Radley Yeldar

HOW TO DESIGN SUSTAINABILITY THAT SELLS

A new visual language for sustainability

ry.

CREATIVITY CAN SAVE THE WORLD

But it's hard

There is little practical, usable, evidence-based guidance on what sustainability should look like. There's plenty of guidance on how to position it and what language to use. But, when it comes to visuals, it's either very specialised, overly-hypothetical or unsubstantiated. At RY we have long suspected the way sustainability is visualised is putting many audiences off. We want to change that.

We're not trying to reinvent the wheel – some organisations are making sustainability look great and engaging people effectively. Instead, we've collected the best available insight and most interesting perspectives from industry, academia and our own experience. We've distilled all that into practical guidance anyone can use to visualise sustainability in ways that inspire change. Throughout this document we talk about consumers and customers and selling sustainability, but this thinking applies just as much to NGOs and engaging people as citizens.

Done right, sustainability is a massive opportunity. The global recession dealt a blow to sustainability progress, but since the Paris Climate Agreement and the Global Goals it feels like momentum is gathering. Despite some significant setbacks, sustainability is moving forward again and entering mainstream consciousness in ways it never has before. Survey after survey shows millennials and post-millennials want sustainability. Businesses want it. Your customers, consumers and employees want it.

All we need to do is make it easier to sell, and easier for people to buy into.

WE GATHERED INSIGHTS FROM A RANGE OF SOURCES AND DISCIPLINES.

We wanted to understand the problem from a variety of perspectives to create solutions that would work for the widest possible audience.

WE TALKED TO THE EXPERTS...

Dr Kishore Budha
Semiotics and meaning-centred design
Research Fellow / University of Leeds

David Fell
Economist, Director / Brook Lyndhurst

Dr Paul Osmond
Sustainability in the built environment
and urban design / UNSW Sydney

Naresh Ramchandani
Creative Partner at Pentagram
and co-founder of Do The Green Thing

Dr Alexa Spence
Psychologist, Associate Professor
of Psychology / University of Nottingham

...AND PROFESSIONALS

Claire Bryant
Sustainable Business Advisor / Cargill

Paul Brown and Katy Cottam
Founder & CEO and Head of Brand /
Bol Foods

Mark Lowry
Group CSR and Sustainability Director / CR

Jonny McCaig
Global Reporting Director / Unilever

Mark Newbold
CSR Manager / Lidl UK

Alice Revels
Senior Responsible Business Manager
/ Lloyds Banking Group

Ben Wielgus
Head of Sustainability / Informa

All of the professionals we spoke to were sharing their own thoughts. Some asked not to be named.

OUR RESEARCH

01

We reviewed

All the available guidance from marketing and academic research to establish what best practice looks like now.

02

We talked to

10 senior sustainability and communication professionals at businesses across a range of sectors, from corporate giants to awesome sustainable food start up, Bol Foods. We wanted to understand what they thought was going right, what was going wrong and what they found challenging.

03

We interviewed

Experts with diverse perspectives from fields like psychology and semiotics to see how we can go beyond current best practice to find more effective ways to communicate sustainability.

04

We looked at

Current sustainability communications

- Starting with Forbes 100 most valuable brands
- And comparing them with 20 companies that put sustainability at the heart of their offer and products
- As well as a selection of award-winning sustainability campaigns and activations

WE CONFIRMED THAT SUSTAINABILITY ISN'T WORKING FOR MOST PEOPLE

Sustainability is complicated but the ideas it represents should have been easy for everyone to support. It hasn't worked out that way though.

Preserving nature, avoiding the worst impacts of climate change, working for a better, more equal world – these are things that benefit people alive today as well as people in the future. And there's no shortage of sustainable products, services and ways of living.

But most people still aren't choosing them. Pretty much anyone you ask or survey will say they care about sustainability issues and are trying to do their bit. People want a sustainable world. But, these words aren't matched with action.

It's better than it used to be. But there still aren't enough people or organisations buying into sustainability.

"The semiotics of sustainable lifestyles have generally been coded (framed) in egalitarian or worthy terms and now, ironically, affluent ones. On the other hand it is coded in poverty and exploitation (of humans and the natural resources). Not in ways that most people relate to.

