KEEP IT REAL:
Market and communicate your credentials
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, KEEP IT REAL?
If you’re already working hard to be more sustainable, it’s time to find how to make your customers know about it - and enjoy it.

Keeping it real is all about recognising that authenticity makes your customers’ holidays more fun and their business trips more pleasant.

Companies across South Africa are changing to be more sustainable - but are shy to tell their customers, for fear it’s not relevant, or will be misunderstood. Some have even got awards and certification but still struggle to know how this can be used to best effect.

Get tips and confidence to market your green credentials, by understanding who you tell, for what purpose and through which channels, and more importantly that you know what you’re saying is really worth shouting about.

Use the template at the end of this booklet to prepare your own green communications and marketing action plan, one step at a time. For each market, choose one reason, one message, one channel and one time to tell them.

Five chapters help you take practical decisions:

WHO DO I TELL? Are customers really bothered? Isn’t it only a minority?

WHY AM I TELLING? Can I get more customers? How can I get them to join in, rather than undermine my efforts?

WHAT DO I TELL? Should I say I am sustainable, just like that? Isn’t that preaching?

WHERE DO I TELL? Should I get certified or apply for awards? Talk about sustainability on my website, or through social media?

WHEN DO I TELL? Can I tell customers before they arrive, or only when they are here?
Who do I tell?

Who will appreciate knowing you are working to be sustainable and ethical?
There are many signs that consumers are changing. The increasing awareness and concern for the planet’s health is everywhere - but the problems are too big and complex, there are too many issues, we have all heard too many contradictory messages. It’s not surprising customers struggle to know what to do.

Most customers care, or at least want to know that they are not doing harm. But this does not mean they will act differently. Just as we all forget to bring our stylish recycled bags to the supermarket, customers will book the brands they already know through their usual channels. Habit and convenience play a more important part in how we choose travel, leisure and tourism.

Price, location, convenience and brand still come first for most people. But when all of these are equal, sustainability values and actions can and do differentiate a product. Consumers prefer brands and companies that are environmentally and socially responsible - but that doesn’t mean they are searching exclusively for sustainability at the time of choosing.

2010 VISITENGLAND DATA ON ENGLISH CONSUMERS SAYS:

- 58% would want to stay in accommodation with green awards/environmentally friendly practices
- 51% say that if two hotels were the same, they would choose the one with a green award
- 46% don’t want to think about being green - they want to relax
- 33% believe sustainability claims are often ways to save money and/or reduce service
- Only 15% think a hotel run sustainably will be less comfortable than one without green credentials.
Encouraging clients to support our conservation and research by educating and challenging them

Real case studies

We communicate our sustainability values through a detailed briefing, an incredible nature experience, on board marine biologist, posters of the research and a dedicated conservation talk to change the client’s perception of sharks and translate their experience into action by offering the opportunity to donate to shark research.

Introducing: Marine Dynamics offers a lifetime experience of seeing a great white shark up close. The company also invests heavily into shark research in order to better understand and protect this species and challenges clients to support the project too.

What We Do: Marine Dynamics has positioned in the marketplace for its investment in shark research- customers find this information in their website, posters, affiliation with the Dyer Island Conservation Trust and educational materials available. Many clients choose the company because of the strong conservation ethos. The company also strives hard to make science accessible to all through easy to understand info-graphics. The company started an international marine volunteer programme where participants can learn even more about the great white shark and other species through a series of dedicated lectures. These students become ambassadors for great white sharks when the leave and the more people changing the perception of this misunderstood predator the better its chances of future survival. Should a client decide to support the conservation research they will receive a certificate of donation, a shark pendant, their name permanently on the trust website and a quarterly newsletter. They are encouraged them to join on social media to sustain their interest.

Our Top Tip: Ensure clients have a WOW experience by offering incredible service, being committed to conservation and in turn supporting the conservation of a species.
DIFFERENT CUSTOMERS, DIFFERENT APPROACHES

‘Ethical seekers’ actively seek green holidays as a continuation of their lifestyle. There are few of them, but they are vocal and loyal. They want to know all about what you do.

