

# If I Knew, I Would

## PARTNERING FOR CHANGE AT SCALE

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At the 2022 Sustainable Brands Conference, we shared a new study on consumer engagement and sustainable behaviors. The research revealed that there is a spectrum of intention, from those who will “do nothing” in the face of climate change, to those who believe sustainability isn’t just a set of choices, but a way of life.

The good news is general receptivity for sustainable behaviors is high. Fifty-four percent of consumers are willing to adopt a mix of simple, easy behaviors to protect the planet, and 26 percent are willing to go even further and make changes to their lifestyle. These are exciting data points for sustainability practitioners and brands who are creating products that are better for the planet.

But we also saw a challenge. Consumers aren’t willing to make the same level of lifestyle change across all sustainable behaviors. When asking about specific intentions, (i.e., willingness to rent or buy used products instead of new ones, openness to using products made from nature-friendly ingredients, receptivity to skipping eating meat once a week), some consumers aren’t as easily motivated to make major changes.

**Three well-established barriers to adopting these sustainable behaviors emerged in our study:**



**Cost**



**Accessibility**



**Performance**

To these findings we say:

- **Value products and sustainable products cannot be mutually exclusive.** Brands must address the economics of sustainable goods.
- **There should be no sustainable product deserts.** Sustainable products must also be available to everyone, everywhere.
- **And brands need to actively counter the misperceptions about the performance of sustainable products.** People must believe sustainable products are efficacious.

We uncovered one more barrier that may be well known – but is less talked about. In many ways its best addressed by a collective of brands working together in a pre-competitive space. It’s an issue that transcends categories and could benefit from a more cooperative approach. The barrier is best articulated by the consumer sentiment, **“If I knew, I would.”**

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Across numerous sustainable behaviors, over one-third of respondents communicated a lack of knowledge or understanding about how, why and where to participate, and how their participation benefited the environment.

Specifically, we learned that **38 percent** of respondents would throw away fewer products if they **knew how to extend the life** of existing products. They told us they would use more nature-friendly products if they **knew more about the ingredients** (**31%**) or if the **labels clearly indicated** how they are nature friendly (**39%**). We learned that they would **upgrade or update products** without having to get new ones (**37%**), **access replacement parts** or tips for repairs (**34%**) and **upcycle** or use products in a **different or new way** (**32%**) if they knew how.

This is a unique moment in time. Consumers have never been more primed for new behaviors in pursuit of a better future. COVID-19 reshaped our capacity for change and collaboration. We saw, repeatedly, that if a consumer had the right information, they would act accordingly – if they knew.

We must seize the moment and help people understand how to participate in the sustainable economy and what their impact can be. Even more, we must change social norms so that people feel compelled to opt in.

We believe there is a striking opening to influence behavior change at scale – an opportunity to drive greater adoption of the sustainable behaviors that will ultimately fuel the long-term purchase of sustainable products, shareholder value and societal good. This vision would benefit from a coalition approach – brands partnering together to help create the environment for large scale change.

There is a precedent for fueling this kind of change through Public Education. Broad sweeping campaigns helped change the trajectory of smoking. They taught people to wear seat belts, to stop littering and to eat differently for better health. There is an opportunity for brands to partner on this together, to form a coalition and help move consumers across the sustainability spectrum.

In 2022, businesses remain the most trusted institution in our nation – ahead of NGOs, government, and the media. This is both an opportunity and a responsibility. People are exercising their agency through the brands they choose. And it's never been clearer that an organization must think seriously not just about its environmental impact, but how it will participate in shaping a safer, more sustainable future.

**If they knew, they would.**

**Let's help them, so they do.**

**Now is the time.**