendations are just a starting point, but they offer the basics for creating an effective plan. Start by looking at your business’ existing sustainable practices:

- How well do these practices carry over into a marketing campaign?
- Are any of the existing practices “leading edge” – that is, is the practice rare in your market?
- Is your organization an early adopter of a sustainable practice that can demonstrate leadership?

Such practices can often equate to attention in the media, but should still be weighed against the actual value they provide – for your customers and community, for the environment and for the organization’s bottom line.

Remember that marketing your green activities happens whenever someone walks into your office or store, not just when the media reports on it or when it’s described in marketing materials. Therefore, demonstrating a commitment through daily activities goes a long way toward making the right impression.

For a next step, research the sustainable practices of your vendors and suppliers:

- Do they minimize packaging materials to reduce waste?
- Are they using organic or recycled materials?

Know that you have influence over the products and services vendors offer. You're a client and they want to keep your business. Use your influence to achieve results.

Throughout this process, remember that the people in your organization can often be the best resource for identifying green gains. Some of the best ideas come from employees who face the everyday challenge of increasing efficiency. A business' internal audience is perhaps the most important when it comes to effective marketing strategies, as employees often feel greater allegiance to an organization that functions in environmentally and socially responsible ways.

With a clearer understanding of existing and possible sustainable practices to deepen your business' commitment to sustainable behavior, you can strategically market your efforts in a genuine and thoughtful manner, with the ability to back up your claims.

Part of marketing green efforts involves educating your audiences as to what constitutes a green brand or practice. Deeper understanding within the organization means a greater ability to explicitly convey your green efforts so that your target audiences will be better able to compare you against your competitors and develop a preference.

Your commitment to sustainability can lead to greater efficiencies and market share now and down the road, as these practices will soon be considered not just a trend, but common sense when it comes to conducting business.



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**Josh Chaitin** is an account supervisor at Frause, a public relations, marketing and advertising firm based in Seattle with an office in Portland. Josh brings important skills in presentation training and project management to Frause.

Josh works with clients to create programs that foster sustainability, social responsibility and reduced environmental impact. Spanning just about every industry, Josh has helped companies reduce costs through targeted efforts that improve purchasing and waste disposal practices. Under his guidance, clients have experienced greater return on their environmental efforts through promotion and marketing.

Josh has a master's degree in public administration from the University of Washington's Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs.

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