

# SUSTAINABILITY COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

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*Ten Sustainability Communication Steps  
towards a better yachting industry*



**SET  
THE COURSE**



**ALWAYS BEGIN  
INTERNALLY**



**SHARE  
THE JOURNEY**



**CHOOSE YOUR  
MEDIA WISELY**



**ALWAYS FOCUS  
ON IMPACT**



**KEEP IT SIMPLE  
YET HONEST**



**LOOK FOR AN  
EMOTIONAL  
ANGLE**



**BE VISUAL**



**MAKE EVERYONE  
PART OF THE  
JOURNEY**



**COLLABORATE**

*These 10 steps have been carefully compiled with sustainability communication experts and experienced yachting industry marketeers. In addition to optimising the messages showcasing your sustainability efforts, they should also prevent (unintended) greenwashing. This is a common but counterproductive phenomenon in sectors that embark on the sustainability journey. When you have more intentions than efforts to report, it is particularly important to show how each effort is part of a larger and more ambitious plan.*

STEP 1

# SET THE COURSE

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*Which changes are you hoping to accomplish?*

Just as ships need a clear course and arrival time, your journey to sustainability requires a clear plan with an agreed ETA. This will serve as your compass for engaging stakeholders internally and externally. Now, you need to convert your sustainability plan into a communication plan. Evaluate how your plans compare to your industry peers in key areas such as health & safety and climate, and decide whether you have something to share that adds value. Try rating each key area on a scale of 1-5: 1) *Compliant* 2) *Getting started* 3) *Industry level* 4) *Promising progress* 5) *Thought-leader*. While ideally focusing on your areas of strengths, there's also value to be had from communicating your weaknesses.

Once you've identified your key areas it is time to communicate the specific efforts and initiatives that support your plan. Focus on just one or a few key areas when engaging a wider group of stakeholders in order to build consistency and recognition.

## **DO'S**

Think about the areas in which you excel. Maybe you have a best-in-class safety record? Then you can aim to be the Volvo of the yachting industry.

## **DONT'S**

While each action matters, avoid making initiatives seem larger than they really are. Switching to LED light bulbs at the office is commendable but a relatively minor contribution to minimising your overall environmental footprint.



### **Internal example**

The Green Dream Marina started its sustainability journey under the slogan 'From part of the problem, to part of the solution' and identified 25 goals for 2025. It admitted that a challenging journey lay ahead with a long way still to go.

### **External example**

Marks and Spencer's commitments were translated into an ambitious campaign in 2007 called 'Plan A'. Under the powerful slogan 'There is no Plan B', the company set over 100 goals covering health, social and environmental issues. The campaign was also seen as a chance to harvest some of the investments in sustainability and set M&S apart in an increasingly competitive market.

## STEP 2

# ALWAYS BEGIN INTERNALLY

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*How can you make your  
colleagues part of  
the journey?*

Your colleagues can be your greatest asset, from contributing to making your sustainability goals happen to sharing their personal stories of change. Involving people from the bottom up is always stronger than top down. Explore whether you can enrol their specialty or showcase their personal motivation.

Consider if you can involve colleagues in shaping your sustainability programme or submitting ideas for improvement on a continual basis. Consider how they can be the voices or faces behind change when shared externally on a blog, via social media or in a press release.

Your stakeholders will connect better with human stories such as a technical director who is challenged by a shift to 100% renewable energy. Make your colleagues passionate about the coming change and turn them into vocal ambassadors.

## **DO'S**

Find the people internally who are passionate about change.

## **DONT'S**

Don't force anyone. Don't invent spokespersons. Don't be over-optimistic.



### **Internal example**

The captain of the Green Dream Yacht created an internal programme 'Sail towards sustainability' and encouraged everyone from chef to deckhand to contribute ideas that could make a positive difference. One crew member suggested establishing a running club to improve overall health and strength.

### **External example**

In 2019 Carlsberg launched its sustainability programme 'Together towards Zero' to rally everyone in the organisation to move forward together to eradicate negative social and environmental impacts.

