

: Tips on creating a sustainable business

Recent years have seen a rise in sustainable business practices as people become increasingly aware of their impact on the planet. In the past, sustainability was seen as a "nice to have" or providing a competitive edge to a brand. Today it has become an expected part of the way in which businesses are expected to operate.



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This theme was recently explored during a webinar series, hosted by the V&A Waterfront, as an extension of their 100 Beautiful Things campaign.

The Sustainable Design episode discussed sustainability as the new currency of business and a driver of open and transparent business practices. Here the panel, made up of respected experts on the topic, discussed ways to build a successful brand with sustainability in mind.

Their discussions culminated in a number of insights, with four key tips being shared to help businesses build an environmentally and socially responsible brand.

1. You cannot not rely on sustainability alone to sell a product

Jasper Eales, co-founder of Sealand Gear, a company which specialises in the creation of upcycled bags and apparel, explained that an entrepreneur in this day and age cannot rely on sustainability alone when building a successful brand.

“Create something that serves a purpose”, he explains. “Sustainability should be the base ingredient and interwoven into the brand DNA, however it has to be functional and look good too.”

2. Change your perception of waste

Panellists recommend that businesses should look at the world around them through a different lens in order to change their perception of waste. When waste products are reframed as a medium or a material, it opens up endless opportunities to create.

Davis Ndungu, founder of Recycled Flip Flop Sculptures, is a great example of this. Davis started out his career as an artist using wood as a medium. However, when wood became too expensive, he had to seek out alternative low-cost materials. He started gathering old discarded flip flops, turning them into beautiful animal sculptures.

“In times of crisis there are always opportunities,” explains Davis. “Follow your gut and create something that you believe in. Keep the end user in mind, but don’t create something just because you think it will sell.”

3. Keep in-line with your core values

Most panellists agreed that sustainability should be woven into a business’s founding principles, acting as a cornerstone to guide their on-going behaviour.

For example, Jasper credits the success of Sealand Gear to the fact that they remained true to their original brand values, which were developed five years earlier. According to him, a successful brand needs to have a strong story to tell. He recommends that businesses should have a thorough understanding of their business identity and core values and not to lose sight of who they are and what defines them,

4. Use your brand for good

“A powerful brand has a voice and an opportunity to reach a large audience. Tell your story, make it an informative one that educates people along the way,” recommends Jasper. According to him, it is essential to build a brand that is aspirational and use it as platform to educate people on being environmentally responsible.

Alexis Grosskopf, Co-founder of OceanHub Africa, a platform for ocean-conscious entrepreneurs, notes that, because sustainable business practices have become expected as standard, there are no longer grants to assist start-ups based purely on these principles. However, he claims that making these principles core to a brand’s purpose and operations, adds value to its overall story and identity, which will help to draw in private investors.

What the episode:

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