They are aware of the issues, but don’t go out of their way to act.

At the other extreme, the “just want to switch off” group travel wanting to forget about their daily lives and responsibilities. They are unlikely to value your efforts. Sustainability actions will need to happen behind the scenes and your communication should focus on how it does improve their experience.

The “feel good factor” group is the majority - they are aware of the issues, but don’t go out of their way to act. They won’t seek information, but will respond well to messages that show they can easily “do their bit” - or where they get a better product or service that happens to be sustainable.

This group will avidly read about you in the press travel pages because you are interesting and different, not because you are sustainable. Awards and certification reinforce that you can be trusted, one more element to influence the booking decision.
Real case studies

We repeat sustainability messaging throughout as much communications as possible.

Introducing: Maropeng is the official visitors’ centre of the Cradle of Humankind. We adhere to specific fair trade tourism principles, including fair wages and working conditions, fair distribution of benefits, ethical business practice, and respect for human rights, culture and the environment. We’ve also recently embarked on a recycling initiative called Bokashi, that breaks down food waste at source.

Maropeng currently uses the recycled material to feed its gardens and is assisting a nearby school with feed for its vegetable gardens.

Other green projects include biodegradable packaging and eating utensils, rechargeable torch batteries used by Maropeng’s tour guides, conference notepads and pencils made using recycled materials, low-energy lighting and a variety of preservation efforts to protect indigenous fauna and flora in the area.

What we do: To keep our sustainability practices top of mind we communicate about it as regularly and consistently as possible across all our platforms, and throughout all messaging. To communicate that, we have constructed an ozone wastewater purification system at the Sterkfontein Caves, which also hosts an artificial wetland system to naturally assist in the filtering and cleansing of grey and black water, and also to communicate the importance of this practice, we put photos of before and after the purification system with messages about the benefits in all our social media channels.

Our key ways to communicate these sustainability messages are through social media, our website and traditional PR that leads to regular coverage in newspapers and magazines. It also forms part of the branding on all marketing materials. This has resulted in increased visitor interest.

Keep sustainability messaging top of the consumer’s mind by interspersing it throughout communications as regularly as possible.
Why am I telling?

There are too many vague messages out there. You can’t do everything, so be clear about what response or change you are hoping for from your customers.
TO MAKE CUSTOMERS FEEL GOOD

Ok, you want more customers - but before you get there, remember there are many other more realistic ways of using sustainability in your communications.

Help your customers feel better about their purchase by showing how you have taken care of the need to be more sustainable - leaving them to enjoy the benefits.

The fact they will not go out of their way to buy from you because you are green does not mean they don’t appreciate it. It won’t put customers off, and can make them feel good knowing that they are “doing their bit.”

If you genuinely think your customers don’t want to know, focus on what you do for them. Make it easy, by telling them they can relax and enjoy, while you take care of things without compromising quality.

Customers feel good (or less guilty) facing easy choices. Encourage charitable donations, tell them about public transport options or where to recycle - show them it is both better and more sustainable. The easiest solution of all is for the options provided to be ‘good’ choices with positive impacts.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR SUPPLIERS!

- A map of where your different suppliers are can demonstrate how many are local - good.
- Photos will show a human side to who they are - better.
- Explaining how they take good care of the produce they sell to you will show that you also care about what you share with your customers - best.
Real case studies

We use attractive messages to get tourists involved such as “Who said you couldn’t save the world on holiday?”

We communicate our sustainable practice and its importance in reusable water bottles.

Introducing: The Amakhala Foundation coordinates community projects within the Amakhala Game Reserve and aims to advertise to guests on the game reserve the importance of our projects.

What We Do: The biggest attraction to staying on a game reserve is, of course, viewing wildlife in their natural surroundings. In the hot summer months this makes for thirsty work. During the check in procedure at a lodge, guests are presented with refillable water bottles. We write clear attractive messages on these bottles to highlight why we use them and how important it is to use them. These are filled at a central water fountain by the guests before each game drive. At the end of their stay, the guests are welcome to take the bottle home as a souvenir. This substantially reduces the amount of plastic waste produced by each lodge, since we have replaced the use of at least six 500ml water bottles per guest during a visit with just one re-fillable bottle.