### STEP 3

# SHARE THE JOURNEY

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*How are you progressing  
on your goals?*

Change doesn't happen from one day to the next so always involve your stakeholders in the journey and the results along the way. Compare it to training for a marathon by first running five kilometres. Think about which channels you can use to share the progress such as your website, blogs and social media. How do you present the change? Via numbers, graphs and infographics or through personal stories?

Make ongoing reality checks: look at your sustainability plan and see how you're improving, say, from 1) Compliant to 2) Industry level. There are many digital tools available to help you share the change in real time such as electricity consumption, energy mix and water use.

## **DO'S**

Be visual as you share your progress and specific on the impact/change. Choose graphs or infographics over numbers and percentages. Share where you are on your journey.

## **DONT'S**

Don't overpromise or make small changes seem big. Don't be one-sided: share the challenges too.

### **Internal example**

'The weekly green' is a blog run by volunteers across the organisation at Green Dream Yacht Designers where they share stories of how their climate impact is being minimised. For example, a colleague covered the office's new fleet of electric bicycles.

### **External example**

Schiphol shares its commitments and initiatives throughout the airport, ranging from being 100% powered by Dutch wind energy to securing better biodiversity and having sheep grazing between the terminal buildings.

## STEP 4

# CHOOSE YOUR MEDIA WISELY

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*How can you touch  
people at the right time,  
place and situation?*

It's not just the message that matters. You need to pick the right time, place and situation where your stakeholders are most attentive and able to act. It's all about putting the message in the right context. If you want to share more about your commitments related to water conservation then a reusable water bottle could be a good medium.

Or why not make the medium the message? When installing an intelligent lighting circuit, share the number of kilowatts saved. When addressing people with children, it is a good opportunity to talk about leaving the planet better for the next generation. In general, if you go big with your media choice, make sure you have a really impactful story to share.

## **DO'S**

Think like the people you want to reach. Where do they live? What do they read? Where do they go? What are their sustainability habits like? Explore and be creative.

## **DONT'S**

If you try to reach everyone, you rarely touch anyone. Don't treat this as yet another communication assignment – choose your media wisely and, if possible, sustainably.

### **Internal example**

Green Dream Charter Managers sends a New Year's e-mail to clients, suppliers and partners. They share what they've done to make the charters eco-friendlier, the new sustainable additions to their portfolio and what charterers themselves can do. It's all about selecting the right context.

### **External example**

HSBC bank targets global movers and shakers in business and runs large outdoor adverts in airports where they can reach their nomadic potential clients.

STEP 5

# ALWAYS FOCUS ON IMPACT

*What's the real impact?*

What you cannot measure, you cannot change. Always make sure that the impact of an initiative is quantifiable such as litres of water saved, number of work-related accidents lowered by X% or XX euros donated. Prior to communicating this, however, make sure you compare the results to your overall impact and to others in the industry. If you install water-saving toilets across your production but your overall water footprint remains millions of litres this may not be a smart story to go big on.

That said, many small steps can have a major impact collectively so perhaps you can share those steps as part of a bigger plan? If in doubt, always ask a subject matter expert or have an external auditor or reputable NGO validate the impact of your initiative.

## **DO'S**

Explore how best to convey the impact. Use analogies, visuals or comparisons. If you've saved 2.5 million litres of water tell people that is the equivalent of one Olympic-size swimming pool.

## **DONT'S**

Don't hide behind a label, certification or programme. Explain the real impact you're having.

### **Internal example**

Every year the CEO of Green Dream Suppliers shares the overall progress made across all the company's sustainability pillars in a video, on its website and in a report visualised as a graph with yearly changes and the journey still ahead to reach its goals.

### **External example**

Australian winemaker Hidden Sea removes 10 plastic bottles from the oceans for each bottle sold. Its website has a counter showing current progress and the goal to remove a billion bottles by 2030.

## STEP 6

# KEEP IT SIMPLE YET HONEST

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*How can you explain complex issues simply and transparently?*

In the famous words of Albert Einstein: “If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.” Always consider how you can distil complex sustainability issues into something everyone can understand. While you can always reach out to an expert to qualify your story, ultimately you should be able to pitch the angle to your mum.

