



Google's Sustainability Marketing Playbook

Reviewed by
**PROJECT
DRAWDOWN.**



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PROJECT DRAWDOWN®

Google is grateful to Project Drawdown and Drawdown Labs for their input into the first edition of this playbook and for lending their expertise to our early thinking.

As external reviewers, Project Drawdown evaluated the recommendations in this playbook, providing feedback regarding the relative importance and impact of actions relative to the amount of greenhouse gases reduced or avoided in the atmosphere. Together, Google and Project Drawdown prioritized and ranked the actions, ensuring that this playbook content is both actionable and impactful.

[Project Drawdown](#) is the world's leading resource for climate solutions. The nonprofit organization's mission is to help the world stop climate change—as quickly, safely, and equitably as possible. Project Drawdown does this by advancing effective, science-based climate solutions and strategies; fostering bold, new climate leadership; and promoting new climate narratives and new voices.

[Drawdown Labs](#) is Project Drawdown's private sector testing ground for accelerating the scaling of climate solutions. Leveraging the organization's world-class research and analysis — and the cross-industry capabilities of participating businesses and funders — Drawdown Labs experiments with collaborative ways to address climate change at unprecedented scale and offers the world a more expansive vision for private sector climate leadership.



What's the point?



Make climate action **easy**.

This is **one stop shopping** for marketers to learn how to reduce waste and emissions as quickly as possible.



Understand marketing **superpowers**.

Reducing operational waste is important. As marketers, our **real leverage is in the stories we tell** - and how we enable broader action for our billions of users.



Measure and track **progress**.

Start accounting for waste and carbon footprint now. **Focus on what matters in the race to zero**, and do it in your creative today.

Why should you care?



It matters to **consumers**.

[Three quarters](#) of US consumers feel big businesses should play a role in fighting climate change and [85% of executives](#) acknowledge customers are more likely to engage and do business with sustainable brands

AD NET ZERO
ALL FOR NONE

It matters to the **industry**.

The marketing industry is rallying behind joint initiatives like [AdNetZero](#), [AdGreen](#) and [GARM](#).



It matters to **citizens**.

Sustainability policies are emerging globally to support better marketing practices. For example, the EU is working on a [proposal for a directive on green claims](#).



Every job is a **climate job** now.

To solve the climate crisis, we must get [all hands on deck](#). And this isn't just about the planet., it's also about people, equality, and values.



What can marketers do?



Magic

Goals

Use your leverage to remove barriers and turbocharge climate solutions.



Shape culture

Show diverse people taking climate action as a normal, fun part of their everyday lives.

Culture is critical context for climate solutions and action, telling us what is right or wrong, what is possible or impossible. Cultural change can feel difficult, but it sets the context for what we do as a society and can foster a sense of collective courage.



Change behavior

Create new ways of operating. Craft stories about the ways your products and solutions support climate-friendly behaviors. All climate solutions have behavioral dimensions, and some hinge almost entirely on human habit.



Invest responsibly

Work with partners that prioritize climate action. Ask what partners or their parent companies are doing to support climate action and use that as your evaluation for partner selection.



Fundamentals

Goals

Design, build and buy intentionally to avoid pollution.



Reduce first

Do you really need to build or buy something new? Always consider finite resources (raw materials, shipping / travel emissions, labor hours, money) before you create.



Reuse when you can

Use rented or pre-loved structures, furniture, plants, etc. Remember where you kept that perfect design element - so you can use it later.



Recycle/compost as a last resort

Recycling is hard to get right. Less than [10%](#) of plastic gets recycled worldwide. “Compostable” foodware usually isn’t. Always [vet](#) local capabilities per material before recycling planning. Reduce first.

01

Marketing that supports change



Marketing that supports change

Key principles



Lead with genuine user needs

Anchor narratives on genuine user needs instead of creating new ones that could encourage excessive consumption and waste (e.g. [Don't Buy This Jacket](#) campaign by Patagonia). It's good marketing practice and fundamental for the Google brand to be seen as truly helpful.



Learn what sustainability means to your audience

"Sustainability" means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. Users' expectations for your product or service may also vary greatly depending on their geographic location or belief systems.

