

April 2009

AMA and Fleishman-Hillard Research Study

**A RESEARCH STUDY BY  
THE AMERICAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION  
AND FLEISHMAN-HILLARD, INC.**

*Marketers' Views Remain Bright on the Topic of  
Sustainability, Despite Gloomy Economy*

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## **Marketers' Views Remain Bright on the Topic of Sustainability, Despite Gloomy Economy**

When it comes to new and potentially expanded opportunities for sustainable development, communicators — primarily those who hold marketing or public relations jobs — remain optimistic for the future. This optimism is a welcome bright spot in a time of increasing global economic uncertainty and rising climate crisis. Marketers and communicators appear to be taking a long-term view of organizational sustainability, recognizing that new investments made within the next year will pay off handsomely in the years that follow.

Does this mean that 2009 or 2010 will be the tipping point for sustainable marketing initiatives in North America? To find out, the American Marketing Association (AMA) and Fleishman-Hillard conducted a survey to better understand perceptions about the future of sustainability.

More than half of the communicators surveyed say that their organizations will maintain or increase their involvement in sustainability in the next 12 months. One-fifth of those surveyed feel that their organizations have already put considerable efforts and resources behind sustainable development, while 58% say that their organizations will place greater emphasis on sustainable initiatives in the next two to three years. Of those surveyed, only 33% cite little or no anticipated change or emphasis in their sustainability programs in the months ahead.

Forty-three percent of those surveyed say that they will increase their focus on sustainability because it is the right thing to do, customers are asking for it, a sustainable approach supports their organizational culture and, equally important, sustainability offers a clear, distinct business advantage.

Marketers and communicators believe that their organizations' commitments to sustainability are important not only to support the dynamic function of the natural world in positive ways, but also to create business success through increased cost and production efficiencies, enhanced brand image and relationships with stakeholders and competitive differentiation.

Fifty-three percent of respondents define sustainability as the need to balance financial, human and natural resources for the long-term benefit of business and communities.

### **About the Survey**

The American Marketing Association and Fleishman-Hillard collaborated on a survey to gauge perceptions about sustainability. Specifically, the survey aimed to understand:

- Communicators' current perceptions about sustainability
- The potential for future organizational investments in sustainability or adoption of sustainable business practices
- The forces within marketing and corporate organizations that are driving the adoption of sustainability practices and policies
- The anticipated short-term versus long-term payback potential for sustainable initiatives

Fleishman-Hillard developed and designed the web-based survey questionnaire in collaboration with its Corporate Reputation and Sustainability Practice Groups. The AMA conducted the survey between January 14, 2009 and February 19, 2009.

- A total of 270 respondents completed the survey
- One fifth of the respondents come from marketing or communications businesses; the remainder represent a strong cross section of other economic sectors
- 28% of the respondents come from companies with 1,000 or more employees, 41% come from companies with 20 to 999 employees, and 31% of the respondents come from companies with fewer than 20 employees

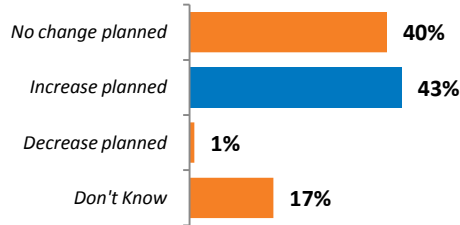
The communicators surveyed include primarily persons in marketing positions, as well as people who are working in public relations, advertising, sales, operations and administrative positions.

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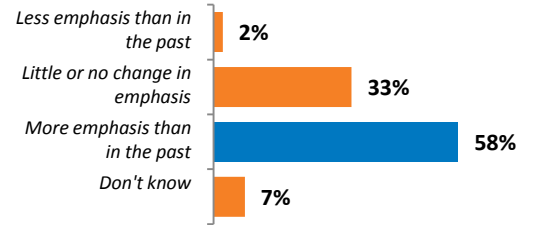
**Summary of Findings**

The survey found that a majority of communicators believe that their organizations will increase their involvement in sustainability in the next year (58%), with 43% anticipating investments and increases in the marketing of sustainability because it is the right thing to do for their business and their customers.

