

The 60% Potential – How to Excite the Masses for Green Consumption through Marketing

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The Green Economy – an economy where sustainability is the central factor – is on the rise. Its guiding principle is no longer just to optimize actions for profit and revenue but to prioritize the environment equally. Ecosystems should be kept free from pollution, biodiversity preserved, raw materials protected for future generations, and the Earth not exploited – all while maintaining a successful economic operation.

The good news: Some technological solutions are already available. New technologies are constantly emerging, allowing us to produce goods in a more resource-efficient manner, move around, and generate energy. Entire value chains can be adapted, and practices like recycling or upcycling extend the lifespan of products, while well-insulated buildings reduce energy consumption. Additionally, more and more sustainable product alternatives are filling supermarket shelves.

The not-so-good news: Sustainable products remain stuck in a niche. According to the German Environment Agency, only about 15% of products in a given category are sustainable. The rest are still mostly conventional products, often with a higher carbon footprint. The main reason for this: Consumers are often not choosing the more sustainable products.

We attribute this to the fact that the sustainable transformation has been largely driven by the natural sciences. As a result, people have been somewhat forgotten in the process.



So how can we truly engage people in the green transformation? How can we excite them about green products?

To answer these questions, we developed the concept of “The 60% Potential”; Approximately 60% of people don’t really know where to stand: On the one hand, they consider green consumption and behavior important, but on the other hand, they associate it with fun-killers like reason, sacrifice, or higher costs.

These people represent the 60% potential for companies – the broad mass that is often overlooked in the ideological battles between eco-fans and eco-skeptics. But these are precisely the people we need to inspire with green consumption! They offer immense potential not only for the environment but also for revenue. If we can win over the 60%, we can finally democratize green consumption. In other words, we’ll make sustainable products bestsellers.

Three Concrete Steps to Realize the 60% Potential

1. Acknowledge Responsibility

Sustainable product alternatives exist. However, they remain stuck in the niche and often fail to meet sales expectations. This is where marketing comes into play: Skillful marketing has long known how to excite the masses about a product or cause.

2. The 60% Think Differently Than Eco-Fans

Eco-fans have paved the way for greener alternatives, and that’s a good thing! But if we want this market to develop further, we need to reach the broader public. We must realize that the 60% think very differently about sustainable products than eco-fans. For example, the broad masses are not willing to pay premiums for green products – even if they say so in market research studies. This is more likely a case of social desirability.

3. Adapt your marketing

In our book, we break down marketing into the classic elements of Product, Price, Promotion, and Placement. These provide good starting points for action:

- **Product:** Product design like in the old health food store? The 60% want beautiful and cool products that support their lifestyle.
- **Price:** Prices like at the organic market? The 60% need to save money. Some find being frugal appealing, while others have too much month left at the end of their money.
- **Promotion:** Rhetoric like at a climate rally? The 60% are looking for brands that surprise and excite them, rather than trying to persuade or overwhelm them with facts.
- **Placement:** Hard-to-find items in specialty stores? The 60% neither have the time nor the desire to search for products – they are used to finding them easily.

Marketing has always understood how to inspire people and get them excited about certain products. We can use this knowledge to make sustainability sexy again.

About the Author

Dr. Johanna Gollnhofer is a researcher at the intersection of marketing and sustainability, dedicated to bridging the gap between resource mindsets. Her work has been featured in top journals and earned awards such as the Sidney Levy and Ferber Awards. Originally from Germany, she has enriched her expertise across seven countries. As a faculty member at the University of St. Gallen, she inspires over 600 students and delivers executive programs for leading brands.

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