Check out some of Google's tools to better understand sustainable audiences, behaviors & search trends on Think With Google. Tools include [Market Finder](#), [Google Trends](#) & the Insights tab in Google Ads accounts.



Feature brands or products that showcase sustainable values

Showcase how other brands and partners are using our products to make a change (e.g. [Stella McCartney](#), [Levi Strauss & Co.](#), [Rothy's](#)).

Avoid doing co-branding with companies with questionable sustainability practices.



Integrate sustainability throughout the creative process

Infuse sustainability right from the brief stage (e.g. include a default sustainability question in your brief template such as "how will you ensure this project is in alignment with our goals?"). [Examples can be found here](#).

Bake sustainability into your creative review process (e.g. make someone accountable for calling out creatives that foster unsustainable behaviors).



Portray eco-conscious characters

[We know that representing all categories of the population in a non-stereotypical way can help support equity](#). Portraying eco-conscious characters can also go a long way. Many of our users are already changing their consumption habits. And picturing sustainable actions is often the most inclusive option as durable products tend to also be the most economical and accessible of all.

Ensure your team's creative library provides access to eco-friendly imagery that's relevant to your business area.



Understand & prevent greenwashing

Greenwashing = Any message that may mislead the public on the real sustainable quality of a product or service or on the reality of the company's sustainability strategy or inciting behavior contrary to the ecological transition. Greenwashing can result in public backlash and significant financial loss.

Share authentic, informative and precise information about our products and services.

Give preference to eco-conscious behaviors

Food & beverage



Make plant-based meals look delicious

- Show people enjoying vegetables, legumes, pasta, plant based meat etc... even for special occasions.
- Veganism has exploded in the past decade, and its rise in popularity shows [no sign of stopping any time soon](#).



Make cooking part of people's routine

- Show people and families cooking real food instead of processed and packaged meals or takeouts. Bonus point: Show food scraps and compost bins.
- A growing part of households' expenditures are dedicated to grocery and [1 in 3 Americans learned to cook during the COVID lockdown](#). This is also the healthiest choice.



Default to reusable dishware

- Show people using reusable mugs, cutlery, plates. No disposable paper, plastic, or styrofoam even when they're on the go. Show parents putting kids' lunches in reusable lunch bags. Reusables are often more aesthetic too.
- Reusables are less expensive in the long run. As more people spend time at home, it is also the most likely representation of people's new habits.

Transportation



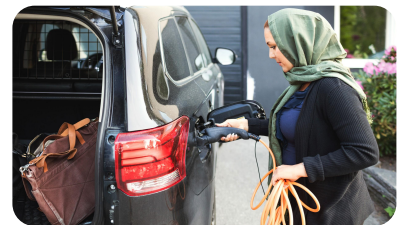
Encourage mass transportation

- Show people taking the train, the bus or even carpooling and carsharing and highlight the benefits of such transportation modes. Avoid showing cars with only one passenger.
- Remember that not everyone can afford a car and while driving may be the norm in the US, it is not as frequent [in other parts of the world](#).



Promote alternative modes of transportation

- Show people riding bikes, scooters or simply walking. [Many people plan to use shared-mobility and micromobility options like electric bicycles in the future](#).



Normalize green choices

- Show people using electric or hybrid cars. If you have to go with gas cars, pick small models rather than SUVs, vans etc.
- People are increasingly searching for "[electric car](#)" and past the March 2020 dip, this is back at an all time high.

Give preference to eco-conscious behaviors

Resources & energy



Shed light on solar energy

- Show houses equipped with solar panels or portray people charging devices using solar energy.
- In an economic crisis, adding solar panels to a home means never having to pay an electric bill again and the investment can even increase property value.
- Solar is also a great solution for the [750M people](#) who are still not connected to the grid.



Encourage responsible water consumption

- Show people swimming in the sea or lakes rather than in pools. Choose bathrooms with showers rather than baths.
- These are usually the most affordable options.



Showcase renewable energies in the landscape

- Show wind turbines or solar panels in the background.