Dr Kishore Budha
Semiotician

THE EXPERTS ARE WORRIED

While some organisations are doing a great job communicating sustainability, others are seriously lagging behind in how they visualise it. This is more than just a problem of aesthetics.

The current visual language of sustainability relies on clichés, used by organisations and brands regardless of their normal visual identity. All the experts we spoke to condemned this aesthetic.

It's 'Stock Sustainability'. 'Stock Sustainability' is green and earthy and homespun and full of holding hands, hessian and windmills. It's 'eco-friendly' and 'organic'. Or it's dry, dated and corporate. Either way, it uses the same tired clichés.

'Stock Sustainability' isn't just off-brand for a lot of organisations, it's not engaging for most audiences. People don't want tired and clichéd – they want sexy, charming, funny, beautiful, new.

Our experts felt (and we agreed) this 'Stock Sustainability' approach to communication is potentially harming the cause of sustainability itself. Sustainability isn't receiving the same creativity other communication challenges do. This leads to unimaginative approaches that aren't attractive to many people. All of that means people are less likely to buy into sustainable products, services and lifestyles.

"Sustainability is a marketing problem. The problem is not enough people are persuaded or tempted to be sustainable and, in the creative community, we are persuaders and tempters–it's up to us to make it desirable.."

Naresh Ramchandani
Creative Director

EVERYTHING LOOKS LIKE THIS

This is ‘Stock Sustainability’. It’s an endless collection of light bulbs and bizarre photography and dated, corporate visuals. It’s cutesy, homespun, hand-drawn illustrations or dry and technical. It’s lots and lots of hands and trees and hands holding trees.

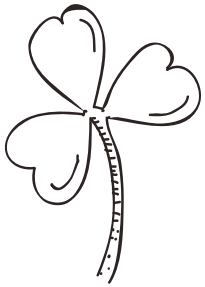




Source: Google images









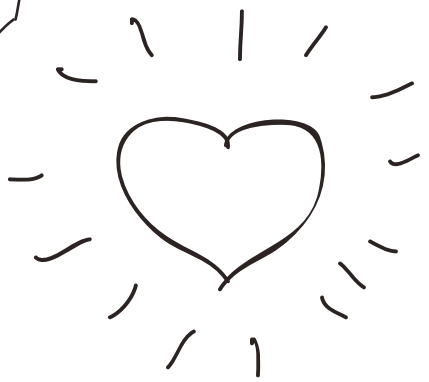


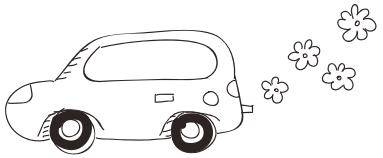












Source: Google Images, iStock, Alamy

THE STOCK SUSTAINABILITY CLICHÉS

These are the images we saw most frequently in our research. Some of these, like wind turbines, do have a place, so we only counted them as a cliché when they were used out of context or in a really off-brand way. Others like water droplets and hands clutching a little plant have no place in modern sustainability.

01 Trees

02 Leaves

03 Wind turbines

04 Hands holding the world/globe /soil with plant

05 Globe

06 Water droplet

07 Handshake/ hand-holding

08 Clouds

09 Light bulb

10 Cycles/loops

EVEN THE WORLD'S LEADING BRANDS ARE FALLING INTO STOCK SUSTAINABILITY

19/20

brands featured at least one of the top clichés.

80%

of the world's most valuable brands used trees in contexts where trees were not relevant.

7/10

of the world's most valuable brands used an image of a wind turbine to communicate sustainability, when they weren't talking about renewable power.

ULTIMATELY, COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY IS HARD

"Sustainability is not a single 'thing', it's an interlocking set of values, ideas, concepts, choices. The kinds of sustainable lifestyles that have so far been imagined or developed tend to imply unrealistic images of what we all should be"

David Fell
Economist

And its very easy to fall back on the clichés of 'Stock Sustainability' but, if we want to sell sustainability, we can't afford to. Because sustainability isn't one thing – it's thousands of different, interesting, varied ways of living, working, buying and operating. And it has to be as cool, sexy, fun and desirable as everything else out there.

But at the moment it isn't.

Why?

We uncovered some key factors that make communicating sustainability particularly hard.

