



Union for
Ethical
BioTrade

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How can we market biodiversity?

The United Nations (UN) declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. Its aim was to encourage the recognition of biodiversity's value and the consequences of its ongoing loss, as well as to motivate and empower change. It was also seen as a valuable chance to put biodiversity protection higher on the political agenda.

In October 2010, the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held a meeting in Japan to discuss its strategic plan for the next decade. One of the major objectives highlighted by this plan is raising biodiversity awareness. By 2020 at the latest, people need to be aware of the values of biodiversity and the steps they can take to conserve it and use it sustainably. To help achieve this, 2011 to 2020 has been declared the Decade of Biodiversity.

Identifying how much consumers know about biodiversity is an important part of charting progress towards this goal and the CBD will be using the Biodiversity Barometer, a measure of biodiversity awareness produced by UEBT, as one of the tools to illustrate improvement.



“The barometer we have been conducting for UEBT the past three years shows that consumers are increasingly concerned about the conservation of biodiversity. They beg for more transparency on companies' sourcing practices and they are better aware of what is implied by the 'ethical sourcing of biodiversity'.”

Remy Oudghiri from IPSOS.

Rising consumer awareness

This year's Biodiversity Barometer shows that biodiversity awareness is going up. For the first time the barometer includes results from a total of seven countries, illustrating the global awareness of this issue. Overall 70% of people surveyed said they were aware of the term, and in France and Brazil awareness is approaching 100%. However, not everyone who says they know about biodiversity can actually define it, suggesting there is work to be done to improve consumer understanding.

Results from the Barometer also suggest that biodiversity awareness will grow at an ever-increasing rate. It is often the youngest consumers who know the most about biodiversity, illustrating the role education plays. As these consumers grow older they will be replaced by a younger ever more informed population, contributing to increasing awareness.

So, what can brands do?

Integrating biodiversity into a communication strategy can not only inform consumers about specific biodiversity-related actions from the brand, but also help raise awareness in general. When asked by the Biodiversity Barometer research, a number of consumers highlighted brands as the way they first heard about the term. For a number of companies, communicating about biodiversity is becoming increasingly important. For Bas Schneiders, Head of Corporate Sustainability and International Strategic Sourcing at Weleda, communication has to increase as biodiversity loss accelerates. “For us it has always been a major topic, without communicating much about it. Due to a high loss in biodiversity, going hand in hand with a growing concern on the long term supply of raw materials, we have to address this thoroughly and, logically, also communicate to all relevant stakeholders involved.”



How can we market Biodiversity?

How can we increase biodiversity awareness?

Biodiversity is a complicated concept and it is not always easy to understand the messages that surround its protection. Traditionally the majority of biodiversity communication has used negative messages and shock tactics. Pictures of rainforest destruction and hungry polar bears have been used in an attempt to motivate the public to act now, before it is too late. But, some experts suggest that this might not be the most effective strategy.



“Focus on the awe and wonder people feel towards the natural world and kill off the extinction message!”

Biodiversity communication action plan for brands

Keep it simple and positive – use love not loss as a basis for your messaging, and avoid using jargon.

Make it relevant – communication needs to be relevant to your business and represent the material impacts of your products (dolphin-friendly tuna is ok, dolphin friendly lipsticks are not); in addition it needs to be relevant to your audience (aligned to their values and lifestyles).

Beware of greenwash – be careful with words and images you use. Overstating your claims on biodiversity will undermine trust in your brand, and get you into legal hot water.

Tell consumers what they can do – biodiversity conservation is an emotive issue for consumers, and most people want to do their bit. Tell them how you can help them to help.

Source: Futerra

Sustainable communications agency Futerra, which was involved in the International Year of Biodiversity campaign, believes that communication should focus on the awe and wonder people associate with biodiversity, which it calls the Love-Action message. “The Love-Action message asks communicators not to build their messages around guilt-inducing stories of extinction or complex scientific principles. These messages disempower most people rather than inspiring them. Instead it asks them to celebrate what they love about nature and gives them the tools to make it happen,” said Laurie Bennett from Futerra.

This year’s Biodiversity Barometer asked people about the messages they thought would encourage biodiversity protection. While a third of consumers said they thought alarming messages about species loss was an effective message, this was closely followed by information about the importance of biodiversity to our everyday lives. The least effective message was thought to be calls asking people to act now and do more.

Branding Biodiversity

Brands embody a number of different values for consumers and act as a shortcut for a larger body of information. Futerra believes we should make biodiversity into a brand that encompasses all the positive feelings that people feel towards the natural world, rather than one that embodies scientific details and guilt. Branding biodiversity can be done both by governments and policy makers who wish to raise awareness and motivate change, as well as companies wishing to communicate about their actions relating to biodiversity. “Everyone is in a position to help brand biodiversity. But, companies already use their brands as a shortcut to inspiring consumers about their products. They distil the many reasons why consumers should buy their wares, into a set of simple, compelling values and promises. So they’re perfectly placed to apply the same principles to how they talk about biodiversity,” said Laurie Bennett from Futerra.

Contact UEBT

For more information on UEBT, its members, the UEBT standard, technical briefs, and news up-dates visit www.ethicalbiotrade.org

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