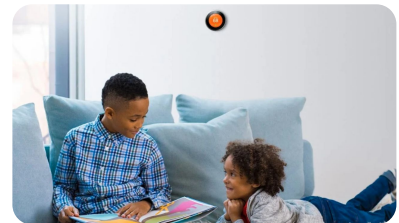
Encourage responsible electricity consumption

- Show people using reasonably sized screens. Prefer laptops over desktop as they are significantly less energy-intensive.
- Few people can afford a 85" flat screen tv.
- Desktop use is also dropping so laptops are more true to life.



Feature energy-saving home appliances or technology

- The energy-saving bulb is a worn out image so think creatively! Picture characters using permanent coffee filters, or coffee percolators instead of capsules. Have laundry drying on a clothesline for scenes in backyard instead of featuring a drying machine.
- Appliances you see as a necessity may be a nice-to-have elsewhere in the world.



Showcase energy-efficient heating & cooling

- Use images of cutting-edge, energy-efficient home climate solutions like heat pumps, smart thermostats, low-flow fixtures, high-performance glass, or green roofs to start to normalize them.

Give preference to eco-conscious behaviors

Circular consumption



Encourage people to fix and upcycle

- Show people giving a second life to their belongings. Do not incentivize people to consume more than they need to.



Empower people to make things

- Show people crafting things at home (baking, sewing, knitting etc.)



Prompt people to reuse

- Show people buying clothes in thrift shops or furniture in antique stores.
- Thrifting has become more popular in recent years, with young people from all over the world flocking to the trend.

Shopping



Show diverse grocery shopping experiences

- Show people getting fruits, vegetables and grains (not meat) at farmers' markets or in smaller health food stores rather than the traditional mall or supermarkets. Instead of buying pre-packaged goods, they can also buy in bulk and/or store their food in reusable containers.



Opt for reusable bags

- All too often, our characters use disposable bags. Research shows that paper bags are not greener than plastic bags. So the best option is a mesh or canvas tote bag. They're also more aesthetic.
- Many regions and countries around the world are phasing out or have already [banned plastic bags](#).



Be careful with delivery packaging

- Delivery tends to increase our carton usage. When portraying people unboxing goods, limit unnecessary wrapping and packaging usage.



Give preference to eco-conscious behaviors

Connection to nature



Portray people in nature

- Show people spending time in the wild or in contact with animals.
- During COVID, [people spent more time outdoors](#) and local nature tourism increased.



Cultivate people's interest for gardening

- Show people growing their own food, watering indoor plants or beautifying urban areas.
- [In the US, 7 in 10 millennials call themselves a plant parent.](#)



Highlight humans' bond with animals

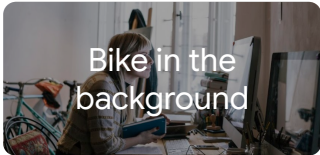
- Celebrate our appreciation for wildlife by showing people caring for animals (e.g, observing wild life without interfering with the ecosystem).

Are you using any of these in your creative?