Are specific plans in place for the next 12 months to change the level of emphasis on sustainability practices in your marketing, advertising, and communications with external audiences?

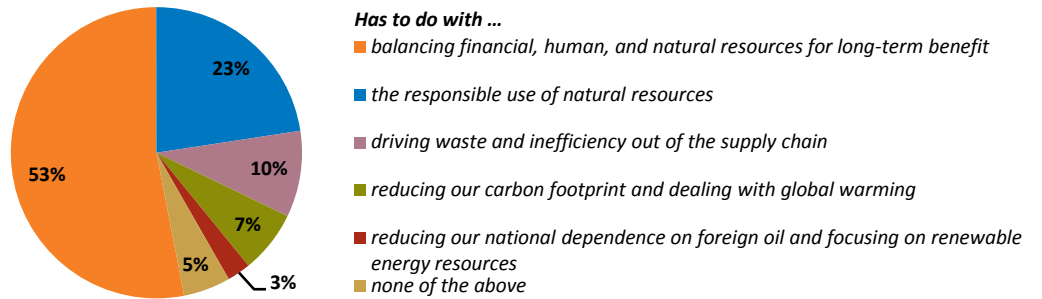


Considering the political, economic and social environment, what emphasis does your organization place on sustainability issues over the next two to three years?



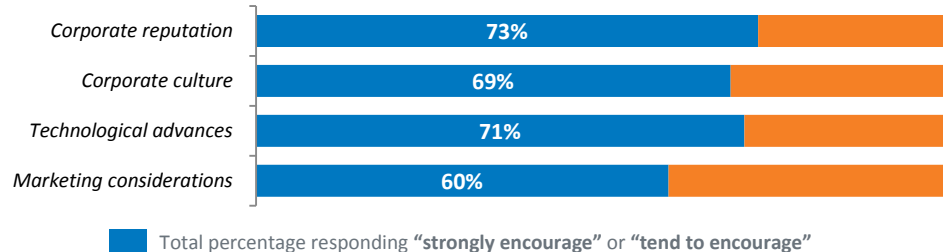
More marketers (53%) believe sustainability has to do with balancing financial, human and natural resources for long-term benefit than with environmental protection (23%). Few define sustainability in terms of focusing on renewable energy resources (3%) or driving inefficiency out of the supply chain (10%).

Which of the following descriptions of sustainability makes the most sense for your organization?



Nearly three-quarters of those surveyed believe that corporate reputation (73%), corporate culture (69%) and technological advancements (71%) will be the drivers for sustainability. While 73% feel that corporate reputation encourages sustainability initiatives, fewer (60%) feel that marketing considerations encourage the adoption of sustainability practices.

Over the next two to three years, do you expect each of the following considerations to discourage or encourage your organization's adoption of sustainability practices?

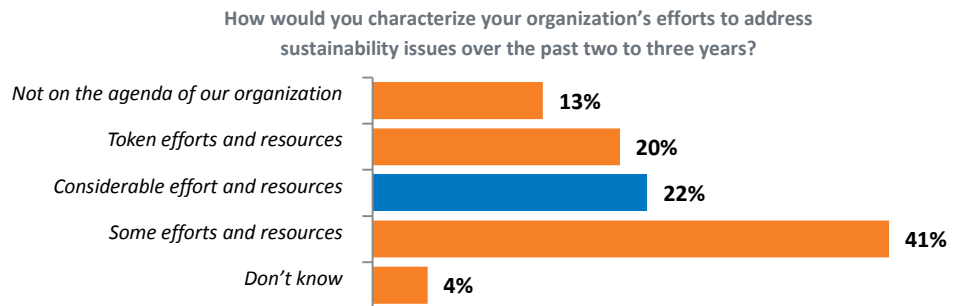


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Marketers believe that their companies, while increasingly committed to sustainability, have a long way to go. Even the most popular sustainability programs — recycling (36%) and electric energy efficiency (20%) — are extensively embraced by only a minority of businesses.



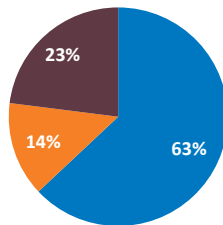
Only a fifth of respondents (22%) feel that their organizations have put considerable efforts and resources behind sustainability issues.