IT'S AN ABSTRACT CONCEPT MADE UP OF ABSTRACT ISSUES

Sustainability itself is an incredibly complex idea. One academic paper we saw looked at the similarities and differences between over 100 different definitions of 'sustainability' already published elsewhere.

If sustainability professionals can't agree one single definition, is it reasonable to expect normal people to know what sustainability is?

A lot of the different issues and ideas sustainability covers are abstract too.

Explaining them is hard. Visualising them is harder. And engaging people with 'sustainability' as a whole is extremely difficult.

People engage with – and take action on – issues that feel tangible, or issues they have experience of. So, we have to make issues tangible and relevant. And this leads us to the next problem.

"We have to break down abstract concepts and make them real and relevant if we want people to pay attention and act"

David Fell
Economist



IT'S WRAPPED UP WITH THINGS PEOPLE DON'T FEEL ARE RELEVANT TO THEM

Sustainability is communicated as politics, science or a corporate governance issue. It's long-term risk and planning scenarios. It's stats, stats and more stats. It's not usually communicated in terms relevant to most people's lives. And, for many people, just one of those topics is enough for them to disengage, let alone a combination.

The world is a complex place, and people are busy. There is far too much going on for us to process and recall everything in detail. Instead we use mental 'frames' to help us understand the world. Certain words or images activate these frames. For example, we hear the word 'footballer' we think about the game and famous players, perhaps about high salaries. The word fits into a wider frame we have about the subject.

But most people don't have a frame for sustainability, so sustainability communications often lack relevance for them and go straight past without being really processed.

The world is a complex place, and people are busy. There is far too much going on for us to process and recall everything in detail.



IT'S PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISTANT

Psychological distance is the gap between us, or our audience, and an issue, place or person. If something is psychologically distant, people are less likely to focus on and engage with it. There are four types of psychological distance:

Temporal
it's happening at some point in the future, not now

Spatial
it's happening somewhere else

Social
it's happening to someone else

Experiential
I haven't experienced it

The psychologist we spoke to, Dr Alexa Spence, has done research proving that, for people in Britain, climate change is psychologically distant across some of these types. So people in Britain are less likely to engage with campaigns that use climate change to drive action than people in other countries who are already being affected by it. There's a lot of thinking behind this but, ultimately, it's a simple concept. Create communications that close that psychological gap and you'll have much greater success.

BAD COMMUNICATION HAS MADE IT HARDER

We won't beat around the bush: if you communicate sustainability, you may be part of the problem.

Sad polar bears on melting ice won't break down the psychological distance of climate change. Strange visual metaphors like light bulbs with leaves in them won't make sustainability feel real for people. The sustainability clichés still so common in visual communications don't feel relevant or relatable for people. In fact they may have reinforced the problem and made it harder for people to buy into sustainability. The semiotician we spoke to, Dr Kishore Budha, was very clear: the ways we have represented sustainability – particularly more sustainable lifestyles – are couched in 'worthy' concepts. These might appeal to the minority of hardcore true greens, but they'll only put the rest off.

This is 'Stock Sustainability' and it was sustainability communications professionals that built it and continue to use it today.

If we want to tackle these problems, and make sustainability work for everyone, we need to move away from this aesthetic. Quickly.

WE'VE COME UP WITH 10 PRINCIPLES TO HELP YOU SELL SUSTAINABILITY BETTER

Any marketer, brand or NGO can use these principles to break out of 'Stock Sustainability' and create more engaging communications. They will help sell sustainable products, get people excited about living in a more sustainable way, and make sure the world can continue to thrive.

They're based on a combination of what we learned from the experts and professionals we interviewed, our review of existing communications, and our own experience of what works.

Some enable you simply to swap a visual element that doesn't work with one that will. Others require a bit more thinking and a different approach to communication. They all call for a closer examination of what will really work for your audience, then going from there.

The principles won't fix everything, but hopefully they will get you off to a strong start and make it easier for you to create effective sustainability communications.

"People want to know what they can do simply and easily. They want to be part of the solution, but the simple and easy just won't be enough. Creativity will be needed to convince people to be part of the bigger, harder things the world needs to do as well"

Dr Alexa Spence
Psychologist

10

PRINCIPLES TO SELL SUSTAINABILITY BETTER

#01

KEEP IT SIMPLE

#01
KEEP IT SIMPLE

Why?