Green examples



Bus stop



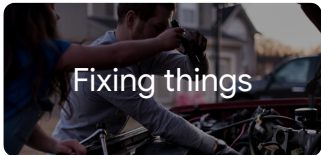
Bike in the background



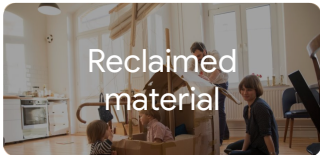
Reusable cup



Cooking



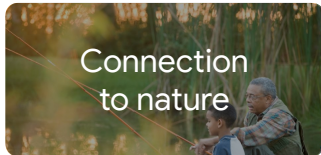
Fixing things



Reclaimed material

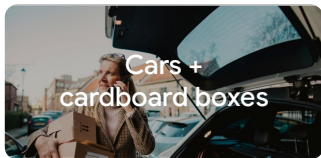


Gardening



Connection to nature

Not so green examples



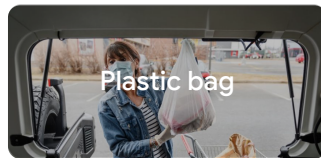
Cars + cardboard boxes



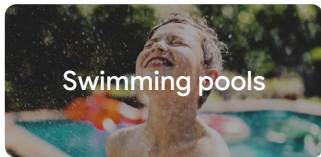
Excessive plastic wrapping



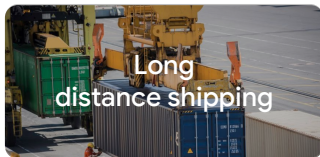
Aestheticization of cars



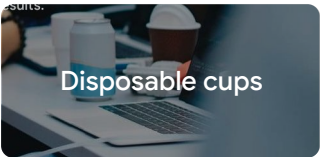
Plastic bag



Swimming pools



Long distance shipping



Disposable cups

02

Sustainable events and experiences

Transportation



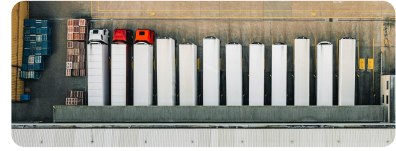
Minimize flights

- Air travel accounts can lead to significant emissions footprints.
- Think about your audience and minimize the miles they need to fly.
- Minimize agency travel.
- For in-person events, track and offset all miles flown by attendees and vendors.



Encourage mass transportation

- Offer vouchers for public transportation.
- Offer low-emissions shuttle services.
- Communicate up front to attendees about our sustainability efforts and incentivize public transportation.



Minimize trucking weight & distance

- Work with your agency partners to source local vendors.
- Work with scenic shops on how to scale back on shipping needs.

Energy



Understand your energy mix

- Request a breakdown of energy sources from venues. Even asking the question brings awareness to the importance of including renewables in electric contracts.



Delete or improve generators

- Generators burn through a lot of diesel, and biodiesel isn't much better.
- Encourage vendors to run shore power instead of adding generators.
- Push for alternate sources like battery and PV microgrids



Seek venues with efficiency + renewables built in

- Ask questions early to build lower emissions into all of your onsite operations.

Food & beverage



Reduce food waste

- Order the [right amount](#) of food for attendees.
- Make a plan so that leftover food doesn't go to waste. (see [Copia](#))
- Serve buffet style rather than box lunch style.



Source plant-based

- Eliminate beef.
- Give vegetarian items visual priority over meat-based items.



Choose reusable dishware

- Wash, don't toss.
- Eliminate single-use containers. Pass out reusable water bottles and employ refill stations.
- If disposables are unavoidable, use truly compostable wares in locations where compost is part of the city's waste management plan.

Build



Reduce single-use flooring

- Connect with local waste management companies on what can be recycled [i.e. Recology in San Francisco recycles carpets; rubber flooring can be donated].



Use reclaimed & reused materials

- What's old can be made new again - and requires less energy to build.



Rent or source vintage locally instead of buying new

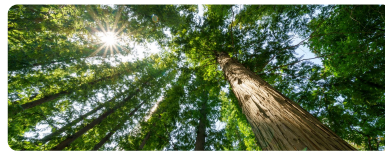
- Fewer transportation emissions, and less invested energy.

Graphics



Eliminate foam core

- Try falconboard or ecoboard. They are 100% recyclable, contain post-consumer recycled content and are approved by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- Make sure printing doesn't render them un-recyclable. Use water-based, vegan inks, and don't laminate.



Use sustainable materials

- Focus on printed materials meeting sustainable requirements such as FSC or 100% recycled content.



Use alternative methods for distributing information

- Can a single sign obviate thousands of flyers?
- Can information live online, pointed-to with a short URL?

Other stuff



Minimize swag

- Instead of producing a t-shirt, bag, or bottle for every attendee (that might end up in the trash), make a small amount that you'll run out of. It makes the items precious - not dumpster fodder.



Use onsite water

- Water is sometimes trucked in for various reasons, like dishwashing. That's bad for emissions.
- Pick venues that can accommodate all your water needs - including washing dishware.



Encourage reusable water bottles or provide them as swag

- Reduction is best - ask attendees bring their own vessels. Producing a small amount as swag (not one for everyone) is a good alternative.

03

Sustainable creative production

Shoots



Review image libraries before your shoots

- Consider whether you need to mount a shoot at all. You might be able to source images that already exist.
- Libraries like [Getty Images](#) and [Shutterstock](#) can find images that competitors haven't used already.
- Consider using [Product Studio](#) and [AI-powered video editing on YouTube](#) too.