For example, we have messages on each bottle such as: “By supporting the use of this reusable water bottle you are not only helping to support environmental education and community upliftment through the Amakhala Foundation but you are also helping to effectively contribute towards reducing an estimated 38 billion water bottles that end up in landfills worldwide every year… Now who said you couldn’t save the world on holiday?”

Our Top Tip: Use attractive and clear messages on the products to explain about your sustainable practices and their importance not only to inform tourists, but also, to make them feel that they are supporting the initiative too.
TO RAISE AWARENESS AND CHANGE BEHAVIOUR

Are you fed up of having all your good sustainability work undermined by customers that just don’t get it?

If you want change, give something in return. Whether you want them to purchase local or respect local customs, to drive less or recycle more, be clear how to motivate and be positive.

Be specific about what you ask them to do: vague messages lead to frustration – tell them what to do, not “be green.”

Show how the action you are asking your customers to take has a direct positive impact, of what kind, and how it can be seen - instead of saying “save water,” tell them what can be done with the water they have saved.

Explain who benefits from the change of behaviour - if it isn’t the customer, think again how you tell why they should care.

Only mention the more sustainable options - focus on daytrips that are nearby rather than hours away, or cut out endangered or unsustainable food from the menu. No need to label as “green” either, just present as fun or a great idea.
Real case studies

“Your choice can make a difference” is the key message we want our clients to understand and we encourage them to participate by making a direct contribution to the conservation of the African penguin.

Introducing: Dyer Island Cruises, owned by Wilfred Chivell, offers the opportunity to view and learn more about the Southern right whales and the other marine animals of the Dyer Island area, most importantly the endangered African penguins of Dyer Island. Tourists have the opportunity to support a unique project started by the company to support the conservation of this species.

What We Do: We highlight the plight of the African penguin prior to each whale/eco trip. Clients can purchase a penguin home at R400 for which they receive a certificate, their name permanently on the Trust website, a penguin pendant and a quarterly newsletter. The project is part of the Biodiversity Management Plan for this species. The donation also helps support penguin research and contributes to the soon to be built Penguin and Seabird Sanctuary in Gansbaai.

In the briefing room, we have posters up about our other work such as addressing marine pollution, animal rescues, education and more. While we have their attention on the boat, the clients will also learn from the on board marine biologist about our involvement with shark research as we pass our shark boat. Our fishing line bin project is on display as clients enter our premises.

Our Top Tip: Customers respond better to sustainability and conservation messages when they receive a tangible difference they have personally made, that they can take home. Think about how what you are asking your customers can translate into something they can see and identify with.
We’ve only looked at your current customers and your main business. Now, how do we get your customers to buy more from you?

Design sustainable packages for your low occupancy or usage periods, or think of services that can generate more money in high season. Look at ways customers will stay longer, or will come back when your business is empty.

- Develop a nature diary on your website for your property - emphasise what’s there in low season.
- Promote meat/vegetables/jam from your local farm or neighbours - encourage customers to come back to restock.
- Grow-and-cook your own veg, local history or bicycle maintenance courses, “eco-warrior” after school clubs, children’s nature themed birthday parties… create demand for quieter times.
- Typically, a rural pub is full lunchtime weekends - develop a special promotion for mid morning or mid afternoon coffee and cake/tea and scone, together with a free map for a circular pub walk.
- Business hotels can include 30 and 60 minute running maps from the hotel, and design and promote a runner’s breakfast with the right nutritional contents - if you are a chain, roll it out across your whole portfolio.
Real case studies

Introducing: !Xaus Lodge is deep in the Kalahari desert, a concession in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. While the rough edges of life are smoothed for the guests, the Lodge has been designed with fewer modern technologies than most expect from a four-star graded establishment. Owned by the local Mier and ǂKhomani San communities, this Lodge is place for guests to learn about people and an environment quite different from their own.

What We Do: All our communications speak of the benefits of ‘less is more’. We focus on keeping the carbon foot-print of this desert Lodge to a minimum. A typical result is electricity that’s only generated for 4 hours a day – and a consequent lack of TV, wi-fi and air-conditioning.

