

Marks and Spencer's emerging business case for sustainability

Leslie Brokaw



Marks and Spencer has demonstrated "a strong business case for sustainability, with £185m in net benefits" since 1997 available for reinvestment. Wheelock Place, Singapore.

Five years ago, the UK retailer Marks and Spencer announced what it called Plan A, a commitment to tangible steps to make the company more sustainable. T-shirts for associates featured the slogan, "There is no Plan B."

As it says at the Plan A website today, "We launched Plan A in January 2007, setting out 100 commitments to achieve in 5 years. We've now extended Plan A to 180 commitments to achieve by 2015, with the ultimate goal of becoming the world's most sustainable major retailer."

The company's new 56-page "How We Do Business Report 2012" details what the company has achieved in the past five years.

Marks and Spencer has also prepared a separate report called "The key lessons from the Plan A business case."

Of its goals, the company has achieved 138 of its 180 commitments, with 30 'on plan', 6 'behind plan' and 6 'not achieved,' according to the report. Among the report highlights:

Marks and Spencer has a convincing business case for sustainability. The company, says Marc Bolland, CEO, can "demonstrate a strong business case for sustainability, with £185m in net benefits from Plan A made available to be reinvested back into our business over the last five years." Operational savings include a 28% improvement in energy efficiency per sq ft.

Achievements include becoming carbon neutral, sending no waste to landfill and sourcing 100% of the wild fish it sells "from the most sustainable sources available."

Customers have embraced a chance to give back. The company launched a so-called 'shopping' initiative (the word combines "shop" with "swap"), encouraging customers to bring in used clothes when they buy new ones, and one-day "Wardrobe Clear-Out" events, with clothes donated to Oxfam second-hand clothing stores. Total number of garments donated: 11 million. Money raised for charity: £20 million.

Sustainability is integrated into financial reporting and review. M&S produced its sustainability report with its Internal Audit team and Ernst & Young. The Board and Audit Committee reviewed Plan A progress every six months. All Executive Directors and Directors have Plan A targets "which contribute towards their personal performance payments."

Suppliers have become engaged. Some 1,100 people attended the company's Plan A Supplier Conference this year, and suppliers have cumulatively gone through 555,000 hours of training. The company says it has made "good progress" on its Farming for the Future best practices, Food Supplier Sustainability Framework and three Model Eco Dyehouses.

The company has a sustainability template in place for expansion. M&S plans to use "a seamless approach to sustainability across all areas of our business" as it expands in the next few years from being, as CEO Bolland puts it, "primarily a UK, store-based retailer into a multi-channel international retailer."

Fonte: MIT Sloan Management Review, 16 July 2012. [Portal] Disponível em: <<http://sloanreview.mit.edu/improvisations/2012/07/13/marks-and-spencers-emerging-business-case-for-sustainability/>> Acesso em: 16 July 2012.

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