Going Green Inside and Out: Sustainability Sample Report

Overview

A keystone of any sustainability initiative is the sustainability report. Not only does a report help your company promote the good work that you are doing, but it also assists with sustainability planning.

Sustainability reports are typically published once a year or once every two years. At the end of the reporting period, factual data from NAED’s Sustainability Performance Management Tools1 can be incorporated into the report.

This sample plan can help get you started. Start with the major headings and subheadings, adding interim achievements and progress toward sustainability goals.²

By drafting a mock up of the sustainability report early in the process, staff will have a tool to capture lessons learned as well as manage the data.

The finished report will showcase the achievement of sustainability goals and current year-end statistics. Tailored to your target audiences, your sustainability report will be a powerful statement of your goals and commitments.

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT RESOURCES

Before diving into sustainability planning and reporting, it is helpful to look at the following examples of reporting frameworks relevant to the electrical industry.

>> The Global Reporting Initiative provides a trusted and credible framework for sustainability reporting applicable to a wide range of organizations.

>> Southwire, a leading wire and cable manufacturer, publishes the company’s sustainability reports on their website.

>> OSRAM SYLVANIA devotes a page of its company website to their sustainability efforts. This page also provides a link to their corporate sustainability report.

For more examples, see CorporateRegister.com, a searchable database of corporate social responsibility reports and resources.
Title Page

Include:

- **Company Name**
- **Logo**
- **Sustainability Report Title**
- **Date of Publication**

**REPORT CONSIDERATIONS**

- Consider whether or not the final report needs to be printed; often an electronic version will suffice.
  - If print copies are desirable, consider using soy-based inks and paper with post-consumer recycled content. Most printers can accommodate these requests quite easily.
  - The format of the report, print or electronic, should be tailored to the targeted audience.
Table of Contents

The table of contents not only helps readers find their way through your sustainability report, but it is also a helpful planning tool for your sustainability initiative. Be sure to include major section headings and key subheadings with page numbers, including as much detail as fits your company. Also, think about the tone you’d like to set in the report, and then create your table of contents to reflect your company’s culture with either formal details or a casual approach.

For Example

You can choose to use a formal table of contents like Schneider Electric to the right or a more informal approach like Southwire’s below.

Contents

SOUTHWIRE'S VISION 3
CEO'S MESSAGE 4
BUILDING WORTH 5
GROWING GREEN 7
LIVING WELL 19
GIVING BACK 27
DOING RIGHT 35
COMPANY PROFILE 41
Letter from the CEO

Many sustainability reports begin with a letter from the CEO or President of the organization. Senior management support of sustainability initiatives within their organizations is crucial. This letter clearly indicates executive leadership’s support of the sustainability initiatives and measurements outlined in the report.

The letter can be formal or casual, depending on the overall tone and content of the report. Most reports contain a letter from the CEO, but the letter can also represent the Board of Directors. This letter should convey the motivation behind sustainability to help readers discover the reasons behind a company’s decision to undertake sustainability planning and reporting.

For Example

These messages from the sustainability reports of Southwire and GE convey each company’s central sustainability message—that it drives every aspect of business.

Did you know?

One-third of the firms surveyed for the Economist Intelligence Unit study place responsibility for sustainability performance directly with the CEO; another 26% place it with the board.
Executive Summary

Recommended Elements:

- **Vision**
  The vision summarizes what the organization’s definition of sustainability is and what a sustainable version of the organization will look like. Defining this vision is the first step toward sustainability.

- **Benefits / Business Case**
  This section should also outline the business case to stakeholders. Listing the benefits an organization accrues from sustainability initiatives justifies the investment and upfront costs for planning and implementing sustainability.

- **Achievements**
  Finally, summarize notable achievements accomplished within the past year. Doing so highlights achievements detailed in the Initiatives and Accounting sections.

- **Barriers and Responses**
  Summarizing barriers to sustainability initiatives is also helpful because it conveys transparency and accountability while also presenting a learning opportunity.

For Example

GE’s Citizenship Report covers its sustainability initiatives and how it impacts each of its main business sectors.

REPORT TIP: PROVING THE BUSINESS CASE

- Include detailed information like budget figures and the timeframe for planning and implementing sustainability initiatives.
- These details give readers a better sense of what it takes to accomplish sustainability goals.

For More Info...

On making the business case and expressing the vision, see NAED’s Little Green Book of Corporate Sustainability.
Initiatives

Recommended Elements:

- **List the initiatives pursued in the last year**
  Greening the supply chain is an essential sustainability initiative for electrical manufacturers and distributors. The initiative section offers a detailed list of the strategic sustainability initiatives that the company chose to implement.

- **Describe why initiatives were chosen**
  In addition, this section provides the narrative behind how strategic initiatives were chosen and what they will accomplish. This is different from the Accounting section, which provides detailed measurements behind environmental impact reductions.