All communications, from website and initial enquiry emails, to greetings and in-room guest books, point to how this benefits the guests.

The lack of air-conditioning is an opportunity to learn to live the way the local Bushman tribes cope with the heat. The absence of TV & wi-fi encourages a digital detox. The focus on morning walks through the dunes (rather than fuel-guzzling game drives) becomes a chance to ‘see the small things’; and the highly saline shower water has become a rejuvenating salt-scrub.

Our Top Tip: When you offer less than guests expect, show them how this will benefit them, and what they can learn from the experience.
TO GET MORE CUSTOMERS

Faced with a similar price and location, your sustainability credentials can give you the edge for both business and leisure markets. It’s all about being noticed and giving a bit more.

Do remember, customers like to know they are getting a bargain

There are more examples of increased occupancy and lower seasonality through using sustainability creatively, than there are about higher prices. This is probably good news for the service sector, where managing occupancy has a more significant impact on your bottom line than charging more at peak periods.

Businesses that put most points raised in this toolkit into practice should be in a position to increase their prices marginally, or to not reduce them as substantially in low season.

Do remember, customers like to know they are getting a bargain - so showing that behaving sustainably gives them either a discount or additional benefits is likely to be attractive. We have seen cafés giving a discount (and others putting 10p in a charity pot) for regulars that bring their own commuter mug - saving on disposable cups while gaining a loyal customer. While 2010 data from VisitEngland shows that 60% of holidaymakers would be more likely to use public transport if the accommodation offered a discount for doing so.
What do I tell?

Be clear about the impression you want to create - with your sustainability policy, photos, text... From the following pages, choose one or two messages only that you think represent best how you want your customers to see you.
**FUN/PARTICIPATION - WHAT CAN I DO?**

Sustainability should not be boring! Help your customers to enjoy themselves and to experience “hands on” what makes you unique.

Have you realised how much mainstream advertising makes fun of being sustainable? Sainsbury’s Take an Old Bag Shopping, Seeds of Change “I am not a goody-goody pasta sauce, I am a yummy-yummy,” and so on. Bottom line, sounding worthy is less likely to sell - you want to tell customers, not put them off.

Get your customers to participate in things they can relate to

Get customers to participate – doing is more fun than observing. The chance for a customer to pick their own lunch means that in their mind, it just tastes better. Develop a family quiz to explore and learn more about the places they visit, or a nature, town or city trail from your front door. Get them to participate in things they can relate to - you have seen how kitchens attract as much attention as stately rooms in historic homes - or even better, allowing children to use the dress up box in the servants’ hall.
We help customers face their prejudices and learn how to preserve endangered species through extraordinary experiences.

Introducing: White Shark Projects is a conservation, educational and tourism enterprise focused on the protection and preservation of one the oceans apex predators. We facilitate personal and moving encounters with these magnificent fish.

What We Do: We help customers learn why sharks need to be protected by offering face to face encounters with sharks in a safe and non-threatening environment. Before the adventure begins, negative perceptions – often associated with the JAWS myth - are addressed and thought-provoking evidence is shared with guests enabling them to gain a greater understanding of the dire situation sharks face. Our Volunteer programme involves long-term partnerships between volunteers and WSP giving them daily hands-on involvement and behind the scenes insight into the work we do for the protection of sharks and the upliftment of our local community.

Every guest becomes a shark ambassador and advances the plight of these mysterious and feared fish. Scientists know so little about sharks, thousands are slaughtered with little concern for their conservation and place in our marine ecosystem. Personalised DVD's of our guest's shark adventure create opportunities to communicate their own adventure and stories back home.

Our Top Tip: Cultivate alliances with guests, so they can brag about having done something daring and new, while creating an extraordinary connection which fosters long lasting relationships, a sense of ownership and awakens a desire to help more. This translates into referral business, practical and financial assistance with the Recycle Swop Shop and the advancement of shark conservation.
BETTER SERVICE - MAKE ME FEEL SPECIAL

Holidays are times to put yourself first, while business travellers will want you to get things right quickly. Some aspects of sustainability can help.

