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Greening the Company Website

A New Era in Sustainability Reporting

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Executive Summary

Leading companies are setting a new standard for corporate sustainability reporting. Increasingly, they are using their websites to better communicate with their stakeholders and engage them in sustainability efforts. For these companies, websites have become community-building tools that keep stakeholders up-to-date and involved. In this study, we evaluated the websites of sixty companies recognized as sustainability leaders and distilled eight essential attributes common to effective online communication and engagement. Many of the company websites we reviewed succeeded in presenting basic information about sustainability efforts, offering improved visibility and access to data traditionally contained in a stand-alone, annual sustainability report. But most companies are not yet using the Web to its full potential—as a channel for bidirectional communication and delivery of information in a more complete and timely fashion. In this analysis, we present the attributes of leading practice and methods for evaluating and improving online communications. We conclude with practical advice and detailed examples of ways leading companies are addressing sustainability through their corporate Web presence.

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- 2 Overall Results
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- 4 Leading Practices and Profiles
- 5 Recommendations
- 6 Appendix: Data and Methods

Notes & Resources

In addition to examining the websites of sixty global companies publicly recognized as environmental leaders in thirteen sectors, we developed an original analytical framework identifying eight key attributes of sustainability reporting websites.

Jaclyn Pitera and Kathleen Acuff, "Greening the Company Website: The Next Wave in Sustainability Reporting," AltaTerra Research, January 2010, 20 pages (including 7 tables and 7 exhibits), PDF, \$398, www.AltaTerra.net.

Key Findings

- Among the sixty leading companies reviewed, presentation of environmental sustainability information was generally excellent. For example, nearly all company websites provide helpful navigational signposts to their sustainability pages. On a scale from zero to three (0–3), the average score for *navigation* across all companies was nearly three (2.94).
- The provision of data substance in sustainability generally scored significantly lower. The lowest-scoring attribute overall was *timeliness*, for which the average score was less than one (0.87).
- Scores varied widely across sectors and industries, with no definitive industry concentration in relation to leading online sustainability reporting and engagement practices.
- The average score per attribute across the sixty leading companies was two (2.01) on a scale from zero to three. Companies of all types have opportunities to improve sustainability reporting and communications through their corporate website.

Key Topics

- Company website design
- Corporate environmental management
- Corporate energy practices
- Corporate sustainability reporting
- Green company
- Public relations
- Social responsibility
- Stakeholder relations
- Sustainability report
- Top environmental companies
- Web 2.0

Companies Reviewed

Table 1.0.1. All Companies Evaluated, by Business Sector

Industry	Companies							
Automotive	BMW	GM	Toyota					
Chemicals/ Materials	Alcoa	BASF	Dow	DSM	Holcim	Panasonic Electric Works		
Consumer Goods/ Retail	adidas	Kingfisher	Nike	Patagonia	Starbucks	Timberland	Unilever	Wal- Mart
Energy/ Mining	Aracruz Celulose	EnCana	ENI	Total	Xstrata			
Financial Services/ Banking	ANZ Banking Group	Credit Agricole	Itau*	State Street	Swiss Re			
Health Care/ Pharma	Bristol- Myers Squibb	Johnson & Johnson	Merck	Novartis	Roche	Smith & Nephew		
Industrials	Applied Materials	Atlantia	Atlas Copco	General Electric	TNT			
IT	Dell	HP	IBM	Intel	Sun			
Media	Pearson	Reed Elsevier						
Real Estate	GPT Group	Land Securities	Dexus Property Group					
Telecom	BT Group	Nokia	NTT Docomo	Telefonica	Telus			
Transport/ Travel	Air France/ KLM	East Japan Railway	Sodexo					
Utilities	Centrica	CEMiG**	Iberdrola	PG&E				

* Investimentos Itau **Cia Energética de Minas Gerais

List of Other Tables

Table 1.0.2. Eight Key Attributes of Effective Sustainability Websites Defined

Table 2.0.1. Attribute Rankings: Average Score and Total Points for All Companies

Table 2.0.2. Highest-Scoring Companies

Table 6.0.1. Source of Leading Environmental Sustainability Firms Evaluated

Table 6.0.2. Attribute Ranking Criteria: Presentation

Table 6.0.3. Attribute Ranking Criteria: Data

Sample Exhibit

Exhibit 4.1.2. Graphics Attribute Example: Patagonia

The screenshot shows the 'the footprint' website interface. At the top, there are navigation links: 'CHOOSE A PRODUCT', 'DIGGING DEEPER', and 'JOIN THE DISCUSSION'. The main content area features a world map with a dashed line connecting two red dots. Below the map is a row of six small images representing different product stages, with the text 'roll over the boxes to view product stories' underneath. The selected product is a maroon T-shirt with a 'LIVE SIMPLY' logo. To the right of the T-shirt, there is a 'T-Shirts' section with links for 'View Details' and 'Men's | Women's'. Below this, there are icons for a lightbulb, a circular arrow, CO2, and a trash can. The 'CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS' section provides the following information:

- CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS**
- Total CO₂ emissions generated by the garment's production, from origin as fiber through garment delivery to Patagonia's Reno Distribution Center, is approximately 3.5 pounds (1.6 kg).
- The amount of CO₂ is nearly eight times the weight of one Men's T-Shirt.
- Phthalate free.

At the bottom right, there is a section titled 'What We Think' with the text: 'shirts, as our most popular clothing item, should reflect every bit of applied environmental knowledge we possess. And so they do. But every human activity pollutes and, alas, our tees are no exception.'

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patagonia

List of Other Exhibits

- Exhibit 4.1.1. Graphics and Performance Statistics Attributes Example: Real Estate
- Exhibit 4.2.1. Engagement Attribute Example: Consumer Goods/Retail Segment
- Exhibit 4.2.2. Engagement Attribute Example: Consumer Goods/Retail Segment
- Exhibit 4.2.3. Engagement Attribute Example: Automotive Segment
- Exhibit 4.3.1. Timeliness Attribute Example: Consumer Goods/Retail Segment
- Exhibit 4.5.1. Performance Statistics Attribute Example: Consumer Goods/Retail Segment