

Keep it real

Market and Communicate Your Credentials



Visit
Wales



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

What do you mean, keep it real?

If you're already working hard to be more sustainable, it's time to find how to make your customers know about it – and enjoy it.

Keeping it real is all about recognising that authenticity makes your customers' holidays more fun and their business trips more pleasant.

Companies across Wales are changing to be more sustainable – but are shy to tell their customers, for fear it's not relevant, or will be misunderstood. Some have even got awards and certification but still struggle to know how this can be used to best effect.

Five chapters help you take practical decisions:

- **Who do I tell?**

Are customers really bothered?
Isn't it only a minority?

- **Why am I telling?**

Can I get more customers? How can I get them to join in, rather than undermine my efforts?

- **What do I say?**

Should I say I am sustainable, just like that? Isn't that preaching?

- **Where do I tell?**

Should I get certified or apply for awards?
Talk about sustainability on my website, or through social media?

- **When do I tell?**

Can I tell customers before they arrive, or only when they are here?

Get tips and confidence to market your green credentials, by understanding who you tell, for what purpose and through which channels, and more importantly that you know what you're saying is really worth shouting about.

Use the template at the end of this booklet to prepare your own green communications and marketing action plan, one step at a time. For each market, choose one reason, one message, one channel and one time to tell them.



Who is this booklet for?



It's for all the companies that behave sustainably because it's the right thing to do, but have struggled to see how to turn it into a commercial advantage. For those that ask themselves – how did Hafan Y Mor do that?

Introducing: Hafan Y Mor (part of the Bourne Leisure Group), a 250 acre holiday park in Gwynedd, with over 800 caravans. We've been acting sustainably for 10 years, but for the first 5 years we weren't getting buy in from our customers and they didn't get it, so we changed our approach.

What we do: We started communicating with customers by getting them more involved in our sustainability journey. We now ask them for feedback on specific projects and to comment on feedback forms so we can make changes that make sense to them.



The results have been really encouraging. By switching from large communal recycling bins for caravans – it turns out many customers didn't like these – to offering individual kerbside bins on request, we now get more recycled waste. We've also introduced DIY nature trails which customers prefer to the weekly scheduled walks as it offers more flexibility. Over 30 families a week now use the trails, much more than previously.

Thanks to this change in approach we now get much more buy in and great ideas for improvements.

Our top tips: If you're worried your customers aren't interested in your green credentials get them involved in a way that's meaningful to them. You'll be surprised at the results. This document has lots of relevant tips on how you can do this and communicate what you do so it makes sense to your customers.





Who do I tell?

Who will appreciate knowing you are working to be sustainable and ethical?

Tell everybody that sustainability is quality

and how they can have a better experience for it.

There are many signs that consumers are changing. The increasing awareness and concern for the planet's health is everywhere – but the problems are too big and complex, there are too many issues, we have all heard too many contradictory messages. It's not surprising customers struggle to know what to do.

Most customers care, or at least want to know that they are not doing harm. But this does not mean they will act differently. Just as we all forget to bring our stylish recycled bags to the supermarket, customers will book the brands they already know through their usual channels. Habit and convenience play a more important part in how we choose travel, leisure and tourism.

Price, location, convenience and brand still come first for most people. But when all of these are equal, sustainability values and actions can **and do** differentiate a product. Consumers prefer brands and companies that are environmentally and socially responsible – but that doesn't mean they are searching exclusively for sustainability at the time of choosing.

Wales Visitor Survey 2009 found that:

- **72%** rated environmental factors important in choosing their holiday destination
- **18%** actively looked for environmentally friendly accommodation rising to 26% amongst overseas visitors
- Welsh food on the menu attracts staying visitors into restaurants with **25%** claiming they visited an eating establishment because Welsh food was on the Menu
- **30%** responding to Wales representing an environmentally friendly family break

Sustainability and marketing make a better business



Introducing: Mark Edwards. Bryn Bella (Snowdonia) is an eco friendly B&B where sustainability is an integral part of everything we do.



What we do: 18 months ago we decided to enhance the services we offer customers by introducing ready made packages and experiences. 'Snowdonia without a Car' is proving really popular, where we show customers how they can enjoy the local countryside and Snowdonia from our door, by foot, bike and public transport. We've also introduced an experience offering the chance to 'Meet our Chickens' and pick their own eggs for breakfast – parents and kids alike love this.

To promote these experiences we use Twitter, Facebook and our blog to keep customers up to date with what's going on, show them how they can experience Bryn Bella year round, and to help spread the word to potential new customers.

By using a combination of marketing methods we now get more new referrals to our website and direct bookings year round. We also have a growing base of repeat customers, one group from Holland have been coming for 6 years!

Our top tip: Sustainability does not have to be overt, it needs to be something that enhances your customer experience and offers quality. Use social media as part of your marketing mix as it allows customers to talk about their experiences and spread the word – it's powerful and it's free!



Be Creative



Introducing: Greenwood Forest Park in Gwynedd invites families to have fun and adventures in their world of trees and nature. By offering visitors the chance to participate in activities we create better experiences where they can learn from the natural environment.



What we do: We've introduced a range of activities for children in the school holidays that are fun and interactive.

These include:

- Building out of natural materials – children use their sense of adventure to build dens from logs and fallen branches in the forest.
- Recycling old and unwanted clothes – children cut clothes into rags and weave them to make a mini rug full of interesting colours and materials.



- Creative with flowers – children fray sticks to make “flowers” which they then dye and take home as a memory of their day.

By getting involved in practical activities children learn how materials can be reused and how to care for the natural environment.

Our top tip: Communicate messages by getting visitors to participate. Making experiences fun means they will be memorable.

Who do I tell?



Different customers, different approaches

‘Ethical seekers’ actively seek green holidays as a continuation of their lifestyle. There are few of them, but they are vocal and loyal. They want to know all about what you do.