Sustainability text can should like apologies or jargon. Instead, put the customer at the centre of the experience - what’s in it for them? Word your information thinking about how you want your customers to feel, instead of listing your product features or attributes. Write about sustainability as pampering, as having something unique, about looking after your customer. “You can see things nobody else does” is likely to sell, but find a way of showing that the place is still looked after, the “feel good factor.” The message “fresh, unadulterated, honest food that makes holidaying memorable” is more likely to sell than “food miles and supporting the local economy.” It’s both what you say and how you say it that matters.

Put the customer at the centre of the experience – what’s in it for them?
We involve guests in a fun way to conserve electricity and encourage the staff to use these ideas in the community.

*Introducing:* Three Trees at Spioenkop is small world-class family-run Fair Trade Eco-lodge in the foothills of the Drakensberg. Here we cook traditional South African potjiekos, but we do it outside in our Solar Cooker which draws all its energy from the sun (Which we have a lot of! – average 2500 hours of sunshine per year)

What We Do: We save energy because we make a spectacle of our cooking. The kitchen team will write this on their menu in the afternoon and guests are encouraged to try their hand at adjusting the cooker during the day. This involves very little effort of pushing the dish to face the sun as it travels through the sky, approximately every half hour.

Because we encourage customers to participate, staff and customers talk a lot more, we create a sense of shared experience, and by the time the food is ready customers have learned more about our culture and cooking, and our values as a sustainability property. While cooking we tell customers that we were even awarded an Imvelo Award for Best Energy Management in 2013, which reinforces our values.

Our Top Tip: You can also improve customer experience by showing and sharing. Our customers understand us better than if we displayed a sustainability policy, and thanks to them, we have reduced our overall energy consumption.
EMPATHY - WE THINK ALIKE

The message here is to emphasise the personal connection between host and guest - “We are people like you, we have the same values, that’s why you’ll enjoy being here.”

You are showing a personal connection, not a bland corporate directive. Say it in words - and with the more informal tone, pictures that show the fun element of your place and contents of your website. Write in the first person, include a photo of yourself as host, explain more about the surroundings - it’s all part of the welcome.

Every time a customer books a holiday or business trip, or choose a day out, there’s an element of risk – what if I have a mistake?

You can use sustainability messages to assure customers that you are a quality business. Displaying your many awards and quality grading – but assure your customers that because you care about the environment and society, you also care about your customers and how they will enjoy their time with you.
Where do I tell?

Integrate sustainability as part of quality through the channels you already use. Use certification and awards to get recognition, and the internet to spread the word.
CERTIFICATION

Certification is a great place to start – you get help to put your house in order and its endorsement should give you confidence to tell others about what you do – now use it as a marketing tool.

Companies get certified partly to gain a marketing advantage, expecting that being certified lifts them above some of their competitors - and yet they report that customer awareness is low.

At the end of the day certification won’t market you, it’s still your role to know how and where to display certificates and logos, and more importantly what they mean and why you gained them.

Gaining a sustainable tourism certification gives customers an independent guarantee of your credentials. It helps with confidence and credibility. Now you have the independent recognition of your sustainability performance, you should explain what you do with confidence.

Do you communicate your certification logo and what you did to achieve it?

- In the reception/entrance
- In your bedroom pack (if accommodation)
- On promotional leaflets and printed literature
- In adverts
- In your public relations work
- On your website
Real case studies

Introducing: Abang Africa Travel is an inbound operator that uses the Fair Trade label to explain what makes their products unique.

What we do: Selling responsible / sustainable tourism can be a challenge. Besides ‘fighting’ the misperceptions of the subject (too expensive, too rural, isn’t it scary and this cannot be comfortable) we are also dealing with the fact that the words responsible and sustainable simply do not sound as adventurous or sexy as brands like ‘adventure tourism’ and ‘safaris in Africa’.

We inform people that responsible tourism is for everybody within every budget and comfort level and that we are not operating in a specific niche market but that it is simply a philosophy on how to do business. Making sure that the destination; its people, economy and environment benefit fairly from hosting visitors.

