

## **Research Project: Sustainable Business Models and Practices: Sustainability Marketing.**

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**Background:** A key business relationship in terms of sustainability and corporate social responsibility is that between a business and its customers (whether end consumers, or other businesses). Marketing is vital in the development of the sustainable business agenda due to the strategic role that it plays in issues such as product design, the segmenting and targeting of markets, managing customer relationships, and key environmental impacts such as packaging and distribution. BRASS's research work in this field aimed to develop new knowledge, theoretical insights and practical tools to assist in the development of more sustainable markets, and to encourage the development of more responsible marketing practices. The core BRASS research work in sectors like food (see A5) and cars (see A2) included marketing elements, but there was also work dedicated explicitly to marketing as a discipline and practice.

**Aims & objectives:** To contribute to the development of a sustainability marketing paradigm and an understanding of how sustainability principles can be integrated into the development of market offerings, their promotion to consumers, and in the process of developing long-term value-based relationships between consumers and firms to promote more sustainable consumption.

**About the research:** The research work in sustainability marketing had several elements:

- Sustainability marketing theory: Prof Ken Peattie has been involved in the development of sustainability marketing theory for more than 20 years including with BRASS. This has included producing a three stage model of the development of sustainability and marketing that has become widely adopted in the field, and a book on the subject which has either been, or is being, translated into German, Russian, Spanish, Chinese & Korean.
- Environmental new product development (ENPD): This work sought to understand the extent to which new product development practices were similar or different to those for conventional products, and identify the key factors behind successful new green products. It involved a programme of interviews of managers involved in ENPD in six major consumer companies, and a questionnaire survey to which 151 UK firms responded.
- Green consumer behaviour: BRASS work has considered the influence of sustainability concerns on consumer behaviours, both in the general case and in more specific contexts of transport behaviours (see A2) and climate change behaviours (see A33). Some of the work has explored particular aspects of consumer culture such as the role of 'celebrity' in influencing consumer preferences. BRASS edited and contributed to a special issue of the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* on the topic in 2009;
- Fair Trade marketing: covering both consumer response and marketing via Fair Trade Towns (see A38);
- Extending product lifespans and product labelling: This work was carried out in partnership with Prof Tim Cooper (then at the Centre for Sustainable Consumption, Sheffield Hallam University). This work focused on the efficacy and interpretation of product labelling in a context in which consumers are increasingly urged to seek extra information in order to make more sustainable consumption choices. The research considered labelling across a range of products.
- Sustainability marketing communications: including PhD work looking at the Malaysian regulations promoting the inclusion of secondary socio-environmental messages in corporate advertising (which also became a Harvard Business School published case study), and work looking at the role of sales promotions in the marketing of 'junk food'.

**Results and outputs:** The work on developing a new sustainability marketing paradigm has sought to fuse two existing trajectories of development of marketing theory and practice, the transition from an exchange-based to a relationship-based marketing paradigm, and the move towards a socially and environmentally responsible approach to marketing. This involves integrating the socio-environmental impacts of production and consumption processes as one of the starting points of the marketing strategy-making process, and has involved the development of a new, more consumer-orientated, ‘marketing mix’ and a greater recognition of marketing’s potential to shape its environment and stakeholder relationships.

The work on ENPD revealed a number of key success factors including the need for effective early ‘groundwork; activities, top management support/involvement, good inter-functional coordination, early supplier involvement in decision, environmental database management for life-cycle impacts and activities, and the use of an environmental coordinator.

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**Impacts achieved/potential for impact:** BRASS developed the Sustainable Marketing Knowledge Network (Smart-Know:Net) in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Design and Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) as a web-based resource (backed by a hardcopy report) that aimed to promote sustainability and CSR concepts to mainstream marketers. This was backed up by contributions to UK national and regional marketing events for marketers, and contributions to the Advisory Group for Business in the Community’s *Corporate Responsibility Index*; Forum for the Future’s “*Limited Edition*” Sustainable Marketing initiative; and the CIM’s *Marketing and Sustainability* initiative. BRASS also worked with Apple (via a secondment to its European HQ in Paris) on promoting the importance of environmental communication with consumers and the need for transparency and accountability in the development, marketing and selling of electronics products. BRASS also undertook a ‘critical friend’ review of the Environment Agency UK’s stakeholder communications drawing on the marketing communications work.