

ECO-LABELS & BRANDS - WHICH WAY NOW?

IN TODAY'S 'TRUST CRISIS' HOW DO MARKETERS THINK ECOLABELS CAN HELP BUILD BRANDS?

TOP 10 HEADLINES FROM OUR MARKETERS AND SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS 2017 SURVEY



Marketers are the gate keepers of what makes it to the eyes and ears of consumers. Eco-label NGOs want brands to use their labels to reach consumers and encourage sustainable behaviours. But what do marketers think of ecolabels, can they really help grow brands? In 2012 we researched the attitudes of 100 senior marketers towards 3rd party ecolabels, to assess their brand building potential, and identify best practice for partnerships. We found hurdles of proliferation, proposition, poor design and partnership competence, but also identified the winning factors, and created an ABC guide to partnerships for brands and labels

In late 2017 we have taken another dip, to see how attitudes amongst the marketing world have changed in the last five years. With the world in a 'trust crisis' and fake news on the rise, what role is there for 3rd parties to strengthen brand claims? This time around, as well as surveying 50 marketers we also added in a 50 strong sample of sustainability folks, to see how their view tallied (or not) with their marketing colleagues.

Here we summarise the top 10 findings from this latest study. If you want more detail, or to discuss how our findings could be of use to your brand, please contact Liz Tinlin at liztinlin@bluebabel.co.uk



TOP 10 FINDINGS

1. Proliferation is still the enemy

The sheer diversity of labels and issues still dominates marketers' responses – they are hard to navigate, and it's hard to know which are any good. Who certifies the certifiers?!

2. Currency, Clarity and Credibility win

Marketing success and marketers' respect comes from eco-labels delivering the 3Cs, Currency, Clarity and Credibility, consistently

3. Many labels fail on 3Cs

Very few labels deliver all three of currency, clarity and credibility. For most labels these failings restrict their chances of securing and succeeding in brand partnerships

4. Partnership needs a Triple Win

For a true partnership, brands need not just the 3Cs from a label, but to achieve a triple win – for brand, consumer and society. For the brand this is about fit with purpose, positioning and values of the brand

5. Fairtrade is still the leading label

Fairtrade is still the dominant brand partner, for strong delivery on currency, clarity and credibility, plus widespread applicability in many categories where it would still be news

6. There's a lot to learn from MSC

MSC in the last 5 years has seen huge growth in awareness and understanding driven by strong currency, with sustainable fish campaigns by chefs and retailers

7. Marketers focus on issue and impact

Labels need to single-mindedly provide impact on the central issue, as defined by the public; a connection everyone can see. If the issue changes its centre of gravity, labels cause confusion or simply become irrelevant

8. Marketers reflect the public view of issues – ocean plastics is the new biggie

Ocean plastics, and to a (much) lesser extent palm oil, are the new centres of gravity shaping the debate – but marketers also see climate change as the unanswered elephant in the room, and still love organic

9. Deforestation, waste, climate change and pure/anti-chemical all have currency

Yet all are under-delivered by ecolabels and we're likely to see alternative solutions, from regulation to innovative collaborations

10. Internal programs may build the brand once the issue is mature in that category

Opinion is divided on the impact of some brand owners (e.g. Mondelez, Sainsbury's) taking their sustainability programmes externally to 'take back' the consumer conversation from ecolabels to themselves. They intend to reduce the role of ecolabels from visible badges to behind-the-scenes certifiers, or to replace them completely. But this doesn't apply where the issue is new to a brand and credibility is not yet established