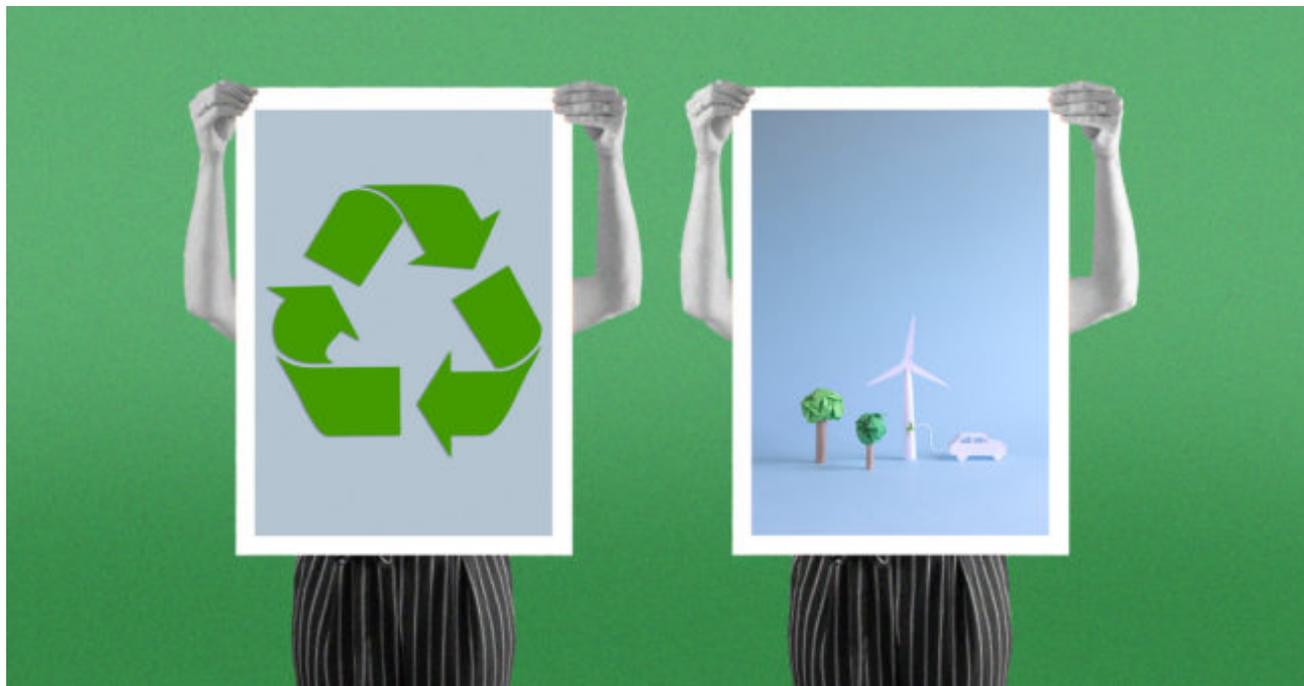


What to Expect in Sustainability Marketing in 2022

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By Kathryn Lundstrom January 31, 2022

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Throughout 2021, climate issues wrestled their way to the forefront.

The U.S. alone was hit with more than \$145 billion in damages from climate-related disasters last year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Flash floods, bomb cyclones, wildfires and frigid temperatures took hundreds of lives all across the country. In October, the United Nations climate conference took place in Glasgow—garnering more international attention than any UN conference has in years.

In this way, climate demanded the attention of business leaders across industries during 2021. Sustainability went from the latest buzzword to the backdrop of every meeting and announcement, as brands rushed to prove their commitment to slowing the destruction of our planet.

In 2022, sustainability-focused marketers expect climate issues to become further entwined with each piece of the branding ecosystem. From reevaluating client rosters and revamping sustainability reports, to reimagining experiential and improving transparency around carbon footprints, there's a lot of room for improvement in the marketing world.

And at the moment, there's a lot of movement holding brands and agencies accountable.

The activists aren't backing down

During 2021, activist groups began to put pressure the advertising, marketing and PR industries to own up to their involvement in climate disinformation and greenwashing. Clean Creatives, for example, has organized young marketers, climate scientists and celebrities around their campaign to get PR and ad agencies to drop their fossil fuel clients.

Solitaire Townsend, co-founder of the climate-focused, UK-based ad agency Futerra, expects that pressure to build throughout 2022.

There's a "growing dissatisfaction with the industry in terms of its climate response," Townsend said. Throughout this year, she expects to see "really big pushback" against the assumption that advertising and marketing agencies can remain "neutral" on issues of climate change.



[After a 60-Day Review of Its Roster, Edelman Is Sticking With Polluters—For Now](#)

Advertising for a greener future

As industrial activity and the burning of fossil fuels has warmed the climate over the last several decades, advertisers haven't exactly been working on the side of the climate, said Townsend. "Our entire business model is based on selling more shit to more people," she said. "We're not just part of the problem, we are literally the handmaiden of the problem."

Still, the unique power that advertising and marketing has to impact behavior change is a huge opportunity for the industry. But that will require innovation and courage from industry leaders, Townsend said.

Advertising and marketing needs to find “growth and financial viability in this new business model of selling the [climate] solutions and helping to change behaviors and storytelling rather than in the old business model of helping to sell more shit to more people,” she said.

Circular economies within experiential

Selina Donald, the new sustainability director for experiential-focused marketing agency Momentum Worldwide, spoke to Adweek about what climate-focused trends are guiding her first year on the job.

First, Momentum is looking at how to eliminate waste from its experiential brand work. The experiential shop is drawing inspiration from the concept of circular economies—something Donald predicts will inform a lot of conversations around sustainable marketing in 2022. (Circular economies aim to eliminate waste from economic activity by sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible.)

Experiential marketing has historically prioritized making a big splash—wowing consumers and fans—above the long-term use of the materials involved. Donald wants to flip the script.

“We’re working with clients to think about what’s already been built, what do we already own, what’s in storage, and how can we repurpose that,” explained Donald. “How do we make something that’s so modular and can be reused and repurposed on a long term basis, in, not just one year, but five years or 10 years?”

Aligning ‘purpose with paycheck’

Donald also highlighted the importance of agencies taking a strong position on climate and sustainability issues as a way to communicate values to prospective talent—especially at a moment when talent holds the cards.

“The market really needs to wake up to that fact that people want to align purpose with paycheck,” she said. “You want to work somewhere where you feel really proud.”