Too many images can make communications seem overwhelming and hard to decipher. Too many messages can make it seem like you're trying to compensate for a lack of substance. And, on top of that, most people don't engage with 'sustainability' as a topic, they engage with specific issues, so focus on the relevant ones where possible.

How to do it

People are in information overload, especially when it comes to sustainability. So don't try to do too much. Avoid jargon and deal with one thing at a time – if you're selling tuna, talk about preventing harm to dolphins; if you're selling washing machines, talk about how much water you're saving. Don't make things bigger than they need to be. And use images and visuals that are consistent with your topic.

#02

BRING IT CLOSER TO HOME

#02
BRING IT CLOSER TO HOME

Why?

Sustainability issues are psychologically distant. They often feel too big for people to make a meaningful difference, too far in the future to worry about now, and too far away in the world to be relevant. This leads to disengagement.

How to do it

Reduce that sense of overwhelming scale and distance by using visuals that show people and places your audience can relate to – people like them in scenarios they could imagine being in. Use examples that make the topic tangible. And play to your audience's priorities – find out what they actually care about. Use your design and imagery to build a bridge between your audience and the issues and ideas being communicated.

"Psychological distance is a problem for sustainability communications. To make visuals that work well you have to make things like climate change relevant to people and show how it will affect them on a local level"

Dr Alexa Spence
Psychologist



#03

BE HONEST

#03
BE HONEST

Why?

Being more sustainable is what counts. If people become sceptical, any benefits from talking about sustainability are lost. The visual cues that imply sustainability to most people – and build positive engagement and opinion – lose any power the moment your audience doubts you.

How to do it

If your main reason for being sustainable is because it's profitable, say that. Don't try to dress anything up or make it sound better than it is. And avoid inauthentic authenticity. If your coffee beans don't come to you in an organic hessian sack, don't have them in your café. It's simple: don't present yourself as something you're not. Because, with this stuff, you can't fake it 'til you make it.

#04

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO LOOK ECO-FRIENDLY

#04
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Why?

The aesthetic and visual language that has grown around sustainability is not one that most people find engaging or relevant to them. Some of the visual metaphors for sustainability – like a plant sprouting from upturned hands – have become so over-used that they've lost any real meaning or credibility. If you want to engage people, you need to find another way to show your thinking – one that's more relevant to your brand and audience.

How to do it

Sustainability isn't just about trees and polar bears – it's a critical, serious, intrinsic part of your business. So show it like that. Think about your audience, think about your brand, go from there. It's what the most successful sustainability communicators are doing. And it's the best way to avoid clichés and do something distinctive.

"We're so used to seeing stuff from 'sustainability corner' – cute and hand-drawn and homespun and less desirable. But sustainability has to be desirable. It has to be as tempting to do the right thing as to not"

Naresh Ramchandani
Pentagram Partner

#05

THAT SAID, GREEN IS (SOMETIMES) GOOD

#05
THAT SAID, GREEN IS (SOMETIMES) GOOD

Why?

For better or worse, green is now solidly associated with sustainability in people's minds. If you want someone to know you're talking about 'sustainability', using green is the quickest way to do that. But does it matter if people know this is a 'sustainable' thing? Or is it more important that they engage with the topic? And although green is effective at making consumers think a product or service is sustainable, it only really works if they buy into the whole proposition – any scepticism and the benefits of using green are lost.

How to do it

Don't be afraid to use green, but don't feel you have to either. If you do, choose fresh, bright tones. Greens closer to blue than yellow on the colour spectrum will feel cooler and less traditional. And RGB greens, designed for digital first, will bring a more modern feel to your work. If you do use green, balance it out with more unusual colour choices and softer tints to create depth.

"Colours are signifiers, acting as a shorthand for the issues and ideas being signified (expressed). For instance, green has come to signify sustainable in marketing and design. However, these categories are just rules, and rules are meant to be broken – that's human nature"

Dr Kishore Budha,
Semiotician

#06

NO PHOTOGRAPHY IS BETTER THAN BAD PHOTOGRAPHY

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Why?

