

The future of...Sustainability - the F words

 By [Ryan McFadyen](#)

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Over the past year, sustainability has transitioned from a nice-to-have component of business to a business imperative. According to [PwC's June 2021 Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey](#), 50% of all consumers worldwide are thinking beyond just price and convenience.



Source: www.pexels.com

And product sustainability, driven globally by Gen Z (54% of whom think a company's environmental and social standing are extremely important and whose purchasing power is growing as they join the workforce in larger numbers), has become one of the top sustainability trends.

Two of the key categories within product sustainability continue to be food and fashion.

Food

Food production is currently responsible for 26% of greenhouse gases, and has a major part to play in habitat destruction and freshwater consumption.

As people become more aware of the detrimental impact of meat production on the environment, the popularity of veganism, vegetarianism and flexitarian diets that incorporate plant-based alternatives continue to rise. Acting on this awareness caused sales of plant-based foods to increase by 27% in 2020.

Those looking for more sustainable foods are also putting food waste at the top of their list of concerns. The reality is that currently 1.3-million tonnes of food is wasted each year while 690-million people go hungry.



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Looking to reduce both figures, innovators are creating apps and platforms which utilise existing food and delivery systems to distribute food more efficiently.

One example is the Swedish food-waste app, Karma. Following a successful trial of a smart fridge and its app in Stockholm's ICA Kvantum Liljeholmen supermarket in 2018, it has now, in conjunction Electrolux, installed the same system in Stockholm's central underground station. This allows consumers who have downloaded the app to purchase discounted surplus food and collect their items from the fridge on their journey home without even going into the store.

The beauty of this initiative is that everyone benefits. Food wastage is reduced placing less strain on the earth. Consumers are able to access product at reduced rates, and retailers are able to recoup cash invested in the product to reduce loss.

Consumers are also looking to shop locally with over 43% stating that they shop locally more reducing the impact of transport and packaging and supporting local farmers and producers.

The reality is, however, that the cost of sustainable food still remains a major barrier to widespread adoption, especially in developing markets with 44% of consumers stating that sustainable foods simply cost too much.

Fashion

Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (born between 1997 and 2015) are the target demographics for most fashion brands. Being able to purchase both to their tastes and in alignment with their values is important for young consumers as they navigate the political and social issues that exist today.

As a result, progressive policies and values – like the promotion of social causes or eco-conscious production – are big drawcards for new brands.

Fashion brands seek to utilise sustainable materials within their manufacture, reduce the impact of their production techniques and even embrace a circular model which sees brands recycle old clothing into new clothing for resale.



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One of the fastest segments to cotton on to this is the global footwear market, and sustainable footwear is becoming a serious business. The global sustainable footwear market size was valued at \$8.8bn in 2020, and is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.8% from 2022 to 2027.

The market segment is so attractive some 44% of companies active in it have a team or individuals dedicated to sustainable footwear within the business.

Leading brands Nike and Adidas have entered the space with their Crater and Parley Ocean School initiatives respectively, and Adidas also has the Futurecraft.Loop, a running shoe made from a single piece of plastic. Part of a circular system known as Made to Be Remade, the sneaker is designed to live on after its initial lifespan by being recycled and made into a new pair of shoes.

Not only have these brands looked to material innovation, they have contributed significantly to enhancing sustainable methods of production, including reduced wastage and reduced resource usage.

In conclusion, the way consumers choose their products and the expectations of companies to change the way they produce and sell their goods is a trend which will continue to grow. Marketers around the world have taken note, with 84% saying the twin pillars of conscious consumerism and sustainability would be impacting their marketing strategies.

While consumer willingness to move toward sustainable products is definitely the strongest force at work and will remain the main driver of change, another key aspect will be the acceleration of regulatory changes.

These regulatory changes will alter the business landscape completely – already 65% of global GDP is now legally bound to a 2050 net-zero commitment. In other words, 65% of the world economy is committed to becoming carbon neutral.

ABOUT RYAN MCFADYEN

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