

ESG, sustainability and Net Zero - the role of communications

You'd be hard pressed to find many professionals working in the built environment sector today who don't believe we need to do more, better and faster, to tackle the risks and impact of climate change and social injustice.

But for every campaign, initiative or guideline published, there is an essential element that needs to be delivered: effective, clear and targeted communications throughout the supply chain and with clients, building users, employees and their families.

ESG (environmental, social and governance) is a collective term for measuring an organisation's impact on social and environmental issues and its governance beyond simply generating revenue or making a profit.

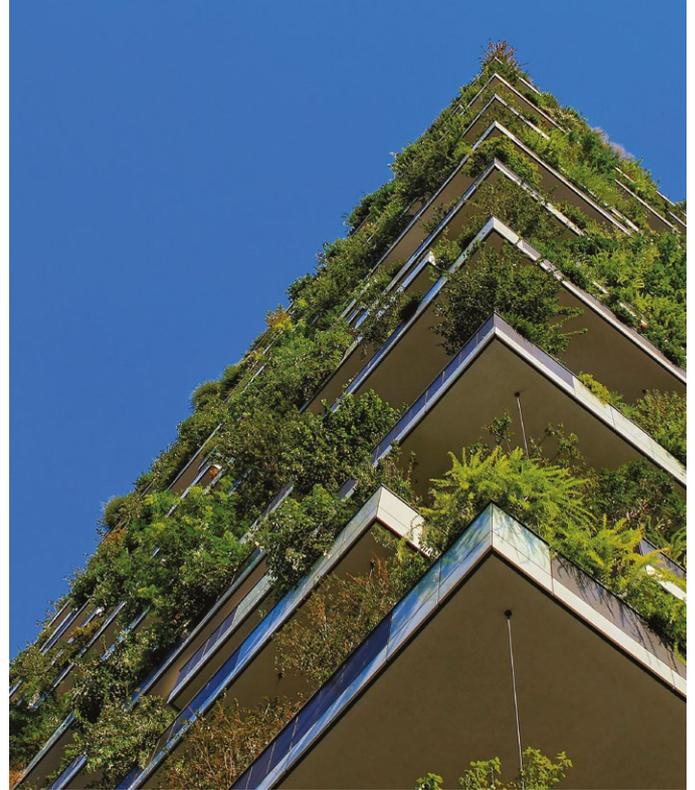


Photo: Ricardo - Unsplash

For construction and the built environment, this could mean initiatives around Net Zero and climate mitigation, resource use, nature and biodiversity, health and wellbeing, socio-economic impact, jobs and skills, diversity and inclusion, and much more.

Many organisations are doing great things, and these need to be shared and celebrated.

Avoid the common pitfalls

Your ESG communications should clearly lay out your approach to listening to stakeholder needs, to addressing priority issues for people and the planet, and to demonstrating progress.

Effective communications about ESG issues – including promoting organisational commitments to Net Zero and the design and development of highly sustainable construction projects – also demands good technical knowledge, a close eye on the business benefits, and a detailed understanding of the stakeholders that you need to reach.



Photo: Alexander Abero - Unsplash

5 things to avoid (and tips):

- 1 AVOID** an unclear initiative with vague business goals or woolly communications objectives
(TIP: Align your work to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, refer to the Construction Innovation Hub's Value Toolkit for help in framing the value proposition of construction projects, and get input from your comms team from the start)
- 2 AVOID** messages that are too complex or nuanced, lack consistency or engagement
(TIP: Keep it personal, tell a consistent story with creativity and flair, and tailor it to engender a positive emotional response from the people you're talking to)
- 3 AVOID** messages that are also too simplistic or at risk of greenwash
(TIP: Try not to use too much of the 'eco', 'green', 'fair', 'natural' or 'environmentally friendly' shorthand)
- 4 AVOID** a lack of metrics, insights or learning
(TIP: Share all lessons learned, embrace transparency and be generous with your knowledge and data, and demonstrate genuine thought leadership)
- 5 AVOID** jumping into the communications tactics without a clear plan
(TIP: Back to step 1 above)



Communicating in the right way

The biggest threat to trust and confidence when it comes to sustainability focused communications is ‘greenwashing’. This happens when vague, inaccurate or unsubstantiated claims are made about products, services or policies. Like fake news, greenwashing creates confusion, misunderstanding, distrust and cynicism.

There is lots of guidance on how to communicate in the right way, including:

- The Government’s Green Claims Code
- Advertising Standards Authority code on environmental claims
- Code for Construction Product Information (CCPI)

But while greenwashing is clearly damaging to corporate reputation and to society’s progress towards sustainability, so is the opposite extreme.

“Greenblushing is the opposite of greenwashing; instead of providing buyers with misleading information about their sustainability efforts, companies that engage in greenblushing disseminate little or no information about their social and environmental sustainability practices or the environmentally-positive characteristics of their products.”
(UL.com)

Got a story to tell? The business case for positive, proactive sustainability communications is sound. What matters now is how we go about it. Let’s talk about how we can help you.

Email: hello@lizmale.co.uk

Call: Liz Male on 07778 778361

Visit: www.lizmale.co.uk

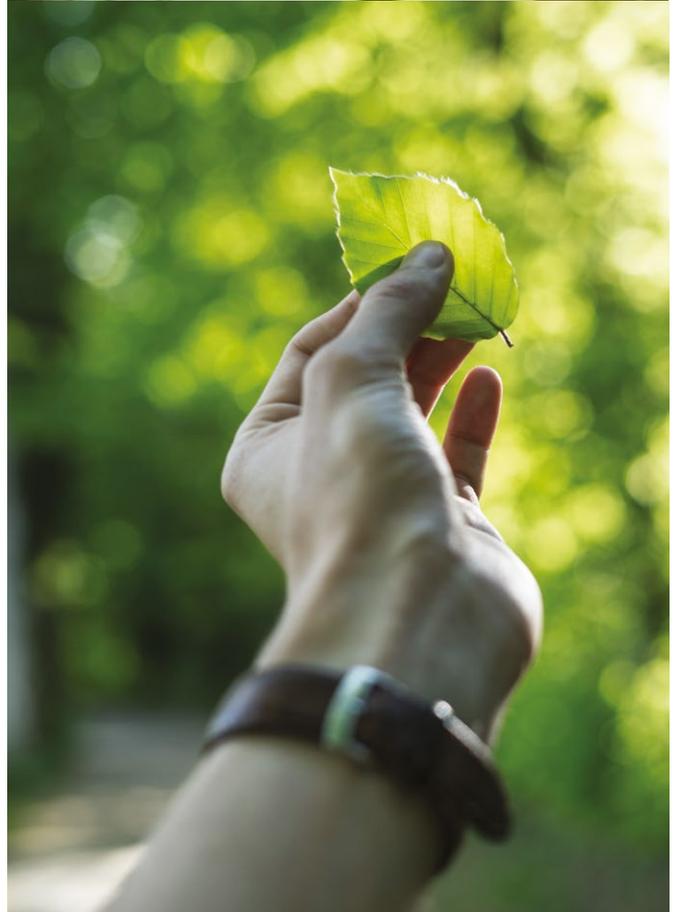


Photo: Tobias Weinhold - Unsplash

About LMC

LMC is a specialist PR and communications consultancy that works with purpose-led innovators, changemakers and thought leaders in the construction, property and built environment sectors.

If you need help to communicate your ESG and sustainability initiatives, please get in touch – we’d love to hear what you’re doing and to share the learning.