Stock images won't inspire change – or much of anything at all. Our expert opinions and the studies we read all suggested highly-posed or artificial photographs don't engage or motivate people. 'Sustainability' images that are unrelated to the subject at hand also do nothing to support the messages they sit alongside.

How to do it

If you don't have a photo of the specific project/location you're talking about, find a solution that doesn't require photography. Photographs are powerful tools in sustainability communications, but make sure they're relevant. Stock images of trees and leaves that have nothing to do with what you're talking about are never a good look and people are quickly becoming wise to them. Stick to creative images that are relevant your specific sustainability messages.

The biggest issue brands should consider is the passivity of their images. They don't work to engage the audience. The images that work are the ones that tell stories, and are rooted in specific places and people. We need a very creative and honest response to the sustainability communications conundrum. We need original and creative images that tap into brand personality and root strengths.

Dr Kishore Budha,
Semiotician

#07

SAY NO TO PAPYRUS

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Why?

From handwriting fonts to distressed type to the dreaded Papyrus, sustainability is an area plagued by out-of-date, off-putting typefaces.

They might appeal to people in the sustainability 'niche' but they don't do anything for anyone else.

How to do it

Avoid the clichés by sticking with your brand or picking something clean and modern. And if you really want to have a sustainable typeface, try the world's most trusted (Baskerville), the world's most accessible (Google fonts), or the world's most earth-friendly (Ryman eco).



#08

BEWARE OF ICONS

#08
BEWARE OF ICONS

Why?

Used well, icons make things easier to read, navigate and understand. But this relies on them either being easy to understand in themselves, or used consistently and sparingly enough that audiences can quickly understand and get familiar with them. Used in the wrong way, they can overcomplicate already complex communications.

Too often, sustainability strategies and reports are communicated with a vast array of inconsistently applied icons, and that helps no one.

How to do it

Icons are a useful visual shorthand, but you'll never get one perfect icon for climate change, or fracking, or organic food, so don't try. If you find you're using more than a handful of different icons, or you're inventing icons to use only one or twice, find another way to talk about and 'flag' your topics. Basically, only use icons when they're easy to understand and you can apply them consistently.

#09

IF IT DOESN'T FIT YOUR BRAND, DON'T USE IT

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Why?

Your brand's visual identity has been designed to work for your audience – the clichés used in sustainability were not.

Brand distinctiveness is important – it's why identities exist. If sustainability is important enough to your organisation to communicate it, you should do it in a way that makes people associate it with your brand.

Every time you communicate sustainability in a way that doesn't reflect your brand, you are reducing your brand's distinctiveness – or at least missing an opportunity to reinforce it.

How to do it

If a design element doesn't fit with your brand, don't use it. If you're frequently communicating sustainability issues and your brand doesn't fit with the subject matter, create rules and add to your guidelines to make your brand work for sustainability.

Think about how you can bring your brand to life through sustainability by using your brand values to shape your sustainability activities. For example, if your brand stands for happiness, how can you make people happy about adopting sustainable practices?

"Rather than always using greens and blues, corporate branding should be applied to sustainability just like any other part of the business"

Dr Paul Osmond,
Sustainability in the built environment and urban design



#10

DO YOUR OWN THING

#10
DO YOUR OWN THING

Why?

If you're reading this it means sustainability is important to your organisation. How it looks should reflect that. Our brains seek novelty, so finding a new way to visualise sustainability will increase the attention you receive. And, as the way sustainability currently looks isn't relevant or engaging for most people, you can reject sustainability clichés and find your own distinctive voice.

How to do it

There are many great examples of this kind of work, but don't copy them. You're not Greenpeace. You're not WWF. You're you. So engage people in unusual, arresting ways. Find interesting and different methods to show people what you're doing. Find weird and wonderful ways to make your point. You shouldn't be fitting with sustainability clichés, you should be finding a way to make sustainability work for you.

"Sustainability should be as cool, sexy, funny, beautiful, shiny, attractive and tempting as everything else out there. You just have to want that stuff. It's as good as – and better"

Naresh Ramchandi,
Pentagram partner and
founder Do the Green Thing

#01 Keep it simple

#02 Bring it closer to home

#03 Be honest

#04 It doesn't have to look eco-friendly

#05 That said, green is (sometimes) good

#06 No photography's better than bad photography

#07 Say no to Papyrus

#08 Beware of icons

#09 If it doesn't fit your brand, don't use it

#10 Do your own thing

PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

WE REALLY WANTED TO CREATE PRACTICAL PRINCIPLES – IDEAS THAT GO BEYOND THEORY AND ARE EASY TO APPLY.

