

Sustainable Responsibility: How The Home Improvement Industry Can Boost Its Eco Credentials

2020 caused a substantial shift in the way consumers saw their homes. Multiple lockdowns forced everyone to confront the shortcomings of their surroundings - but also gave them the free time needed to invest in improvements.

Last year also reframed the way we view our planet. Capital cities reported substantial drops in pollution and wildlife began to reclaim parks and oceans; the effects of people staying home showed us how a cleaner world might look. As a result, consumers are more focused than ever on trying to make sustainable choices.

With these trends visible across key demographics, how can the home improvement industry capitalise on market growth while assuring consumers that their renovations can leave them with a clean conscience?

What Does Sustainability Mean to Consumers?

A recent survey from Garnier found that [73% of UK consumers](#) want to be more sustainable in 2021 and, in a Deloitte study, [around a third of consumers](#) said they have actively chosen brands that align with their social and environmental values.

On top of that, a similar number claimed to have *stopped* purchasing brands or products because they had “ethical or sustainability related concerns about them”. However, when asked about their own sustainable lifestyle changes, participants included a range of activities, from buying more local produce and using alternative transport, to avoiding single-use practice and reducing meat consumption.

Although eco-consciousness is increasingly important, it’s clear that it can still manifest in many ways. These unfocused consumer expectations present a great opportunity for home improvement brands to identify and promote their own areas of sustainable practice.

“Lack of information” was one of the biggest barriers to consumers adopting a more eco-friendly lifestyle, so designers, manufacturers and suppliers should lead by their own examples.

Looking around, there are already brands targeting the market in their own way. For example, [House of Worktops](#) emphasises their production processes: “*Our manufacturing operates on zero waste... our facilities run on renewable energy*”. [The Organic & Natural Paint co.](#) compares its products to the more harmful mainstream option: “*Switching your everyday paints from toxic petrochemical nasties to low and zero VOC paint... [is] a better and sustainable solution*”. [Mike Wye](#) highlights their sustainable sourcing: “*Natural fibre insulation materials are often derived from co-products of other processes, which significantly reduces their environmental impact*”.

The strategy is working, as Dr. Matt Johnson, founder of neuromarketing blog [Pop Neuro](#) says there’s not only “accumulating evidence” that shoppers respond to a brand’s perceived sustainability, but that they’re “willing to pay a premium for products from a sustainable brand over a non-sustainable competitor brand.”

Combining Sustainability With Design Trends

Home improvement projects don’t seem to be threatened by this environmental drive - just last month, Kingfisher, the owner of B&Q, reported an [increase of 44% in pre-tax profits](#). And, although the Baby Boomer demographic is still spending the most money on home improvements, the retail chain observed that 18-34 year-olds were carrying out *more* work during the pandemic than any other group.

Considering many Millennials are stepping onto the property ladder by buying older, fixer-upper homes, this trend is likely to continue to grow as they make bite-sized improvements as often as their budget allows. The key to capturing the market will be to deliver current design trends with an eco-conscious edge.

For example, where homeowners are now looking to increase their living space with loft conversions or extensions, there’s an opportunity to promote energy-efficient features, such as solar panels or [insulation made from natural materials](#).

The trend for minimalist home decor looks set to continue this year too, fusing familiar Scandinavian-inspired features with elements from Japanese design, creating “[Japandi Style](#)”. These interiors focus on natural textures, giving home improvement brands an opportunity to promote sustainably forested timbers - or even alternatives like bamboo - over traditional hardwoods.

Houzz reports increased interest in searches for “luxury vintage” and [high-end, second-hand furniture](#), which aligns sustainability with the narrative that Millennials are searching for ways to put a unique stamp on their homes. This audience is going to be attracted to

brands that can emphasise reclaimed and repurposed materials and furnishings that offer a one-of-a-kind aesthetic.

Boosting Your Eco-Credentials as a Home Improvement Brand

Consumers are eager to make sustainable choices, but remain open-minded about the specifics - and there's a lot of room in the latest home improvement trends for environmentally-friendly products. As such, brands should be taking the opportunity to showcase any eco-friendly credentials for their products and practices to capitalise on the sustainability trend.

A word of caution; only apply sustainable, low-carbon and environmentally-friendly labels where they actually apply. Consumers are becoming increasingly savvy to misleading eco claims (known as '[greenwashing](#)'), and organisations and governments are beginning to call out and clamp down on offenders across every industry.

Promote your products that are locally sourced, made from recycled materials or by using low-emission, low-resource processes. Highlight your use of renewable energy sources and responsible waste management. Where you can, treat sustainability as seriously as your customers do, and you'll be rewarded with buyers that are delighted to find a stylish home doesn't have to cost the earth.