Aim for simple yet captivating language but never forget to be honest about the challenges or try to hide behind simplicity. Take the nutritional facts we see on food packaging for example. These seem to offer transparency but the situation is not simple and honest as most of us struggle to decipher the true meaning behind the figures. Honesty beats transparency as it always aims for things to be clear and easily understood. Honesty puts a human face to the challenge. And good communication about sustainability combines simplicity with honesty.

## **DO'S**

See if you can explain your story in a simple 160-word Tweet. If you can, you've most likely captured the true essence.

## **DONT'S**

Don't oversimplify, pretend something is black & white or talk down to people.

### **Internal example**

Green Dream Naval Architects used an exhibition to wrap its electric vehicles in black foil with a message to celebrate the launch of new hybrid engines on one of their yachts. The message explained how an average month's consumption using hybrid power was equivalent to removing 100 fossil-fuelled cars from the road.

### **External example**

In 2010 Nike made their soccer jerseys for the World Cup in South Africa out of eight plastic bottles per shirt. In stores they showcased the jerseys inside a bottle and wrote: Made out of 8 plastic bottles. Visually simple – and honest.

## STEP 7

# LOOK FOR AN EMOTIONAL ANGLE

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*How personal can you get?*

Thousands of people dying from extreme weather conditions caused by climate change is unfortunate while one person dying in a car accident down the road is a tragedy. We seem to be able to relate more easily to our neighbours than to a thousand faceless victims of global warming. This is why the press tends to report on what's happening to those near and dear to us.

Unlike soulless statistics, we can feel and relate to individuals. So try to explore whether there is a personal or emotional side to your sustainability initiative that's worth sharing. After all, you're involved in saving lives, preserving our oceans and its inhabitants, and other exciting stories. Targeting emotions is a powerful tool in great storytelling. Can you make people smile or feel curious?

## **DO'S**

What's in it for them? How does your initiative change their lives? How can you relate it to something people are familiar with like 'the energy consumption of X is equivalent to 1000 households.'

## **DONT'S**

Don't avoid facts. Be sensible but not oversentimental. Sustainability stories are not all doom and gloom – how can you make people laugh?

### **Internal example**

Green Dream Refits looked at ways to share its health, safety and well-being accomplishments. When ships leave the yard every staff member signs a big congratulations card containing the message 'refitted with care, zero accidents and lots of passion' to the new owner – and so do first-tier suppliers.

### **External example**

When fundraising for a new sailboat for the Rainbow family, Greenpeace opened up a dedicated website sharing details of the design. People could fund everything from a fork (€1) to the ship's wheel (€500). The way in which donors contributed was both engaging and personal.

## STEP 8

# BE VISUAL PEOPLE DON'T READ

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*How can you tell your story  
by using visuals?*

Contrary to popular belief, people respond less well to written messages as they do to visual prompts. This is why roads have simple visual language such as traffic lights with green, yellow and red colours. Think about how you can make your report, sustainability initiative or communication more visual by using infographics, iconography and images.

Schiphol has created a relaxation zone that looks like a small wood where people can charge their phone by pedalling on a bike. This is a fine example of a participatory environmental initiative. Think too about the 'energy labels' that depict a simple scale from A to E and a gradient of colours from green to red.

## **DO'S**

How would your communication look if you only use emoticons?  
Can you illustrate? Or maybe use photographs to convey the story?

## **DONT'S**

Don't rely on stereotypes.  
The colour green can signal sustainability but may backfire if over-used.

### **Internal example**

Looking to cut down on food waste in its canteens the Green Dream shipyard switched to smaller plates to give people a visual nudge to change their habits.

### **External example**

Launching a new packaging made out of ocean plastic, Head & Shoulder's illustrated its iconic '&' with empty plastic bottles.