So, to test them, we tackled five of the big sustainability issues. We created 5 'traditional', simple, low-budget sustainability communications. Then set ourselves a 30-minute limit to brainstorm alternatives using our principles. Then gave a designer one day to bring the thinking to life.

WITH OUR PRINCIPLES, RENEWABLE ENERGY CAN STOP LOOKING LIKE THIS...

People care about the things energy gives them – light, heat, wifi. People also care about the benefits renewable energy brings – like cleaner air and water. But that doesn't mean they'll care about the energy itself. It's abstract, 'green', psychologically-distant. So this pamphlet, in 'Stock Sustainability' aesthetic, with a clichéd 'Better tomorrow' headline, won't engage people.



AND START LOOKING LIKE THIS.

This pamphlet would work better.

Printed with ink made from a week's worth of local pollution, this document puts the problem right in people's hands. This kind of ink already exists. So all you'd need to do is find the right printer, make your message specific and relevant, and you've created something truly engaging.



FOOD WASTE CAN STOP LOOKING LIKE THIS...

Most people don't consciously waste food, or think of themselves as wasting food (even though they do), so simply asking them to waste less won't change anything. And neither will using awkward puns. For some reason, communications around food waste are full of them. We're not sure why, it's just something we've noticed.

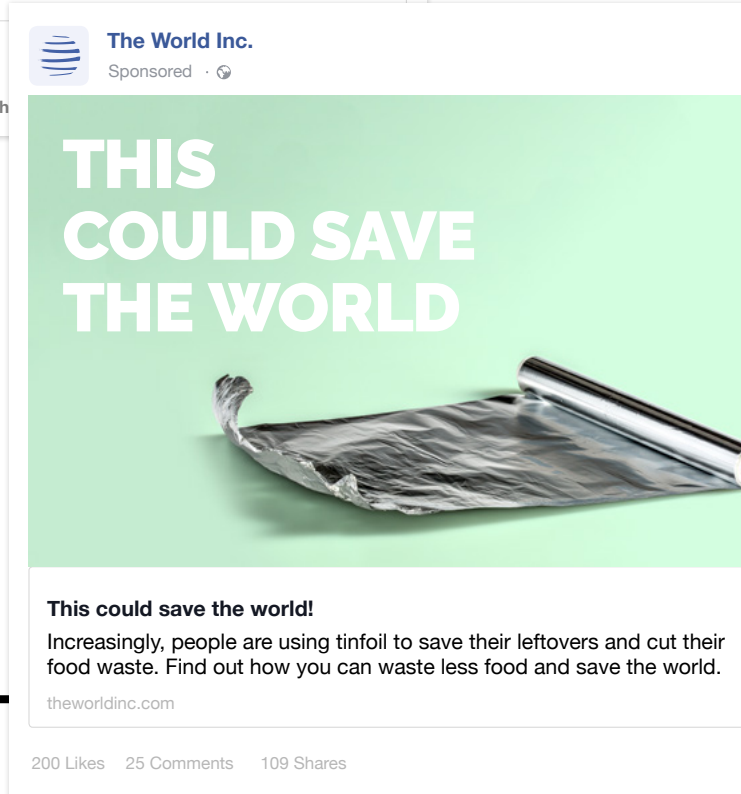


AND START LOOKING LIKE THIS.

These ads would work better.

Direct interventions that make it easy for people to save food are proven to work. Here, instead of asking people to waste less – trying to tackle a massive, abstract issue – we've kept it simple and relevant. These ads hero individual food-saving behaviours and products and nudge people to behave differently.





FOOD WASTE CAN STOP LOOKING LIKE THIS...

Posters like this are seen in offices all over the world. But people who were going to recycle anyway will do so. And people who were not going to are unlikely to be persuaded by an abstract, clichéd poster that looks like it was designed by and for 'greenies'.



AND START LOOKING LIKE THIS.