For us as incoming operator it has been great to be able to be approved by a brand as Fair Trade Tourism as it assists us with telling our story without having to put all energy in explaining the misperceptions. Fair Trade recently is more and more recognized in several markets and people more and more do affiliate the brand with fair, honest, open and real products.

Fair Trade Tourism approval allows us this platform of recognition and being able to showcase the Fair Trade label in our marketing and promotions gives trust and recognition. Through this commitment we manage to share our story rather than responsible tourism as a brand. We believe that this is exactly what the market is looking for. Sharing stories, local experiences, real adventures and sincere benefits, impacts and happy people; both locals and travellers.

Our top tip: Use the accepted sustainable Fair Trade approval to help explain your real African stories and impact to increase bookings and create trust.
AWARDS

Only a few companies win awards. You could spend much time on it without any results, and you will need to show something unique and extraordinary.

But if you do win an award, use it to create a sense of confidence and trust in your quality. The good news is that submitting your company for awards doesn’t cost you and the recognition lasts much longer.

Try both the Lizilela and international tourism awards—World Responsible Tourism awards at World Travel Market, the ToDo! Awards or the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards to give some examples. It pays to get awards from the country your tourists come from, so they recognise it.

All awards are useful and you should display them with pride on your website. Add text next to them or make the logo clickable and explain how proud you are of winning them, what the award means to you, and what you won it for—emphasising the reassurance to the customer that a company that wins awards can be trusted to get the basic services right.

Display awards you won some years ago—but change the explanation to say that before others did it because it was fashionable, you were already ahead of the game. And if your award is recent, tell us that the standards keep going up and you won ahead of lots of competition!
PRESS

We see interesting stories in the travel pages every week - how can you get your business featured there? By having something different to tell.

Travel editors get bombarded with very similar mailings, claiming to be sustainable. Their question? “What makes you different, in a way that my customers will want to read about you?”

Press coverage you’ve achieved should not be lost – make links to it

VisitEngland research says 21% of customers have taken a holiday or break recommended in a newspaper or magazine.

Press coverage you’ve achieved should not be lost - make links to it from your website, say in your mailings that you have been highlighted, use quotes from the write up to show your positive side. Even if it is old, there’s a value to it. A quote from a national publication could have more impact than a certification scheme that has a lower awareness level.

Add a tab to your website called “our recognition” where you gather the certifications, awards and press coverage - put the new one on top, and keep all the previous coverage lower down. All of it reinforces the fact that you are a company that can be trusted.
YOUR WEBSITE

All too often a missed opportunity. Let me feel you mean it, show me what’s good about what you do, keep it up to date.

You typically have all your sustainability information on a single page, probably called sustainability policy. Mostly we see dull lists of water, waste, and energy actions, written in management speak – I’m hardly going to pick up the phone because I’ve read that you “minimise waste by evaluating operations and ensuring they are fit for purpose.”

By all means upload your policy and list your achievements somewhere, but in general you won’t get many customers visiting it. There are of course exceptions…but you need to get more creative.

The aspects of sustainability that directly relate to quality, as customers would perceive it, need to be incorporated throughout the website. Describe a quieter and warmer (better insulated, biomass fuelled heating) bedroom, a tastier (locally sourced) menu, a more personally and uniquely designed (with local crafts) hotel…
SOCIAL MEDIA

Like it or not, this is a digital world. So get used to blogging, Twitter, Facebook and other social networks to tell others what you are up to - eventually you will find these quite addictive!

If you have something interesting to say you will develop followers

If you have something interesting to say and you are internet savvy, you will develop a group of followers. Many social media sites are free, and your local tourism partnership is likely to run or know about training available in your area.

Social media is a channel - you still have to develop interesting content. Conservation and community messages provide you with content to share with customers. This has to be light hearted, positive messages that customers feel compelled to like or share. Funny messages work best, as well as those they feel identified with.
When do I tell?

You actually market your company all the time. So think about the many different stages you can communicate and how what you say helps customers take decisions at that point.
PRIOR TO BOOKING/PURCHASE

Tell customers why they should buy from you. Explain why your product is better value, better quality, or simply a more appealing proposition, because the sustainability work you do.