- **Illustrate how initiatives developed over the past year**
  Explain how the initiatives included in the report were chosen and developed over the course of the past year. Be sure to include details like timelines and the amount of money budgeted for each initiative. To make the initiative transparent, some organizations identify the various departments and/or staff persons responsible for carrying out these responsibilities. Finally, summarize what has been achieved through current initiatives. Inevitably, obstacles present themselves when companies unveil and roll-out major initiatives. Discuss risk management planning because readers will want to know what processes were implemented to plan for unforeseen “roadblocks,” plus how the company overcame the obstacles it encountered.

- **Share achievements**
  Use this section to demonstrate how the company’s sustainability initiatives reduce the company’s environmental impacts and offer customers more sustainable products and services.

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Did you know?

OSRAM SYLVANIA’s Sustainability Report features sustainable products and/or services the company provides, along with demonstrated facts and figures about how select items fit into the company’s overall sustainability initiatives.

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For More Info...

- See NAED’s *Little Green Book of Corporate Sustainability* for choosing initiatives to pursue.
- Refer to NAED’s *Best Practices Case Study Series* (Green Warehouses and Lamp Recycling) for examples of sustainable strategic initiatives.
- See NAED’s *Case Study Series* (Sustainable Purchasing) and NAED’s *Little Green Book of Corporate Sustainability* for greening the supply chain.

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For Example

Hagemeyer’s Green Catalog is a good example of greening the supply chain; the company has specifically chosen products that will help their customers reduce energy use and become more sustainable.
**Accounting**

Recommended Elements:

- **Impacts**
  This section describes the company’s primary environmental impacts.

- **Tools**
  Be sure to detail how your company reduced these impacts and the tools or metrics used to measure reductions.

- **Goals**
  This section should outline the goals selected to reduce environmental impacts. Many companies establish a baseline and reduction goals and report progress. The nature of environmental impacts largely determines the goals a company strives to achieve within a given time frame. For instance, reducing solid waste might take longer than reducing energy use, or vice-versa. A business might have limited recycling options, but most businesses have numerous options for increasing energy efficiency. Some goals require capital investments that are part of an annual budget cycle. Reducing carbon emissions is an increasingly important goal for many organizations. The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHG Protocol) is a tool for measuring carbon and other greenhouse gas emissions.

- **Progress made in the past year**
  Many companies establish a baseline and outline goals to reduce environmental impacts, then they follow up by reporting progress made towards achieving those goals over the past year. (Most companies establish annual baseline impacts.)

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For Example

Southwire’s 2008 Sustainability Report shows how to establish baselines and make progress toward reduction goals. The report lays out several environmental impacts, such as landfill waste, carbon dioxide emissions, and water consumption. The company first established a baseline for each area. Then, Southwire measured these impacts over a specified period of time.

Southwire also established the following goals:

- Achieve zero landfill status by 2017
- Reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 10% by 2010
- Reduce water consumption by 15% by 2010

The Southwire report also provides a narrative for how they are moving toward their goals.

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For More Info...

- On sustainability tools and metrics, see NAED’s Sustainability Performance Management Tools on TEDGreenRoom.com.
- On how Architectural Area Lighting (a Hubbell Lighting, Inc. brand) achieved carbon neutrality using the GHG Protocol, see NAED’s Hubbell Lighting Case Study.
Future Plans

Recommended Elements:

- **Initiatives**
  These elements outline future sustainability plans. List initiatives the company intends to add to its sustainability repertoire.

- **Accounting**
  List sustainability accounting tools for future achievements not previously addressed.

**For Example**

Schneider Electric’s Sustainability Report identifies future goals for the company, while also sharing how their products enable their customers to also become more sustainable.
Conclusion

This section summarizes the company’s significant sustainability achievements and benefits. A company profile, including governance structure, divisions, product line, locations, and contact information, may be useful here. In addition, use this section to reiterate the company’s identity, vision of sustainability, plans to implement that vision, and overall benefits of going green!

For Example

In the concluding pages of its Sustainability Report, OSRAM SYLVANIA reiterates its vision of sustainability and connected initiatives.

Specifically, the report:

>> Identifies the organizations it partners with to achieve sustainability in its corporate practices

>> Features one of the programs it implements to recognize business practices incorporating energy-saving strategies and environmentally responsible solutions

>> Highlights instances of its own success in the field of corporate sustainability
Endnotes

1 NAED’s Sustainability Performance Management Tools are another component of NAED’s Corporate Sustainability Planning educational program, available at TEDGreenRoom.com.

Additional NAED Inside Going Green Corporate Sustainability Tools at TEDGreenroom.com:

- **Little Green Book of Corporate Sustainability**
- **Sustainability Best Practices Case Study Series**
  - Greening Warehouse Facilities
  - Hubbell and AAL Lighting the Way
  - Lamp Recycling Services
  - Southwire: Implementing Sustainability Vision
  - Sustainable Purchasing Programs
- **Sustainability Performance Management Tools**

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