This would work better.

People might not care about recycling. But studies show they don't like the idea of sending things to landfill. This simple approach – rebranding the general bin as the 'landfill' bin – closes the gap between our disposal behaviour and the real world impact.



DIVERSITY CAN STOP LOOKING LIKE THIS...

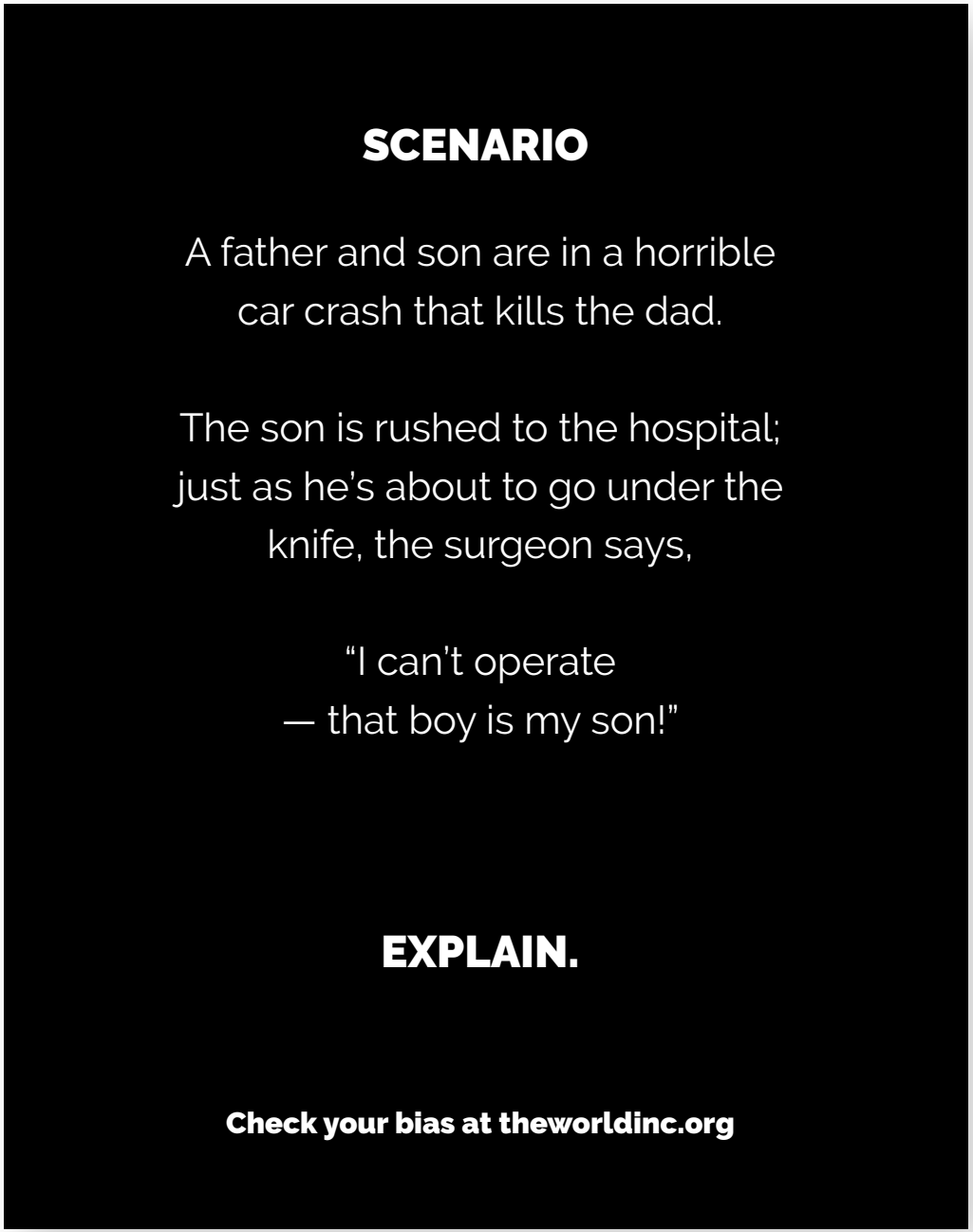
Diversity is so often communicated with images of people of different ethnicities and genders all looking happy together. Hands are particularly popular. But this is hardly a persuasive approach designed to challenge and change minds. And just asking for diversity won't change a thing.