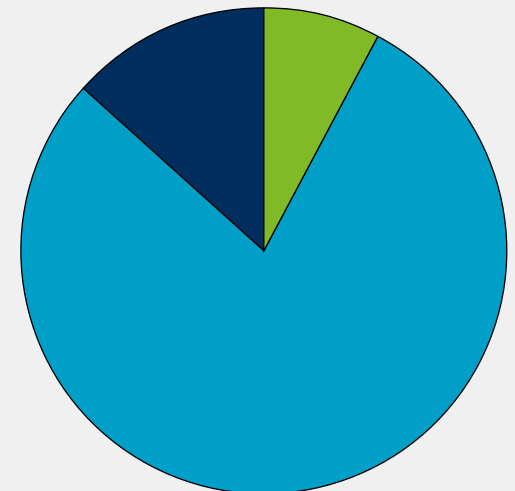
They are aware of the issues, but don't go out of their way to act.

At the other extreme, the “just want to switch off” group travel wanting to forget about their daily lives and responsibilities. They are unlikely to value your efforts. Sustainability actions will need to happen behind the scenes and your communication should focus on how it does improve their experience.

The “feel good factor” group is the majority – they are aware of the issues, but don’t go out of their way to act. They won’t seek information, but will respond well to messages that show they can easily “do their bit” – or where they get a better product or service that happens to be sustainable.

This group will avidly read about you in the press travel pages because you are interesting and different, not because you are sustainable. Awards and certification reinforce that you can be trusted, one more element to influence the booking decision.

- **Ethical Seekers:** Rational, International, Interrogative, Willing to Pay
- **Feel Good Factors:** Emotional, Local, Simplified, Unlikely to Pay
- **Switch Off:** Irrelevant, Local, Cynical, Won't Pay





Why am I telling?

There are too many vague messages out there. You can't do everything, so be clear about what response or change you are hoping for from your customers.

To make customers feel good

Ok, you want more customers – but before you get there, remember there are many other more realistic ways of using sustainability in your communications.

Help your customers feel better about their purchase by showing how you have taken care of the need to be more sustainable – leaving them to enjoy the benefits.

The fact they will not go out of their way to buy from you because you are green does not mean they don't appreciate it. It won't put customers off, and can make them feel good knowing that they are "doing their bit."

If you genuinely think your customers don't want to know, focus on what you do for them. Make it easy, by telling them they can relax and enjoy, while you take care of things without compromising quality.

Customers feel good (or less guilty) facing easy choices. Encourage charitable donations, tell them about public transport options or where to recycle – show them it is both better and more sustainable. The easiest solution of all is for the options provided to be 'good' choices with positive impacts.



Why am I telling?

A B&B owner in the Brecon Beacons only has to walk into the garden to select and pick the fresh vegetables and fruit which grow in abundance in their vegetable garden, poly tunnel and orchards.

She tends to point out of the window to their guests' horses grazing peacefully behind the house. She explains that the horses directly contribute to what they are eating, as their manure, once collected and composted, is their sole fertiliser. Talking like this brings over the environmental message about food mileage much more effectively than printing it in a brochure or on the web site.

It just tastes better



Introducing: Kerena Pugh. 18 months ago at Lon Lodges (Rhayader) we introduced welcome packs and a range of Luxury Welsh produce hampers as a pre order service for our customers.



What we do: Many of our customers tell us they don't want the hassle of buying food on holiday, or they want something special to celebrate an anniversary or birthday. So we thought we would make it convenient and easy for them. We provide information about this service on our website and at the time of booking.

Customers can then order ahead and have fine foods ready and waiting on arrival. We have personally selected all our suppliers and use only the finest Welsh foods including wine and hand made chocolates, produced by Tanya at Penarth Estate.

We realise others have also tried to do this – for us it works because the quality of produce and convenience of the service means repeat customers now use this service as standard and we have a growing number of new customers placing orders.

Our top tip: Offer a service and product that makes your customers feel special and cared about, and makes their life easier. They are on holiday and want to relax, they do not want to spend their time doing what they consider everyday chores, like food shopping.

Why am I telling?

Tell us about your suppliers!

- A map of where your different suppliers are can demonstrate how many are local – good.
- Photos will show a human side to who they are – better.
- Explaining how they take good care of the produce they sell to you will show that you also care about what you share with your customers – best.

To raise awareness

and change behaviour

Are you fed up of having all your good sustainability work undermined by customers that just don't get it?

If you want change, give something in return. Whether you want them to purchase local or respect local customs, to drive less or recycle more, be clear how to motivate and be positive.

- Be specific about what you ask them to do: vague messages lead to frustration – tell them what to do, not “be green.”
- Show how the action you are asking your customers to take has a direct positive impact, of what kind, and how it can be seen – instead of saying “save water,” tell them what can be done with the water they have saved.
- Explain who benefits from the change of behaviour – if it isn't the customer, think again how you tell why they should care.

- Only mention the more sustainable options – focus on daytrips that are nearby rather than hours away, or cut out endangered or unsustainable food from the menu. No need to label as “green” either, just present as fun or a great idea.

Call of the Wild (Brecon Beacons) has succeeded in getting customers to appreciate their sustainability efforts and contribute during their bunkhouse stay, although most customers were not aware of their actions before arriving. The sustainability brief on arrival explains what the company does and what consumers can do – with an upbeat angle of all the good things we can do, not a “doom and gloom” approach.

Customers can experience the positive actions taken such as planting of 2000 deciduous trees in 15 hectares of the property, while other actions are less visible and need to be communicated – electricity renewable sources, toilet hippos and shower aerators for example.

Customers respond best to information they can relate to – the toilet hippo sign tells customers the equivalent number of tea cups they saved in a year, which is now much better received to saying litres of water. Customers then respond well to switch-off-the-lights signs, recycling and generally looking after the site because they aren't gimmicks, but part of what we have shown to believe in.

Why am I telling?

To offer something extra

We've only looked at your current customers and your main business. Now, how do we get your customers to buy more from you?