STEP 9

# MAKE EVERYONE PART OF THE JOURNEY

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*How can you motivate your stakeholders to act?*

Whether it's taking shorter showers, living more healthily or saving energy, it's a hard task to get people to give up or limit something they enjoy. Anyone who has (tried to) quit smoking knows you have to understand a lot about yourself to succeed. Changing people's behaviour and attitudes requires moving beyond their intellect to appeal to their feelings and find out what motivates them. This is equally important internally as externally.

Identify what motivates your stakeholders to act or take part in the change. Triggers range from extrinsic motivators like those played on by most marketing campaigns such as status or acceptance to intrinsic triggers like our curiosity to learn or develop. Maybe status is key for you? A CEO who bikes to work to encourage others to join turns biking from a low status to high.

## **DO'S**

Giving people a greater say or control increases their motivation. Make them part of the change. If in doubt about what motivates them, why not ask?

## **DONT'S**

Don't only think financial rewards or status – you're talking to people with dreams and passions.

### **Internal example**

The Green Dream Yacht Show wanted to encourage exhibitors to adopt more sustainable practices and ultimately deliver a more environmentally friendly experience to visitors. Awards are presented each year to individuals or groups that have gone the extra mile or initiated a new sustainable endeavour.

### **External example**

Marks & Spencer encouraged its suppliers to join the sustainability journey because it knew this was a key factor for success. It created a traffic light system whereby the more sustainable suppliers were rewarded with more lucrative terms and conditions.

## STEP 10

# COLLABORATION IS KEY

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*How can you work together to make a bigger difference?*

All your stakeholders matter: from customers, employees and communities to legislators, investors, suppliers and non-profits, their thoughts, ideas and opinions count. Environmental activist Al Gore makes this point about the challenges ahead: “It’s now abundantly clear that we have at our fingertips all of the tools we need to solve the climate crisis. The only missing ingredient is collective will.” We are all in this rocking boat, whether you’re a CEO of a large corporation, an employee or a worried parent, the results of global warming are set to affect your everyday life. Sustainable Development Goal number 17 is collaboration so explore how you can work with stakeholders towards a common goal. Look for key problems that can’t be solved alone and where active participation from stakeholders means one + one = three. This goes way beyond communication and relationship-building exercises: bringing stakeholders closer can unlock new business models and sustainable ideas while driving growth.

## **DO'S**

Think long-term, respect each other, look for shared values. Be open to help and new expertise. Use workshops or co-creation formats. Embrace the difficult.

## **DONT'S**

Don't join partnerships if you're not participating or if it's only for the status. Don't open up to collaboration if you can't handle hearing the truth.

### **Internal example**

Green Dream Yacht Club realised it couldn't succeed alone on the sustainability journey and needed to collaborate with its whole ecosystem, from suppliers to captains. That's why it joined the collaborative platform organised by Water Revolution Foundation.

### **External example**

The online portal 'My Starbucks Idea' posed this question: "You know better than anyone else what you want from Starbucks. So tell us. What's your Starbucks Idea?" Some 75,000 ideas were submitted in the first year alone and 25 were implemented.

## Together we can accelerate sustainability in the superyacht industry

The superyacht industry relies on the health of our oceans. It is our shared responsibility to work together to act sustainably, neutralise our footprint, preserve the world's precious seas and ensure we have a sustainable business for the future. Water Revolution Foundation was established to drive this change.

**YOU  
MAKE IT  
POSSIBLE !**

Through sharing information, experience, knowledge and best practices in the way we've done here we can accelerate the shift to sustainability and significantly reduce our footprint. We welcome partners who share our mission and understand that it requires a strong collaborative approach in order to secure our common future.

## Industry insights and best practices combined

This toolkit has been produced by The Goodvertising Agency, a sustainability marketing consultancy with 10+ years of experience founded by sustainability communication guru Thomas Kolster. It's been developed with industry insights from Benetti, MB92 and Oceanco to ensure applicability to the specifics of the yachting sector.

**goodvertising! agency**



## JOIN THE COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT AND BECOME A PARTNER

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**We are a non-profit foundation, started from within the yachting sector, to drive and accelerate sustainability.**

[WATERREVOLUTIONFOUNDATION.ORG/JOIN](https://waterrevolutionfoundation.org/join)