AND START LOOKING LIKE THIS.

This would work better.

If you want a poster that will challenge people and change minds, create a poster that asks unconscious bias questions. These actively make people examine their own beliefs, bring the issue closer to home, and stimulate discussion.



CLIMATE CHANGE CAN STOP LOOKING LIKE THIS...

Climate change is the ultimate distant issue in most communications. Effects of climate change, like rising sea levels, are terrifying. But for many people – especially in the West – issues like this don't feel relevant. They're happening somewhere else or at some time in the distant future.



AND START LOOKING LIKE THIS.



This would work better.

This execution brings the issue home to people by showing it literally on their doorstep. We first presented this work in Copenhagen, so The Little Mermaid was a perfect example. But this could work anywhere a sea level rise threatens day-to-day life – including Downing Street.*



*Actual sea level rises may not match those indicated. We weren't kidding about the 30 minute brainstorm and actual sea levels are pretty complicated...

Radley Yeldar

TEN PRINCIPLES.
ONE REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH.

A new visual language for sustainability

ry.

THE TEAM

Lead authors

Oliver Burch
Senior Sustainability Consultant

A communications strategist with a technical sustainability background, Oliver works to make complex sustainability issues engaging and take them to mainstream audiences.

Fascinated by psychology and behaviour change theory after a degree in behavioural biology he brings it to bear on all of his work.

Emily Jeffrey-Barrett
Creative Lead

Emily is an award-winning Creative Lead working across the agency's brand, campaign and sustainability offers.

With a background in copywriting, Emily specialises in making complex topics simple, engaging and intriguing – something that comes in handy on pretty much every sustainability project.

Design and creative concepts

Nicholas May
Senior Designer

Finnian Sturdy
Designer

Research Support

Bhaarat Verma
Sustainability Analyst

Liam Farnworth
Researcher

Meg Jordan
Copywriting Intern

THE RESEARCH

Our approach

We took a qualitative approach to this work, combining our perspectives on and experience of communicating sustainability with a diverse range of expertise from business and academia. Our aim was to create practical guidance anyone could use.

Our best-practice review

We carried out a sweep for all relevant, publicly-available academic literature and market research. We found very little market research that was directly relevant or contained practical, evidence-based approaches.

Business Interviews

We interviewed 10 individuals from a range of B2B and B2C organisations in sectors including finance, FMCG, retail, clothing production, agriculture and construction. For these interviews we used a structured approach through a phone call or via email.

Expert Interviews

Experts were selected based on past relevant work and position in their respective fields. As well as expertise in their specific discipline, all have significant expertise and interest in sustainability and its communication. After corresponding via email and phone we carried out phone interviews for between 30 minutes and an hour using a semi-structured approach – with the exception of David Fell who responded to our interview via an email.

Examining existing sustainability communication

This was done in two phases. First, we compared how 'normal' organisations communicate sustainability compared with those generally acknowledged as leaders to see what we could learn. Then we did a more formal review of those communications based on our findings through interviews and best-practice review. We assessed work based on the elements of a visual identity, including colour, type, photography, iconography, illustration and tone of voice. In total, we looked at over 200 brands' communications across a range of outputs, including websites, reports, social activity and above the line campaigns.

ABOUT RY

We are an independent brand, marketing and communications agency. Our 200-strong team of specialists has been working with multinationals, start-ups, private companies and public bodies for more than 30 years.

With a dedicated team of sustainability professionals, we've been at the forefront of sustainability communication for more than a decade. Over the years, we've diversified our service across the following key areas:

Strategy and story: we help you set the direction and story for sustainability within your organisation, from creating sustainability strategies, helping you find your voice on corporate purpose.

Engagement and activation: we craft and share your story with internal and external stakeholders to drive the change you want to see – in print, online, face-to-face or with film.

Measurement and reporting: we advise on and craft best-practice reporting that creates value for your business, and makes it easy for stakeholders to get the information they need.

Together we tackle complex challenges for complex organisations by defining their story, communicating it simply, changing behaviour and delivering results.

Find out more about the thought leadership

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