Design sustainable packages for your low occupancy or usage periods, or think of services that can generate more money in high season. Look at ways customers will stay longer, or will come back when your business is empty.

- Develop a nature diary on your website for your property – emphasise what's there in low season.
- Promote meat/vegetables/jam from your local farm or neighbours – encourage customers to come back to restock.
- “Grow-and-cook your own veg”, local history or bicycle maintenance courses, “eco-warrior” after school clubs, children’s nature themed birthday parties... create demand for quieter times.
- Typically, a rural pub is full lunchtime weekends – develop a special promotion for mid morning or mid afternoon coffee and cake/tea and scone, together with a free map for a circular pub walk.



Northlodge Organic B&B in Pembrokeshire offers Greenshoots courses for customers where they can learn practical skills about gardening which they can take home and use in their own gardens. Getting customers to participate in activities makes being in nature more fun and reinforces their approach to sustainability.

To get more customers

Faced with a similar price and location, your sustainability credentials can give you the edge for both business and leisure markets. It's all about being noticed and giving a bit more.

There are more examples of increased occupancy and lower seasonality through using sustainability creatively, than there are about higher prices. This is probably good news for the service sector, where managing occupancy has a more significant impact on your bottom line than charging more at peak periods.

Do remember, customers like to know they are getting a bargain

Businesses that put most points raised in this toolkit into practice should be in a position to increase their prices marginally, or to not reduce them as substantially in low season.

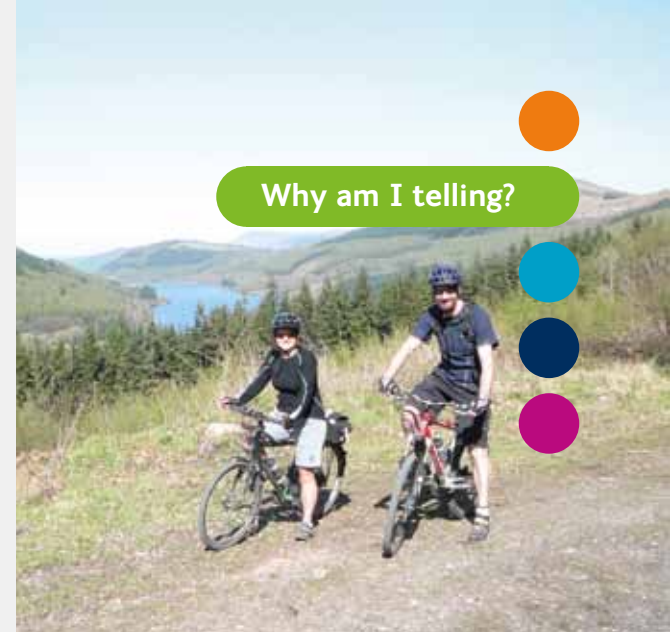
Do remember, customers like to know they are getting a bargain – so showing that behaving sustainably gives them either a discount or additional benefits is likely to be attractive.

We have seen cafés giving a discount (and others putting 10p in a charity pot) for regulars that bring their own commuter mug – saving on disposable cups while gaining a loyal customer.

While 2010 data from VisitEngland shows that 60% of holidaymakers would be more likely to use public transport if the accommodation offered a discount for doing so.*

*English residents are the greatest domestic tourism generator in the UK accounting for 91% of overnight trips made (UKTS 2010). At the Wales level, 77% of visitors were from England (UKTS 2010). Findings from research conducted by VE, which is mainly focused on the views/behaviour of English residents, is very much of relevance to Welsh tourism businesses.

Why am I telling?



The Bridge Café (Brecon) is a B&B that has positioned itself as a specialist for hikers and cyclists. Not only do they offer secure bike storage, hiring and drying facilities, but they now partner with Drover holidays (a local cycling holiday specialist) to offer complete cycling holiday packages. Partnering with a local business means they can now offer customers a one stop cycling experience as well as enjoy the business benefits of year round occupancy, more repeat customers, and group bookings specifically for the complete cycling holiday package.

Using incentives for green travel



Introducing: The Centre for Alternative Technology in Machynlleth. We are a visitor and educational centre for locals and tourists alike. We reward visitors who arrive car free with 50% off our standard entry fee if they travel by train, and £1 off if they arrive by bus, bike or on foot.



What we do: Because of our rural location our visitors often don't think beyond jumping in the car to get here. We make it easy for them to make alternative choices by presenting our green travel scheme and incentives online. We provide detailed information on travelling by train, bus, bike and foot, include photos of what you can see on the way here if you cycle or walk, and what you can do in the local town while waiting for a bus. We recognise car free travel is not an option for some people, so we also promote www.sewtacarshare.com which offers a cost saving incentive.

Using incentives has really worked for us with more visitors now travelling by a greener alternative. Over 6% of visitors now arrive car free and over 70% of students use liftshare for courses. It also has a positive impact on our image as visitors feel we care.

Our top tip: With many tourism businesses in rural locations in Wales, visitors often don't consider an alternative to the car, it's too hard. By providing detailed information on your website and offering incentives it makes it easier for them to make alternative choices and saves them money – all customers love a bargain!



Centre for Alternative Technology
Canolfan y Dechnoleg Amgen

Why am I telling?



What do I say?

Be clear about the impression you want to create – with your sustainability policy, photos, text... From the following pages, choose one or two messages only that you think represent best how you want your customers to see you.

Fun/participation – What can I do?