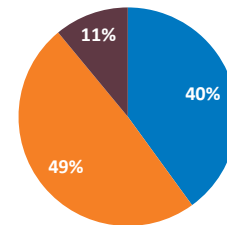
Sixty-three percent believe that the new administration's policies will further accelerate the adoption of sustainability programs. There is no consensus among corporate communicators as to whether or not consumers will pay more for sustainable products in tough economic times (40% agree; 49% disagree).

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about sustainability?

*The policies of the Obama administration will accelerate the adoption of sustainability programs.*



*Even in tough times, consumers will pay more for products that are green.*



■ Total percentage responding "strongly agree" or "tend to agree" ■ Total percentage responding "strongly disagree" or "tend to disagree" ■ No opinion

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Half feel that economic realities encourage the adoption of sustainability practices but some 29% feel that economic realities discourage adoption.

Over the next two to three years, do you expect [economic realities] to discourage or encourage your organization's adoption of sustainability practices?



One in four respondents (27%) believes that his or her organization purposefully keeps a low profile on sustainability efforts. Over half (54%) disagree, while one in five (19%) do not know.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with:  
*Our organization purposely keeps a low profile on our sustainability efforts.*



Employees and customers are more likely to be on the receiving end of communication about an organization's sustainability initiatives. While 58% of communicators expect increases in their organization's involvement in sustainability initiatives, only 43% expect a corresponding increase in communicating the commitments to external audiences.

### About Fleishman-Hillard

Fleishman-Hillard Inc., one of the world's leading public relations firms, has built its reputation by using strategic communications to deliver what its clients value most: meaningful, positive and measurable impact on the performance of their organizations. The firm is widely recognized for excellent client service and a strong company culture founded on teamwork, integrity and personal commitment.

Based in St. Louis, the firm operates throughout North America, Europe, Asia Pacific, Middle East, South Africa, and Latin America through its 80 owned offices. For more information, visit [www.fleishman.com](http://www.fleishman.com).

### How FH Sustainability Can Help

FH Sustainability provides strategic consulting and communications services to assist organizations in addressing strategic priorities and business development opportunities. Specifically, the FH Sustainability Practice Group:

- Empowers internal audiences to address energy management and natural resource challenges
- Advocates for policies and practices that have positive environmental business consequences
- Helps create environmental performance metrics for operations, products and services
- Addresses climate change priorities
- Connects natural resource priorities with broader organizational and external agendas
- Identifies and builds the external relationships needed for success
- Communicates organizational values, positions and programs

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### How FH Reputation Management Can Help

Reputation is an organization's most important asset and strong, credible, well-respected reputations are built over time by doing the right thing across the organization and taking appropriate credit for achievements. FH's Reputation Practice uses a strategy-driven and systematic process to maintain, measure, and protect reputation to achieve business goals so you can:

- Attract and retain the best employees or members
- Find strong business partners
- Build awareness of your brand
- Capture the loyalty of customers

Fleishman-Hillard's reputation management team's expertise includes corporate-positioning, executive visibility, ongoing research, media relations, issues management, investor relations, employee and customer communications, crisis preparation and response and obtaining appropriate awards and recognition.

### About the American Marketing Association

The American Marketing Association (AMA) is the largest marketing association in North America. It is a professional association for individuals and organizations involved in the practice, teaching and study of marketing worldwide. It is also the source that marketers turn to every day for information/resources, education/training and professional networking. AMA members are connected to a network of experienced marketers nearly 40,000 strong and include leading marketing academics, researchers and practitioners from every industry.

AMA offers highly acclaimed seminars, workshops and Hot Topic events focused on the immediate needs of marketers, as well as trends shaping the future. AMA's website, [MarketingPower.com](http://MarketingPower.com), is the everyday connection to marketing data, articles, case studies, best practices and a robust job bank. The AMA also is the source for the field's top magazines and journals, including Marketing News. AMA professional and collegiate chapters and special interest groups keep members in touch with the best people and the best practices.

For more information on the American Marketing Association please visit [www.MarketingPower.com](http://www.MarketingPower.com).

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