Reduce food waste and prioritise plant-forward catering on set

- Ask caterers to provide plant-forward food options and ask attendees to submit food choices in advance to reduce food waste.
- Donate excess food and use reusable cutlery.
- If using trailers, request those powered by renewable electricity.



Re-use on set and re-home afterward

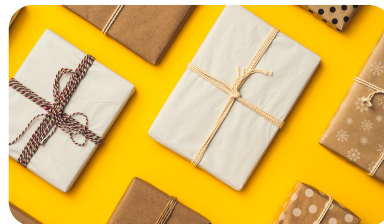
- Avoid buying new to dress cast or sets. For example, brief agencies to source wardrobes from second-hand shops.
- Work with agency partners to find a second home for materials used on set.

Packaging & direct mail



Avoid materials that cannot be re-used or recovered

- For printed material, opt for post-consumer recycled paper and choose [FSC-certified products](#).
- Replace foam or bubble wrap with recyclable, paper-based protection.
- If you need to use plastic, consider using [Prevented Ocean Plastic](#).



Design out waste

- Be efficient: design packaging that's just the right fit for your product and minimise packaging thickness.
- Use embossing or direct printing to avoid labels.
- Avoid combining different materials as it limits recycling opportunities.
- Direct agency partners to review the tools at the [Sustainable Packaging Coalition](#) and use the circular design guides at the [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#).



Explore experiences, not stuff

- Consider whether direct mail could be replaced by a low-emissions experience. Remember that kits and swag often gets tossed.
- If physical assets need to be made, source items produced locally to reduce emissions from shipping.
- Upcycle unused swag at the end of its life; for example donate clothing to local charities.

Retail marketing & post production



Ensure retail fixtures are environmentally-friendly and recyclable

- Select environmentally friendly finishes and materials, such as those made using natural or renewable sources, and do not contain CFCs, HCFCs and other toxins.
- Avoid fixture materials that are difficult to disassemble, recycle and dispose: MDF, acrylic, solid surface resins, glued/laminated materials, magnets.
- Invest in modular fixtures that can be broken down into parts by material for reuse, upcycling, or recycling.



Create a second life for demo units

- Convert demo units back to commercial units for donation or second-hand markets, where possible.
- Move away from dummy demo units (not recyclable)



Reduce file size

- Consider how you can reduce digital pollution — the electricity usage from data centers, networks, and end user devices.
- For example, when sharing files online, make sure to compress files before sending, and ask your agencies to do the same.

04

Ready to
go forth?



Measuring impact

More tools are being developed every day. For now, we encourage our agency partners to explore and engage with these industry-led initiatives.



Media production

Reduce emissions from advertising production

[Learn more](#)



Media planning & buying

Reduce emissions from advertising production

[Learn more](#)



Events & experiences

Reduce advertising emissions through awards and events

[Learn more](#)



Culture change

Harness advertising's power to support consumer behavior change

[Learn more](#)

A final checklist

To inspire and normalize sustainable behaviors and move towards marketing toward a net model.

01

Remember to:

- ✓ Limit long-distance travel
- ✓ Consider local & sustainability-forward teams
- ✓ Ask what partners are doing to support climate action
- ✓ Re-use and re-home as possible
- ✓ Cancel swag or make it useful

02

Sustainable events & experiences:

- ✓ Improve your energy mix
- ✓ Reduce food waste
- ✓ Source plant-based food
- ✓ Choose reusables & optimise waste
- ✓ Prioritize reclaimed, rent or second-hand in build
- ✓ Use alternative comms methods
- ✓ Use on-site water and refill

03

Marketing that supports change:

- ✓ Lead with genuine user needs
- ✓ Learn what sustainability means
- ✓ Integrate sustainability into creative process
- ✓ Portray eco-conscious characters
- ✓ Feature partners that challenge the status quo
- ✓ Understand and prevent greenwashing

04

Sustainable media production:

- ✓ Review image libraries
- ✓ Reduce food waste & prioritise plant-based on set
- ✓ Re-use on set and re-home after
- ✓ Avoid materials that can't be re-used or recovered
- ✓ Design out waste
- ✓ Explore experiences, not stuff
- ✓ Ensure retail fixtures are environmentally friendly
- ✓ Create a second-life for demo units
- ✓ Reduce file sizes

Your efforts
are making a
difference.