

Beyond Green

Selling Sustainability

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Introduction

Sustainability has moved from the sidelines to the center of business decision-making. What was once treated as a compliance task or a branding exercise is now a strategic driver influencing from whom companies buy, how they create value, and which partners they trust for the future. For sales professionals, this shift changes everything.

Beyond Green: Selling Sustainability is targeted everyone involved in commercial decision-making: salespeople, sales leaders, sustainability managers, procurement, marketing, and business leaders. Its purpose is simple but ambitious: to help you turn sustainability as a vague concept into a powerful, credible, and value-creating sales driver.

This book sets off from a clear premise: Customers do not buy sustainability as an abstract ideal. They buy outcomes. They buy reduced risk, lower costs, stronger brands, regulatory compliance, and long-term competitiveness. Sustainability only becomes compelling when it is translated into business value and aligned with the customer's actual priorities. This translation is now a core sales skill.

The book is structured into nine chapters, and each chapter leads into the next, just as natural and sequential as your work process when preparing for a customer meeting.

However, if you prefer to jump right into specific chapters and subjects, the book is written and structured to accommodate this approach while still providing valuable insights.

Each chapter is structured with an introduction to the subject. Then follows a short and accurate walkthrough of the most important focus points and a closing of the chapter with a list of “Practical implementation tips”. Each chapter ends with a summary.

Throughout the chapters, you will learn how sustainability reshapes the buying journey, expands the decision-making unit, and introduces new stakeholders, data requirements, and expectations. We will guide you on how to define your unique sustainability value, understand what sustainability means to different personas, craft compelling stories, build persuasive pitches, and use data with

confidence and credibility. You will also learn how to navigate objections, avoid greenwashing, and build long-term relationships based on trust and shared impact.

The book is a practical guide to becoming relevant, credible, and effective in a world where sustainability is no longer optional. The companies and sales professionals who master this shift will not only win more deals; they will be part of shaping the future of responsible and profitable business.

Welcome to *Beyond Green: Selling Sustainability*

Chapter 1: What Are We Really Selling?

In this chapter, you will get a deeper understanding of how and why you need to change your way of selling, if you want to sell sustainability.

The headline for this chapter is inaccurate. The headline should, in fact, have been “What are customers really **BUYING?**” However, as this book is a tool for becoming better at selling sustainability, we will focus on what we are selling, and, later in the book, we will discuss what customers are buying. You want your sales process to be aligned with the buying process.

We will also elaborate on customers more widely and not just focus on B2B customers. The reason is that B2B buyers are both acting as individuals and as corporate people when they are buying.

The Changing Customer Landscape

The customer landscape is undergoing a significant shift. Sustainability is no longer a bonus but is becoming a baseline expectation. For many customers, we are dealing with a shift from a “nice-to-have” to a “non-negotiable”.

Consumers, especially the younger generations, are increasingly prioritizing environmental and social responsibility when making purchasing decisions. Consumers’ awareness of climate change impacts is introducing an increased focus on sustainability in their purchases. In addition, consumers are willing to pay a premium for sustainably produced or sourced goods.

However, it is not just about eco-labels. Shoppers are looking deeper. They care about how products are manufactured, where they come from, the materials used, and even the company's labor practices. Trust plays a huge role here. Brands that are transparent and authentic in their sustainability efforts are gaining loyalty, while those making vague claims risk losing ground.

This shift is pushing companies to rethink their strategies. Companies that are investing in truly sustainable practices and communicating clearly are not only meeting demand. They are also gaining a competitive edge.

For decades, a large global dairy company has been selling products to B2B customers and engaging in a deep dialogue with them when developing new products. Today, sustainability is number one on the agenda when developing and selling their products. However, they are now dealing with a much broader and more complex group of influencers, such as end consumers, consumer communities, and B2B customers. The number of influencers has increased significantly. Selling sustainability is a game change in their daily sales planning and sales execution.