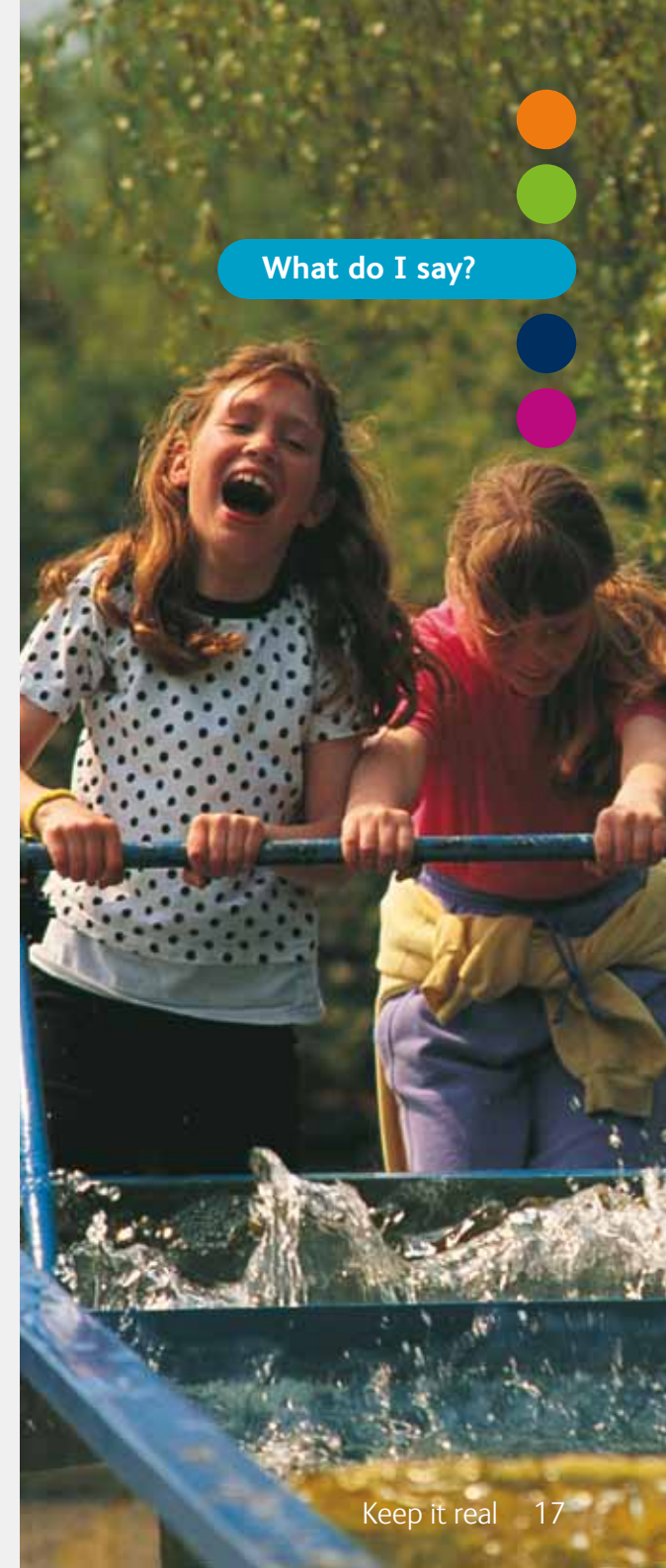
Sustainability should not be boring! Help your customers to enjoy themselves and to experience “hands on” what makes you unique.

Have you realised how much mainstream advertising makes fun of being sustainable? One of the large supermarket's 'Take an Old Bag Shopping, Seeds of Change "I am not a goody-goody pastasauce, I am a yummy-yummy," and so on. Bottom line, sounding worthy is less likely to sell – you want to tell customers, not put them off.

Get your customers to participate in things they can relate to

Get customers to participate – doing is more fun than observing. The chance for a customer to pick their own lunch means that in their mind, it just tastes better. Develop a family quiz to explore and learn more about the places they visit, or a nature, town or city trail from your front door. Get them to participate in things they can relate to – you have seen how kitchens attract as much attention as stately rooms in historic homes – or even better, allowing children to use the dress up box in the servants' hall.

What do I say?



Better service –

Make me feel special

Holidays are times to put yourself first, while business travellers will want you to get things right quickly. Some aspects of sustainability can help.

Sustainability text can sound like apologies or jargon. Instead, put the customer at the centre of the experience – what's in it for them?

Word your information thinking about how you want your customers to feel, instead of listing your product features or attributes.

Put the customer at the centre of the experience – what's in it for them?

Write about sustainability as pampering, as having something unique, about looking after your customer.

“You can see things nobody else does” is likely to sell, but find a way of showing that the place is still looked after, the “feel good factor.”

The message “fresh, unadulterated, honest food that makes holidaying memorable” is more likely to sell than “food miles and supporting the local economy.” It's both what you say and how you say it that matters.

What do I say?



Nannerth Country Holidays say: 'experience a live working farm'



Introducing: Alison Gallagher – Nannerth Fawr is a traditional organic working sheep farm where the ethos is 'to enjoy the environment, explore wild places on the farm and have fun'. Many of our guests don't spend much time in the natural environment, so we created experiences that allow customers to interact with the animals and see the many habitats and species we have.

What we do: We show guests how they can have fun without the car by participating in life on the farm. Guests can feed and touch animals, including our free range hens, pigs and very popular, Welsh mountain lambs. They can experience the whole lambing process, from birth to bonding and we've also ensured lambing coincides with Easter holidays because children love it and want to come back each year!

Other popular experiences are badger watching from the treehouse and falconry, which are popular with all ages. There are woods where children can climb trees and make dens, and wild areas to play in and get muddy. By offering guests the opportunity to participate in these experiences, we now get 50-70% repeat bookings, particularly at certain times of year, like the lambing season.

Our top tip: Provide interactive activities for guests to participate in that they can't at home. It means they will have a memorable experience and fun while learning, which in our experience means they keep coming back for more.

What do I say?

Empathy – We think alike

The message here is to emphasise the personal connection between host and guest – “We are people like you, we have the same values, that’s why you’ll enjoy being here.”

You are showing a personal connection, not a bland corporate directive. Say it in words – and with the more informal tone, pictures that show the fun element of your place and contents of your website.

Write in the first person, include a photo of yourself as host, explain more about the surroundings – it’s all part of the welcome.

Every time a customer books a holiday or business trip, or choose a day out, there’s an element of risk – what if I make a mistake?

