

How marketers lure customers with sustainability—and how that strategy can backfire

Article

In a world that is—in some parts—quite literally on fire, marketers are meeting consumers' climate concerns with promises of sustainability. While brands claim an interest in protecting

the environment, they also have a vested interest in drawing consumers. Here are three key examples of how that's been shaking out:

Brands looked to Earth Day to boost eco credentials

A number of well-known brands launched initiatives in honor of Earth Day, reflecting the trend that consumers seemingly care more about sustainability than ever before. Brands and retailers have been using a variety of tactics, from advertising campaigns highlighting recycling initiatives to new resale programs, to showcase their commitments to sustainability.

Indicators suggest consumers want to see brands taking specific action as opposed to generic support of sustainability. However, in many cases, **true sustainability is at odds with companies' goals to sell more goods to consumers.**

Many outdoor brands are cashing in on sustainability with resale

Dick's Sporting Goods, REI, and lululemon athletica have all recently launched trade-in, resale, and buyback programs. Those efforts are in line with brands like **Patagonia** that already have programs in place to allow customers to trade in items at any of their stores or via the mail.

Sustainability is at the heart of the brand positioning for outdoor names such as Patagonia, **The North Face**, and REI, but this also allows retailers to own their own secondhand markets. That could be huge, as we expect **sales on online fashion resale platforms to represent 10.0% of all US ecommerce apparel and accessories sales** by the end of 2025.

Meanwhile, greenwashing claims aren't limited to brands and retailers

The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the UK has accused **HSBC** of greenwashing its reputation for environmental consciousness. The ASA is targeting two ads run by HSBC placed at bus stops in Bristol and London in October 2021.

Despite banks' general movement toward net-zero-financed emission pledges, many still haven't figured out how to balance a shift toward sustainability with sustaining their profitability.