Another example of the changing customer landscape is the automotive industry, which is pushing toward electric vehicles with Tesla and Ferrari as examples. When it comes to consumer goods, giants like Unilever and IKEA are leading with eco-friendly packaging, circular product design, and renewable energy consumption in their manufacturing processes.

What Sustainability Means to Different Customers

Sustainability is not a “one-size-fits-all” concept. Companies are more likely to succeed if they tailor their sustainability sales strategy by messaging specific customer segments, rather than treating it as a generic value. In B2B, sustainability often refers to practices that are framed as the Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, and Profit. “People” is about promoting social responsibility (fair labor, community engagement). “Planet” is about reducing the environmental impact (carbon emissions, waste, energy use), and “Profit” is about ensuring long-term economic viability (cost efficiency, risk mitigation).

Sustainability means different things depending on “who you are”. Your sales team needs to be very much aware of what sustainability means to the audience they are interacting with. In this chapter, we will describe what sustainability means to 4 different target groups: B2B customers, B2B stakeholders, different customer types, and consumer groups.

Awareness of what sustainability means to the audience you are interacting with is crucial

What Sustainability Means to B2B Customers

When it comes to sustainability, B2B customers are mainly looking into strategic growth and market access, brand reputation, trust, and risk management.

Regarding strategic growth and market access, many major B2B buyers are now requiring sustainability credentials in requests for proposals. They are also looking for suppliers with green practices which can give them access to new markets and partnerships.

Brand reputation and trust are also high on the agenda for B2B buyers. In general, B2B buyers claim that sustainability influences their purchasing decisions significantly. Furthermore, companies that demonstrate ESG leadership are more attractive to investors and customers.

Finally, risk management is also important for B2B buyers. Here, regulatory pressure and carbon taxes are rising on the agenda, and there is an increasing awareness of the way sustainability may help mitigate supply chain, legal, and reputational risks.

What Sustainability Means to Different B2B Stakeholders

Companies that are successful in selling sustainability have changed their sales approach from addressing a few stakeholders within the customer organization to a wider approach. This is due to the new buying process. To succeed in selling sustainability, you need to understand what sustainability means to each stakeholder. Below, we present a few different stakeholders and their varying views on sustainability.

Procurement teams are looking for supplier transparency, emissions data, ethical sourcing, and circular economic practices. This involves practices, such as reducing waste, reusing products, repairing items, refurbishing, remanufacturing, and recycling.

CFOs are often focused on the ROI from green investments, energy cost savings, and risk mitigation.

Marketing and Sales has a different approach in which ESG storytelling, brand differentiation, and customer loyalty are key subjects with respect to sustainability.

Operations Managers are looking for waste reduction, energy use, logistics optimization, and compliance, while investors

broadly are interested in ESG ratings, long-term value creation, and regulatory alignment.

What Sustainability Means to Different Customer Types

Most companies sell to relatively few customer types. No matter how broad you are selling, you need to know the key differences between the different customer types. This is fundamental for you in selling sustainability, as you need to tailor your message to each type. One size fits nobody!

Industrial and manufacturing customers are focused on decarbonization, energy efficiency, and sustainable materials. They are often driven by regulatory compliance and cost savings.

Retail and consumer goods customers emphasize ethical sourcing, packaging, and supply chain transparency. Furthermore, they are pursuing sustainability as a brand differentiator and fulfillment of consumer expectations.

Tech and innovation sectors prioritize low-carbon innovation, green data centers, and circular product design. They are willing to pay premiums for sustainable solutions.

Healthcare and pharma focus on waste reduction, ethical sourcing, and sustainable logistics. They also have an increasing interest in ESG reporting and supplier compliance.

What Sustainability Means to Different Consumer Groups

No two consumers are alike! However, we will take a chance and try to simplify how you can reflect on your consumers by grouping them. Make your own groups and have a look at the groups below as inspiration.