



Taking the May Day Initiative Forward in Your Company

The Prince of Wales's May Day Business Summit on Climate Change 2008 is nearly upon us, bringing together a large gathering of companies committed to taking positive action on climate change. But how do companies actually inspire, engage and mobilise their stakeholders, making them aware that they need to take action as the climate change agenda rises in prominence? Opinion Leader, with the help of our sister company, Corporate Citizenship, brought together organisations across the public and private sectors and detailed some of the latest stakeholder engagement techniques that are currently being used. An insightful debate ensued with our guests discussing some of the challenges, barriers and solutions. The following organisations were represented at the seminar:

Acona	GAM
Arts Council England	Heritage Lottery Fund
BBC	HSBC Holdings plc
BDO Stoy Hayward	Lloyds TSB
Business in the Community	Michael Conn Goldsobel
Cape Plc	Opinion Leader
Carat	Rockpools
Caterpillar (UK) Ltd	Royal Mail
Centrica	SAS UK
Citi Realty Services	Standard Chartered Bank
Corporate Citizenship	The Food & Drink Innovation Network
Envision	Wilkinson Ltd

Discussions showed just how the maturity and importance of the climate change debate varies across sectors. For some there was the perception that the opportunities are there to seize the early adopter advantage while for others it is fast becoming a hygiene factor. Generally there was a sense of optimism across the group, a real feeling that the issue genuinely opened up new opportunities for innovation and engagement. Some of the main points that came out of the discussion follow:

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Challenges

Becoming a hygiene factor

Some sectors are beginning to feel that the climate change issue is more of a hygiene factor. Agencies are currently being asked to produce evidence of their environmental policies and procedures, but perhaps this could deepen into an expectation of carbon neutrality? A note of cynicism was expressed as to whether this requirement was just at the point of tendering for the work rather than a requirement throughout the client relationship – this could change although would it be at the expense of the creative / planning brief? For some clients in the future, this is a possibility, hence the business case for embracing the climate change debate throughout the organisation.

Of course, the client has a role to play here – is it for the agency to dictate the ‘greenness’ of the relationship? An option is a programme of dual pricing – give the client the decision, the carbon neutral or the standard package. Test the market to see how real these concerns and demands are and whether we act differently in our modes as consumer, thinker, producer and home-maker.

Regulation

At what point in the process should activity be regulated? Is there a clear enough corporate benefit to encourage activity and avoid the need for regulation? Does regulation impede genuine steps forward in behaviour encouraging people to reach a benchmark but go no further?

Driving it up the corporate agenda

There is clear distinction between organisations – can it be employee led, does it require an inspirational leader, can a corporate brand adopt an aggressively ‘green’ policy when part of its portfolio has a reputation that is not perceived to be green?

Engaging consumers

There seemed to be some fairly positive outcomes around raising awareness of the issues, but less so around persuading them to buy greener products due to cost. So is the problem an infrastructural one? If organisations cannot change purchase behaviour to have enough of an impact on climate change, do they need to ensure the infrastructure allows only green choices to be made?

Barriers

- **Difficulty of getting people to take responsibility**
 - This was a big problem for many guests, especially those operating in silo'd environments. Discussion centred on how to engage, and several recommendations around operating a ‘champions’ system and devolving the responsibility were put forward.

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- **The importance of leadership**
 - There was an overwhelming need to get leaders on board, especially with regards to 'modelling' behaviour.
- **Customer driven change**
 - The fact that customers aren't pressing for change

Possible solutions....

Importance of measurement/data

Organisations need to know where they are starting from, but also need to be cautious about setting targets too soon as measuring is tricky and it's easy to overlook big emissions the first time you do it. Detailed analysis of energy usage could be really helpful to identify waste/unnecessary use. For example, if energy use does not decline over evenings/weekends for office based businesses, it will be clear that equipment is not being turned off.

Tough decisions

Some research had consumers calling for a ban on energy inefficient light bulbs. Like the smoking ban, would this pass with relatively little controversy, or would there be an outcry such as when some councils decided to move to bi-weekly refuse collections. The general acceptance was that there were going to be some tough decisions to make, and a certain amount of courage will be required (especially by Government, who will not want to make unpopular decisions with votes hanging in the balance).

Innovation

Green goods often carry the perception of being made with second best materials, a compromise. Examples drawn from the food and drink sector as well as the arts raised the issue about the issue being a driver of innovation an opportunity to invest in aspirational design and genuine steps forward in production techniques.

Employee engagement

It was felt that businesses should be communicating about sustainability issues and climate change to their employees, and the most effective way to do this is to ensure it is led from the top (credibility) and that it permeates all forms of corporate communications received by employees (saturation).

Lead the Charge! The benefits of being the early adopter

Examples drawn from the arts showed where there is still significant advantage to be had in being the innovator in a sector. Where events such as music festivals and theatres had adopted an environmentally sustainable approach to operations it had become a key message in their communications and brand. This success of these strategies is perhaps a nod to the interests and aspirations of their target audience. <http://www.arcolatheatre.com>. Similarly the benefits of early

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adoption and thought leadership were felt within the recruitment arena – sustainability is appealing to particular groups e.g. graduates or senior appointments within the public sector.

Next steps

Following the discussions from this briefing, it is evident that organisations need to make their stakeholders aware how action can generate tangible benefits. How you work with stakeholders is vital and Opinion Leader with the help of our sister company, Corporate Citizenship, can provide an end to end solution so you can understand, engage and act with regards to your climate change strategy.

Understanding

By helping you to understand your business impacts, Corporate Citizenship can ensure that you prepared and able to engage appropriate stakeholders effectively in addressing your impacts.

Engaging

Companies are now having a more mature relationship with their stakeholders. There has been a fundamental change in the nature of authority from an age of deference where customers looked up to and trusted companies, and the credibility of a message grew with that distance, to a new age of reference. This is an age where the consumers are far less trusting of companies preferring to seek out others with similar experiences to ourselves, or media sources that have earned our respect. We believe that consumers trust differently and that they're more likely to trust organisations that they have a direct relationship with.

The primary goal of any engagement event is to influence behaviour: raising awareness and driving change - you want to be seen as visible, responsible and accountable. A successful engagement event comes down to two things. Firstly, you need to establish why it matters – don't assume the basic climate change argument is already won. At last years' Prince of Wales's May Day Business Summit on Climate Change just 47% thought climate change would have an impact on the UK economy in the next 20 years. This rose to 69% by the end of the day. It is also important to make space for new ideas. Stakeholders have the opportunity to influence and genuinely have a 'stake' in the outcome. This will demonstrate your commitment to collaborative working creating a more direct relationship with your customers, suppliers and stakeholders. For an idea on how the process works and outputs generated, you can watch Sky's *Bigger Conversation*: [Sky Case Study](#).

Opinion Leader's free Better Engagement, Better Decisions seminar on the 20th May can provide you with a guide to the actual deliberative techniques used for engagement: [Better Engagement Better Decisions](#)

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Acting

Corporate Citizenship can support you in maximizing the value of stakeholder engagement by turning good ideas into action, through the development the appropriate strategies and programmes, support on implementation and effective communication.

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