You can use sustainability messages to assure customers that you are a quality business. Displaying your many awards and quality grading – but assure your customers that because you care about the environment and society, you also care about your customers and how they will enjoy their time with you.



What do I say?

John and Sarah at [Graig Wen](#) (Dolgellau) share a love of the natural environment around them with the customers they attract. Their website is evocative of this and emphasises the beauty of the place using photos, a video and quotes such as ‘one of the most beautiful spots in Britain’ from national press articles. Once at Graig Wen they encourage customers to share in ‘protecting our beautiful environment’ through tongue in cheek messages. The compost loo is a talking point for families, they explain how they can leave ‘feeling they’re part of a natural process’. When using campfires and wood burners they ask customers to use wood provided by them. This way they help protect natural habitats and the woodlands. They don’t tell the eco-warrior message, they just simply explain why it’s better and customers love it.

Common mistakes

Customers often think green businesses just want to save money and provide less comfort. The way you write could contribute to that impression.

The corporate markets is likely to welcome evidence of lower CO₂ emissions for both their conferences and business travel, as many companies have commitments to purchasing services from greener suppliers in their corporate social responsibility statements.

But for the leisure market you don't need to use the word "sustainability" or "green" in your marketing, just as you don't always say quality or luxury in those words – find more subtle ways of putting the message across that are the meaningful to them.

Too many messages aim at making customers feel vaguely warm inside, or less guilty about their travel or day out. Others come across as an apology (we had to do it – but it won't affect you) or a sacrifice (you need to be tough to be green). These won't create trust.

But most typically businesses either don't say what they are doing or present it with a complete lack of imagination in a place that is separate from other communications – as if sustainability was an afterthought.

Am I greenwashing?

- Before you shout about great actions, make sure there are no obvious mistakes.
- You'll find that your credentials will be taken as greenwashing if you also use non-recyclable plastic cups and throwaway crockery, or have an outdoor patio heater turned on when it is really not needed, for example. Don't try to promote your sustainable policy printed on chlorinated bleached paper.
- Futerra's Greenwash Guide will help www.futerra.co.uk/downloads/Greenwash_Guide.pdf

What do I say?





Where do I tell?

Integrate sustainability as part of quality through the channels you already use. Use certification and awards to get recognition, and the internet to spread the word.

Certification

Certification is a great place to start – you get help to put your house in order and its endorsement should give you confidence to tell others about what you do – now use it as a marketing tool.

Companies get certified partly to gain a marketing advantage, expecting that being certified lifts them above some of their competitors – and yet they report that customer awareness is low.

At the end of the day certification won't market you, it's still your role to know how and where to display certificates and logos, and more importantly what they mean and why you gained them.

Gaining a sustainable tourism certification gives customers an independent guarantee of your credentials. It helps with confidence and credibility. Now you have the independent recognition of your sustainability performance, you should explain what you do with confidence.

Do you communicate your certification logo and what you did to achieve it?

- In the reception/entrance
- In your bedroom pack (if accommodation)
- On your website
- On promotional leaflets and printed literature
- In your public relations work
- In adverts

Preferential marketing for companies with sustainable credentials

Visit Wales is able to actively promote your business as sustainable if you are accredited by one of the validated green accreditation schemes such as the Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS). There are also opportunities for you to work with the Visit Wales PR team – letting the team know about your sustainable credentials can go a long way! For more information look under the Help section of this toolkit.

Where do I tell?

Awards

Only a few companies win awards. You could spend much time on it without any results, and you will need to show something unique and extraordinary.

But if you do win an award, use it to create a sense of confidence and trust in your quality. The good news is that submitting your company for awards doesn't cost you and the recognition lasts much longer. For starters try local/regional awards through your Local Authority, also look out for National Awards such as the Visit Wales National Tourism Awards which include a Sustainable tourism category.

Crafnant Guesthouse have entered and won a variety of sustainability awards for their gardens and wildlife, and local sustainable tourism. Mike from Crafnant says, 'we are very proud of the awards because they are a great way of independently showing our customers our commitment to sustainability. We display links and logos on our website, and now we even get customers coming from as far as Australia to experience our gardens and wildlife'.



Where do I tell?

Winning the Green Snowdonia Tourism Award in 2008 helped **Trigonos Conference Venue** develop a very loyal following. Richard from Trigonos says, 'having the award supports our sustainability claims and we display the logo on our website. However, we've found it is more meaningful to our customers when they actually visit us. They can see we really practice what we preach and how it is part of the picture of who we are. Because of this we have found our existing customers often return for several years and have become one of our most effective ways of gaining new business through their word of mouth recommendation.'

Press

We see interesting stories in the travel pages every week – how can you get your business featured there? By having something different to tell.

Travel editors get bombarded with very similar mailings, claiming to be sustainable. Their question? “What makes you different, in a way that my customers will want to read about you?”

Press coverage you’ve achieved should not be lost – make links to it

VisitEngland research says 21% of customers have taken a holiday or break recommended in a newspaper or magazine.*

Press coverage you’ve achieved should not be lost – make links to it from your website, say in your mailings that you have been highlighted, use quotes from the write up to show your positive side. Even if it is old, there’s a value to it. One quote from a national publication could have more impact than a certification scheme that has a lower awareness level.

*English residents are the greatest domestic tourism generator in the UK accounting for 91% of overnight trips made (UKTS 2010). At the Wales level, 77% of visitors were from England (UKTS 2010). Findings from research conducted by VE, which is mainly focused on the views/behaviour of English residents, is very much of relevance to Welsh tourism businesses.



Where do I tell?

The Felin Fach Griffin, near Hay-on-Wye offers customers a rural retreat with sustainability actions at its core. They have featured in numerous articles in national and local newspapers, as well as in travel and foodie magazines who are particularly interested in their very own Organic Kitchen Gardens.

The owner Charles says, ‘We make the most of any press exposure we receive by posting links to all articles on our website, as well as featuring relevant quotes on each page. We’ve found the articles not only generate a flurry of interest with customers at the time, but they also have a longer term value by adding credibility to what we offer.’

