

Green leadership bolsters bottom line

Canadians as a whole have a clear desire to do their part for the environment, but they are not getting the guidance and support they need to take their efforts to the next level.

In fact, there's a clear Green Gap between Canadians actions and how green they perceive themselves to be. This desire for guidance is an incredibly powerful way for businesses to leverage their relationship with their customers and add to the bottom line.

My company, Summerhill, joint with Optimum Public Relations just released its second annual Canadian Green Gap Index, which measures Canadians' behaviours and their self perceptions across six areas. The study indicated a significant 'green

pretense' exists, with a 40 percent difference between the actions Canadians take versus their self perceptions. This illustrates an important area of opportunity for Canadian businesses—how do they align their brand strategies with the growing number of consumers that want to make purchasing decisions based on their environmental beliefs? Well I firmly believe that a combination of having the right product choices available, offering a purchase incentive and having an ambassador engage one on one with customers will begin to close the Green Gap. Making it easier to do it than to not do it is the key.

The Green Gap can't be bridged without the help of the brands that Canadians know, love and trust; yet, so few companies are seen by consumers to be assuming green leadership.

In fact, when we asked Canadians to name a green leader across eight sectors, on average 70 percent of respondents couldn't or wouldn't name a green leader. Corporate Canada is still not engaging their loyal following in tangible ways that help them meet their green goals. We have seen time and time again, how the right strategy has a profound effect on customer decision making and market trends, resulting in the transformation of consumer behaviour.

Integrate sustainability

In our opinion, the most effective approaches integrate sustainability throughout all functional areas of the company—Finance, Operations, HR, Merchandising, Marketing, etc. The plan won't succeed unless the philosophy is set from the top and embedded

into a company's culture within all the areas in which it operates.

For a company to truly harness the desire of their customers to be green and be seen as a green leader, it must demonstrate commitment throughout its functional areas. Corporate Canada has an important responsibility to help its customers make better choices for our environment. And those choices are only as good as the choices they provide.

Being a green leader isn't easy, but if we want to bridge the Green Gap we need to create the opportunity and the change by which consumers are making better choices for the environment every day.

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