Customers need information to help them make decisions. This may be the number of calories in a cup of tea compared to a skinny latte, but it could also be public transport deals or the CO2 emissions of their journey.

For example, hotel chains are starting to calculate the environmental cost of business meetings, to promote themselves as lower carbon than competitors. Hotels also need to tell customers how to get there with low CO2 and importantly what to do there without needing a car.
From the moment that customers enquire we tell them what makes us different

“From the moment that customers enquire we tell them what makes us different.”

Real case studies

We are consistent in telling clients about different ways to support locals and the benefits of each practice.

Introducing: Mashovhela Bush Lodge’s recruitment policy is to first source local people before going outside the area; this was the case in the construction of the lodge and has continued by training locals to be part of the staff in the hospitality business, only employing people outside the community for specialised positions.

What We Do: We aggressively market ourselves as an eco-experience, consistently from the point of enquiry, so customers know what to expect. When a potential customer enquires we explain that we are an eco-lodge which only operates from solar power, with the result that we do not have TVs, kettles and air conditioners in each room, and we explain how this is not necessary but instead the experience they will get is far more uplifting.

That consistency is important to live the expectations that have been created. At guest check-in our hosts show them the facilities and explain our solar system to the guests as well as the support of our community and gratitude’s which will be divided amongst all staff. We talk to our customers about why we invite local women to dance authentic and traditional Venda dance and tell clients about the history of the dance and how the women proudly work and promote the respect for the tradition. We also explain how we buy products from our local community and local town before sourcing outwards and include short messages in products to explain that most of the money went to support local families.

Our Top Tip: Constantly use attractive and clear messages to explain each practice that supports Fair Trade accredited properties, and its benefits to the community.
BETWEEN BOOKING AND ARRIVING

Help customers learn what to pack, what is appropriate clothing, whether to bring gifts (or not), how to get informed about local customs and generally what to expect.

Do it in a helpful, not policing way- the emphasis has to be helping them look forward to their trip and making sure their holiday will be more fulfilling. Personalise the messages so they don’t sound as standard corporate responses.

For example:

- If you are a great birdwatching destination, tell them now which are the species they can expect to see at this time of year.
- If you are a self-catering property, you can offer to source local goods for their stay by encouraging pre-booking.
- If you encourage travelling by public transport, tell them the things they can do once they arrive without having hired a car (otherwise they feel stranded!).
ON ARRIVAL

There are no second chances to make a first impression. Will your reception area send the message of wasteful lighting and heat pumped out of the front door?

There are no second chances to make a first impression

The look or feel of your business, from accommodation providers and attractions, to conference venues and restaurants, sends a message about whether you really care about sustainability.

If you have large numbers of customers, you may only be able to display your sustainability policy, and a page saying “What we have just done to be more sustainable” to show this is an ongoing, day to day policy.

Smaller businesses, like self-catering properties, get to talk to customers one to one, and it’s on arrival they get a chance to share their values while showing guests to their accommodation and explaining how different aspects work e.g. utilities, heating, and so on.

You need to think what works for your business.
DURING THE **STAY/VISIT**

This is your chance to communicate by showing what you do. Decide how much you want the communication to affect the customer experience, or whether it is just in the background.

Some five star hotels are reducing all information displayed to ensure the perception of quality is not affected, while other businesses opt to provide short messages throughout (for example, in the shower, notes about reduced water consumption, by the bedroom entrance, a note about what could be done with the electricity from leaving the lights on).

For accommodation providers, the bedroom browser is the best place for all the background and more technical information - the type that wouldn’t bring your customers through the door, but helps reinforce the range of things you do. The committed few that read it are likely to appreciate it.

**For your bedroom browser, you could print two lists:**

- **“these are the things you can see”** - our honey tastes better because it’s local, we serve water filtered for free to save on glass transport and waste, our clever lights come on automatically when needed, with your help we raised R5000 for our local wildlife club…
- **“and these are the things you can’t”** - we have saved enough oil/gas/electricity to do x, we have saved enough water to do x, we reduced our carbon emissions by xxx
Real case studies

We show and share our sustainability with our customers when they are here.