Your website

All too often a missed opportunity. Let me feel you mean it, show me what's good about what you do, keep it up to date.

You typically have all your sustainability information on a single page, probably called sustainability policy. Mostly we see dull lists of water, waste, and energy actions, written in management speak – I'm hardly going to pick up the phone because I've read that you "minimise waste by evaluating operations and ensuring they are fit for purpose."

By all means upload your policy and list your achievements somewhere, but in general you won't get many customers visiting it. There are of course exceptions... but you need to get more creative.

The aspects of sustainability that directly relate to quality, as customers would perceive it, need to be incorporated throughout the website. Describe a quieter and warmer (better insulated, biomass fuelled heating) bedroom, a tastier and authentic (locally sourced and bilingual) menu, a more personally and uniquely designed (with local crafts) hotel...



Where do I tell?

Sustainability: tell your story

Jacky and Graham at **Coed Cae B&B** (Dolgellau) tell the story of their 'journey to sustainable heating' in their website. By writing about their escapades into log fuelled burners and briquette making they have become known as independent experts and specifically get guests who come to see and learn. It's not unusual to be talking briquettes over breakfast! By telling a story customers can relate to who you are, what you're up to and naturally want to know more.

What's your story and does your website tell it?

Each market needs different communication methods

Where do I tell?

Compare two websites speaking about sustainability very differently. Each has understood their market, and has presented their sustainability in context.

Asheston Eco Barns (Pembrokeshire) are very upfront and clear about their commitment to sustainability, but they communicate this through messages of combining old and new to offer the very best in comfort and modern facilities. They charm customers with stories of renovating their Welsh stone farm buildings using traditional methods and materials; describe underfloor heating that keeps you constantly warm and is a pleasure to walk on; and warm your insides talking about traditional log burning stoves providing cosy nights in by the fire. Messages are about showing customers that eco friendly is not about compromise, it's about enjoying the charm of old and traditional with the comfort that new technologies can bring.
www.eco-barns.co.uk

Two organic Welsh farms are part of **Feather Down Farm Days**, promoting sustainability implicitly with their photos and text, but without a single word about their environmental policies, waste management or any of the behind the scenes messages we all too often see. The emphasis here is on putting the customer at the centre of a family nature experience that brings you closer to nature and makes you appreciate how beautiful and yet fragile it is. Every message is about the togetherness of having an adventure and being a family.
www.featherdown.co.uk



Social media

Where do I tell?

Like it or not, this is a digital world. So get used to blogging, Twitter, Facebook and other social networks to tell others what you are up to – eventually you will find these quite addictive! Write about sustainability as pampering, as having something unique, about looking after your customer.

If you have something interesting to say you will develop followers

If you have something interesting to say and you are internet savvy, you will develop a group of followers. Many social media sites are free, and your local tourism partnership is likely to run or know about training available in your area.

Preseli Venture Eco Lodge and Adventures offer outdoor activity and adventure holidays in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

By using a combination of Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and blogging, Preseli Venture have really created a truly interactive and loyal online following for their brand. Guests can post and view photos of their adventures on Facebook, and creative guests are invited to guest blog.

They don't preach sustainability, the emphasis is on adventure and fun in outstanding natural scenery, and on having an experience you'll remember for a lifetime – sustainability is made part of that.

See it at www.preseliventure.co.uk/blog/
<http://www.facebook.com/preseliventure>



Marketing through other channels

Where do I tell?

You will find there are an increasing number of channels to promote through. Your sustainability credentials are of value to both the channels that specialise in sustainability travel and those that don't.

For now it's time to make yourself stand out a little

While the number of websites promoting sustainable properties is growing, the market is still small. For now, it's the channels you already use where your sustainability information will be more useful – you already know how these channels work and now it's time to make yourself stand out a little.

If you are in Alastair Sawday's Special Places to Stay, or the Good Hotel Guide, you should say that on your website – it's unlikely you'll lose customers to these other websites; statistics show that most customers prefer to book direct anyway. But showing you are listed gives yet another reassurance that you are credible.

Some websites, for example [greentraveller.co.uk](https://www.greentraveller.co.uk) feature green accommodation and holidays that can be reached by train. The selection criteria are Energy; Waste; Water; Food; and Public Transport.

Greentraveller distinguishes between companies merely meeting a standard degree of action (such as recycling, installing low energy light bulbs and fair trade tea and coffee), from those companies that have introduced significant change –

e.g. alternative energy supplies, discounts for guests arriving by public transport, or deciding to move away from carbon-intensive activities e.g. “we used to offer 4x4 tours, but now we organise walking tours.”

In addition, it considers an award from a recognised certification scheme, such as the Green Tourism Business Scheme, to be a valuable indication of a businesses' commitment to environmental responsibilities.



Check what others write about you

Where do I tell?

It's not only what you say, but how you say it... so do your entries on websites or destination guides actually do you proud? Research shows that the photo, name and first sentence of your text are the most typical reasons to click through. But then you need to make sure that your text is attractive too!

Compare these two extremes for a hotel, one written on their website, the other on a third party site. When third parties write about your hotel, try to give them something a bit more exciting to say!

WHAT TO DO!

“All of us are very proud of the fact that we make everything here ourselves, from jams and honey to bread and soups...” is telling us something about your values and it's speaking to the customer – without having to say “hey, I am sustainable” in that many words. Talking in terms of “you” and “we” rather than the third person also helps.

WHAT NOT TO DO!

“Hotel X will take environmental considerations into account in all its activities. Although ultimate responsibility rests with management, all staff have a part to play in minimising adverse effects on the environment. To that end Hotel X will promote the best use of environmental practices. Hotel X will develop and resource programmes for the implementation of its Environmental Policy and will monitor and audit them through an environmental management system.”



When do I tell?

**You actually market your company all the time.
So think about the many different stages you can
communicate and how what you say helps customers
take decisions at that point.**

Prior to

booking/purchase

When do I tell?

