

How to create content with impact: a guide for ESG-focused organisations

Getting results from content marketing has never been more challenging. Especially if you're an ESG-focused organisation, dealing with increasing regulation and cynicism in the face of so much green-washing and values-washing.

Yet with the right strategy, content is still an incredibly powerful marketing tool, especially when it comes to building trust. So how do you ensure that the content you create makes an impact – and showcases yours?

It's important to understand the challenges that exist within today's marketing and business landscape, so that you can create a content strategy that takes these challenges into account. Only by doing so can you fully plan to create a brand that stands on genuine value as well as values, and outlasts whatever trend springs up next.

The content marketing challenge

Ever since the [phrase content marketing was coined in 2001](#) there are two issues that have been growing exponentially: [noise and cynicism](#).

In the early 2000s, only the biggest brands had websites. But when Wordpress and Squarespace launched in 2003, websites became accessible to all. Then YouTube, Twitter, print-on-demand and all the other platforms and channels arrived and suddenly, the internet was a very noisy place.

As content marketing has evolved, so has our cynicism. We're far less ready to believe what we read or see or hear than we once were.

And AI is only making these problems worse. From low quality ChatGPT blog content to generic AI-generated responses on LinkedIn and a host of deep fakes across pretty much every digital channel going, it's no wonder we don't know who to trust.

The ESG / purpose marketing challenge

Alongside these broader content marketing challenges, there are a unique set of hurdles facing any organisation that has a set of values, principles or ESG-criteria at its heart.

The first is the language used to describe such brands, which is constantly evolving and never simple. As we entered the 21st century, terms like 'ethical', 'green', and 'eco-friendly' were

popular. Today we're more likely to talk about a business being purpose-driven or values-led. CSR (corporate social responsibility) has been joined and in some cases replaced by ESG. None of these really captures the whole truth – and all have been misused.

Then there's the fact that purpose is no longer a differentiator in the way it once was. As buyers demand more in the way of values from their suppliers, brands are jumping on the purpose bandwagon. Which means that once again, we're seeing an increase in noise that makes it harder to stand out.

Likewise, people are becoming more cynical. Claim impact without being able to back that up and you'll face accusations of green-washing or values-washing. Increasingly, you may also face regulatory compliance issues too.

In the face of these challenges, there are a number of factors to consider within your brand and content marketing strategy...

Positioning on value rather than values

First things first – are your ESG credentials really strong enough to be the foundation on which you build your outward facing brand? Are you a Patagonia, a Who Gives A Crap, or a [Davines](#)?

If not, you will need to consider how else to format your value proposition, focusing on [the value you can add rather than simply the values you hold](#). Given the choice between a company with a great product and undefined values, or a company with a solid ESG policy but an average product, most buyers would opt for the former.

If you do have the credentials to build a brand around ESG criteria (and your audience cares about this sufficiently for it to be a differentiator), make sure you can back up your claims. In this, as in all things, you need to show rather than tell – and not in a tokenistic way. Pictures of your team planting trees might look great on LinkedIn but if you're also using non-recyclable plastics in your product packaging, that's marketing fluff at best and greenwashing at worst.

Making sure ESG is an operational effort first

Speaking of tokenistic, if ESG efforts are led by the marketing department, they are always going to feel like a layer of makeup – designed to embellish or to hide rather than tell the truth. ESG needs to be operationally driven, informing activity and decision-making throughout the organisation, with impact being tracked as anything else would be.

The job of the marketing department in regards to impact is the same as it is in all things - to provide customers and potential customers with the information they're looking for. People want to know what brands stand for. They want to understand how they treat people and the planet.

So marketers within ESG-focused organisations need to package up that information and communicate it with the outside world as best as possible. To demonstrate impact across all marketing channels, to ensure that impact reports are engaging as well as accurate, to spread the message as widely as possible.

Being helpful, not just good

That said, it's not just about communicating impact. Wherever you sit on the scale of values, whether it's a central part of your value proposition or not, remember that your marketing needs to be more about helping your audience than proving how good you are.

As a B Corporation, values are naturally a central part of who we are at RH&Co. And they definitely resonate with our clients, especially fellow B Corps and those in ESG-focused or third sector organisations. But what they really care about is that we're an exceptional bunch of writers and strategists who can help them communicate their expertise effectively.

Yes, we have an [impact report](#) and yes, we sometimes share [our views about topics like immigration](#). But the majority of our marketing focuses on content strategy, getting the best out of subject matter experts or creating content for each stage of the customer journey. In other words, how our creative team helps clients to [build their brand reputation](#).

Naturally, our values are what drives our business – but being helpful and valuable is what drives our content.

Treading carefully when it comes to AI

It would be remiss of us to talk about ESG and content marketing without a nod to AI. It's arguably the single biggest consideration in the business world right now, and we can no longer sit on the fence over the issue.

The temptation to use AI is strong. It promises an awful lot, and there's a fear of being left behind unless we adopt it wholeheartedly. But like all silver bullets, there's more to the story than there might appear.

Regardless of how useful you find tools like ChatGPT or Midjourney or the many in-brand applications springing up, the reality is that [there are enormous ethical and environmental costs to using AI](#). These range from energy and water usage to plagiarism and copyright issues.

And the truth is that, as it stands, it's simply not good enough to create content that will stand out and have impact in the noise and cynicism that define today's marketing arena. If you want lots of content, AI can help. If you want to build a reputation, you still need humans.

Investing in the longterm

To truly have an impact in this world, we need to balance short term results with long term impact. Carrying out activities today that have little positive effect on tomorrow just isn't enough. It's the 'feed a person / teach a person to fish' principle.

We need to take the same approach to building ESG-focused brands. Short term activations may be necessary but if you want to be seen as a values-led organisation then, as well as actually being a genuinely values-led organisation, you need to look at brand building as a longterm exercise.

A lot of the content you create won't generate exciting results this week or this month or maybe even this quarter. But over time it will all build together to create something much bigger than itself. The somewhat nebulous, often fragile and utterly essential asset every ESG-focused organisation needs: a trusted reputation.

Need support creating content with impact?

At RH&Co we've been working with purpose-led businesses, organisations, charities and non-profits for almost a decade. As a B Corp ourselves, we understand the challenges of creating content that is impactful and showcases our values without straying into greenwashing territory.

Here are just some of the ways we can help:

Brand messaging & value proposition development

To help you create a consistent impression across every touchpoint

Content strategy & campaign design

To build your reputation by showcasing your expertise and credentials

One off & ongoing content creation

Including website copy, thought leadership, case studies and impact reports

To find out more, visit our website at www.rin-hamburgh.co.uk or contact the team on talktous@rin-hamburgh.co.uk.