We proudly support local artists and communities through cultural tours and activities in rural villages.

Introducing: Madi a Thavha’s, Dutch owners started the lodge from scratch and infused it with their passion for rural living, socio economic development and the vibrant art grounded in the culture of this region.

What we do: We specialise in an authentic cultural experience, offering cultural tours around the Soutpansberg Mountain - a natural frontier where Iron Age farmers, Sotho, Venda and Tsonga communities and colonists of European decent met, clashed, married and are still living together in a zany fusion of customs and indigenous knowledge systems.

Guests are invited to engage with sustainable development through cultural tours and creative activities. Friendly engagement between guests and our well informed staff is part of an integrated approach to share indigenous knowledge and encourage interest for the products and people we support.

This gives our guests the opportunity to connect with local people first-hand, in activities such as making traditional clay pots with the potters or to discuss cultural influences with the sculptors themselves. At the lodge guests can verify their new found tacit knowledge in our well-resourced Heritage & Art Centre or buy the works of artists they have just met on tour.

Our Top tip: An integrated, interactive approach has most impact. Our luxury 4 star lodge’s connection with the rural villages and its people makes it a unique living experience for our guests, with mutual benefits for the local communities and our lodge.
AFTER THE **STAY/VISIT**

Stay in touch with your customers. Speaking about sustainability will be more welcomed than a direct promotional message saying “book with us again.”

If your customers saw you plant trees, tell them how they are growing. If you had pictures from a local school, tell customers how you are now speaking with other schools and how these children are learning from what they saw with you.

A large family hotel chain publishes a yearly newsletter that amongst other things provides an update of births, marriages, retirements and deaths amongst their personnel. It’s one more way to communicate that their staff are employed for the long run and to encourage customer loyalty that for them, really works.

If you had pictures from a local school, tell customers how you are now speaking to other schools.
### Time for Action!

**What Will You Do Different After Reading This Toolkit?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who do I tell?</th>
<th>Choose type of customers at a time - they are all interested in different things.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why am I telling?</td>
<td>Choose one main reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do I say?</td>
<td>Make sure the customer will appreciate what you tell them - make it interesting, easy to hear, easy to act on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where do I tell?</td>
<td>Aiming to sell directly, if you can to repeat customers, with stories that engage, backed with facts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do I tell?</td>
<td>Probably on several occasions, making sure the message is consistent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>What Are You Already Doing?</strong></th>
<th><strong>What Do You Want To Do?</strong></th>
<th><strong>What Do You Need To Achieve It?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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**Download this Table**
Thank you to the businesses and organisations that provided information for this document.

ABANG AFRICA TRAVEL — www.abangafrica.com
AMAKHALA GAME RESERVE — www.amakhala.co.za
DYER ISLAND CRUISES — www.dyer-island-cruises.co.za
MADI A THAVHA MOUNTAIN LODGE — www.madiathavha.com
MARINE DYNAMICS — www.sharkwatchsa.com/en/home/
MAROPENG - CRADLE OF HUMAN KIND — www.maropeng.co.za
MASHOVHELIG LODGE — www.mashovhela.com
THREE TREES AT SPIOENKOP — www.threetreehill.co.za
WHITE SHARK PROJECTS — www.whitesharkprojects.co.za
!XAUS LODGE — www.xauslodge.co.za

And a special well done to the following businesses for writing a case study which unfortunately did not get selected for the toolkit.

GROOTBOS — www.grootbos.com/en/home
PAKAMISA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE — www.pakamisa.co.za
PARA TAXI — www.para-taxi.com
THE BACKPACK — www.backpackers.co.za
HELP!
Before marketing you need to get your house in order and FTT can help you do just that. Business Development Support (BDS) is available, at no cost, to all tourism businesses interested in understanding how they can embed sustainability as part of the normal activities. It has been designed to help businesses review their performance and illustrate how sustainable practice can save money, encourage greater efficiency and begin a journey of doing business even better. FTT-certification is the next step after BDS.

www.fairtrade.travel