Tell customers why they should buy from you. Explain why your product is better value, better quality, or simply a more appealing proposition.

Customers need information to help them make decisions. This may be the number of calories in a cup of tea compared to a skinny latte, but it could also be public transport deals or the CO₂ emissions of their journey.

For example, hotel chains are starting to calculate the environmental cost of business meetings, to promote themselves as lower carbon than competitors. Hotels also need to tell customers how to get there with low CO₂ and importantly what to do there without needing a car.

Greenways Coastal Bus Services not only tells you that you can use public buses run on vegetable oil to see the spectacular Pembrokeshire coastline, it also offers you the chance to see the trips through its virtual online tours. Providing this information upfront helps visitors make travel decisions.

www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/coastalbuses

Hidden Valley Yurts in Monmouthshire provides a map and photos on their website showing the trails and walks you can enjoy on their 80 acre farm. This information shows visitors upfront how they can experience the great outdoors on their holiday without even leaving the farm, and reduces car journeys without sounding all goodie-goodie.

Wern Watkin Bunkhouse (Brecon Beacons) is built based on sustainable practices and is GTBS gold certified. In order to appeal to a range of potential customers the owner, Andrew Fryer communicates Wern Watkin's green credentials in different ways and places. To reach people with strong sustainability principles he advertises in Clean Slate, Friends of the Earth Magazine and on the National Park website where he talks openly about sustainability. On their website these messages are more subtle, about walking festivals and outdoor activities in the local countryside, appealing to people who are more 'light green'. By tailoring messages to different target markets Wern Watkin's now has 80% year round occupancy, 15% of which comes from environmentally focused advertising.

Between booking and arriving

Tell your customer how to prepare for their visit – what to bring, what is acceptable behaviour, dress code (if relevant), how to respect other users that will be there.

When do I tell?

This is the time to do something to make travel to you more environmentally friendly – provide information on public transport timetables and destinations, the Traveline website or phone service, how as a business you will find public transport times for your visitors, having a list of car-free things to do in the property itself or nearby...

Equally if you can source local goods for their stay, this is the time to encourage pre-booking – particularly beneficial for self-catering properties in rural locations, but not done often enough.

There are no second chances to make a first impression

On arrival

There are no second chances to make a first impression. Will your reception area send the message of wasteful lighting and heat pumped out of the front door?

The look or feel of your business, from accommodation providers and attractions, to conference venues and restaurants, sends a message about whether you really care about sustainability.

If you have large numbers of customers, you may only be able to display your sustainability policy, and a page saying “What we have just done to be more sustainable” to show this is an ongoing, day to day policy.

Smaller businesses, like self-catering properties, get to talk to customers one to one, and it's on arrival they get a chance to share their values while showing guests to their accommodation and explaining how different aspects work e.g. utilities, heating, and so on.

You need to think what works for your business.

Tell your customers something they want to hear



Gliffaes Country House Hotel (Brecon Beacons) communicates their sustainability message in a traditional, rather dry way. None of their customers have ever commented on their sustainability messages, so Gliffaes owner James Suter gives them little importance. What is missing is engaging customers.

They currently say: “In January 2008 we insulated the space above the bedroom ceilings with over 400m² of sheep’s wool insulation.”

We propose: “Our sheep will keep you warm at night. For there are more than 400m² of our own sheep’s wool insulating the bedrooms’ ceiling. Sleep tight.”

Equally, now they say: “We now compost all our food waste in large commercial food composter that helps accelerate the compost process and in doing so diverts about 12-15 tons of waste per annum from landfill to our gardens.”

And we propose: “We are often asked how we manage to look after our gardens so well all year round – the secret is over 12 tons of food going through our state of the art commercial composter each year.”

When do I tell?



During the stay/visit

This is your chance to communicate by showing what you do. Decide how much you want the communication to affect the customer experience, or whether it is just in the background.

When do I tell?

Some five star hotels are reducing all information displayed to ensure the perception of quality is not affected, while other businesses opt to provide short messages throughout (for example, in the shower, notes about reduced water consumption, by the bedroom entrance, a note about what could be done with the electricity from leaving the lights on).

The Dunoon Hotel (Llandudno) enhances their guest experience with chemical free cleaning! Our sustainability actions are behind the scenes and not something we shout about. We offer guests the chance to learn about our sustainability projects, which we write about in the information packs in guest rooms. Many guests have been surprised at how much we do, that they can still have the same high quality experience, and that sustainability hasn't compromised their enjoyment.

One example of how we have done this is by using Enjo chemical free cleaning cloths in the hotel. Our guests benefit from our efforts with bleach free smelling rooms – yes they do comment! – and our business benefits with reduced hot water costs and staff now find it easier to clean. Our investment paid back within a year, and we now reinvest the cost savings in other sustainability initiatives to ensure we deliver the quality and comfort our guests expect. It doesn't get us first time customers, but it contributes to satisfaction.

For accommodation providers, the bedroom browser is the best place for all the background and more technical information – the type that wouldn't bring your customers through the door, but helps reinforce the range of things you do. The committed few that read it are likely to appreciate it.

For your bedroom browser, you could print two lists:

- “these are the things you can see” – our honey tastes better because it's local, we serve water filtered for free to save on glass transport and waste, our clever lights come on automatically when needed, with your help we raised £500 for our local wildlife club...
- “and these are the things you can't” – we have saved enough oil/gas/electricity to do x, we have saved enough water to do x, we reduced our carbon emissions by x...

Once you've got them there... ...you can tell them much more!



Introducing: John and Marje Rickerby.

At the self catering Rose Cottage Dutlas (Powys) we constantly remind customers to be sustainable during their stay.

What we do: Our effort to encourage wildlife, birds in particular, is the only sustainability message praised by our customers in TripAdvisor reviews. Our sun room is our main attraction, you can see multitude of birds, and often otters.

We have chosen however to go much further in the cottage once customers arrive, although we understand not all of them will feel comfortable with it. It's a personal choice that we realise would not necessarily attract customers, but we think doesn't put them off from coming back.



We make it pretty impossible for our customers not to recycle – with 7 waste sorting bins and signs telling them that unsorted waste goes to landfill. An energy meter that tells them their consumption, and the heating settings and notices encourage being thrifty. In the bathroom we tell them to save water, in the sun room we have environmental magazines and videos.

Our top tip: Find a way of combining the more marketable aspects of sustainability, communicated upfront, with any other messages you personally feel you need to share, which you might want to drip feed during the stay.

When do I tell?



After the stay/visit

Stay in touch with your customers. Speaking about sustainability will be more welcomed than a direct promotional message saying “book with us again.”

If your customers saw you plant trees, tell them how they are growing. If you had pictures from a local school, tell customers how you are now speaking with other schools and how these children are learning from what they saw with you.

A large family hotel chain publishes a yearly newsletter that amongst other things provides an update of births, marriages, retirements and deaths amongst their personnel. It's one more way to communicate that their staff are employed for the long run and to encourage customer loyalty that for them, really works.

If you had pictures from a local school, tell customers how you are now speaking to other schools

When do I tell?



Developing a smallholding



Introducing: Philippa Pickworth.

Families who come to Banceithin Holiday Cottages love to get involved and learn about the development of our smallholding and charities we support.



What we do: The experience of Banceithin doesn't end when customers leave. Many customers have told us they genuinely want to hear how we're getting on, so we make it easy by updating them through Facebook, Twitter & our blog. We tell candid stories of the highs and lows, new pesky pigs and swarms of bees, and the trials and tribulations of tomato growing and our polytunnel.

This isn't about advertising, it's about allowing our customers to still feel part of our journey when they are at home. It's making them laugh, providing topics of conversation to have over coffee, and perhaps inspiring our customers to make changes towards a greener lifestyle. The knock on effect of communicating in this way is that we remain in their minds when it comes to booking their next trip, or recommending somewhere to friends.

Our top tip: Keep in touch with your customers, remind them what made their experience special and that you're still there. It shows you care, offers inspiration and gives them a reason to come back.

When do I tell?

Time for action!



What will you do different after reading this toolkit?
Download this table.

When do I tell?

	What are you already doing?	What do you want to do?	What do you need to achieve it?	Who can help you?
Who do I tell? Choose one type of customer at a time – they are all interested in different things.				
Why am I telling? Choose one main reason.				
What do I say? Make sure the customer will appreciate what you tell them – make it interesting, easy to hear, easy to act on.				
Where do I tell? Aiming to sell directly, if you can to repeat customers, with stories that engage, backed with facts.				
When do I tell? Probably on several occasions, making sure the message is consistent.				

Thank you...

to the businesses and organisations that provided information for this document.

Asheton Eco Barns
www.eco-barns.co.uk

Banceithin Holiday Cottages
www.banceithin.com

Bryn Bella
www.bryn-bella.co.uk

Call of the Wild
www.callofthewild.co.uk

Coed Cae B&B
www.coedcae.co.uk

Crafnant Guesthouse
www.trefriw.co.uk

Feather Down Farm Days
www.featherdown.co.uk

Gliffaes Country House Hotel
www.gliffaeshotel.com

Graig Wen
www.graigwen.co.uk

Greentraveller
www.greentraveller.co.uk

Greenways Coastal Bus Services
www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/coastalbuses

GreenWood Forest Park
www.greenwoodforestpark.co.uk

Hidden Valley Yurts
www.hiddenvalleyyurts.co.uk

Lon Lodges
www.lonlodges.co.uk

Nannerth Fawr
www.nannerth.co.uk

Northlodge Organic B&B
www.northlodgewales.co.uk

Preseli Venture Eco Lodge and Adventures
www.preseliventure.co.uk

Rose Cottage Dutlas
www.rosecottagedutlas.com

The Bridge Café
www.bridgecafe.co.uk

The Centre for Alternative Technology
www.cat.org.uk

The Dunoon Hotel
www.dunoonhotel.co.uk

The Felin Fach Griffin Gastropub
www.eatdrinksleep.ltd.uk

Trigonos Conference Venue
www.trigonos.org

Wern Watkin Bunkhouse
www.wernwatkin.co.uk

Credits

Commissioned and produced by Visit Wales.

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Visit Wales is very grateful to VisitEngland and its regional tourism partners for their kind permission in allowing the reproduction of the core text of their publication Keep It Real and its inclusion in full in this document.

VisitEngland's regional partners are: East of England Tourism; East Midlands Tourism; Advantage West Midlands; London Development Agency; Northwest Regional Development Agency; One North East; South West Tourism; Tourism South East; and Welcome to Yorkshire.

Reference

Visit Wales (2011) Keep it real: market and communicate your green credentials.

Thank you...

to the businesses and organisations that provided information for this document.

Help!

Before marketing you need to get your house in order. The Sustainable Tourism Business Toolkit is available, at no cost, to all tourism businesses interested in understanding how they can embed sustainability as part of the normal activities. It has been designed to help businesses review their performance and illustrate how sustainable practice can save money, encourage greater efficiency and begin a journey of doing business even better.

www.dmwales.com

To keep up to date with Visit Wales communications then visit the industry website and/or subscribe to receive regular e-newsletters and updates.

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism>

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/enewsletter>

Visit Wales has a public relations team who can help promote and publicise your business. See link below to find out more;

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/marketing/publicrelations>

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/development/sustainable>

For information on sustainable tourism and validated accreditation schemes,

www.walesthebrand.com

For everything you need to know about communicating the Wales brand,

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/tourism/marketing/>

For everything you need to know about the Visit Wales marketing team,

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Keep it Real was published by Visit Wales, the Tourism and Marketing Division of the Welsh Government © 2012. Visit Wales, QED Centre, Main Avenue, Treforest Industrial Estate, Treforest, Pontypridd, Rhondda Cynon Taf, CF37 5YR.

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