

Carbon Clear's 10 Step Guide to Effective Carbon Communications

This guide is designed to help you talk meaningfully about carbon to your different stakeholders – from staff to your customers and investors - to maximise the business benefits from your carbon management programme.



Why talk carbon?

Research has shown that people care about the environment and that climate change is a real concern. Most people expect the private and public sector organisations they work for, or do business with, to consider their environmental impacts and act responsibly towards them.

Whilst science tell us overwhelmingly that climate change is happening, some people remain confused, poorly informed or sceptical. It is very important therefore that your carbon communications explain the basic concepts, your approach and your activities so that they can be fully understood.

There are many benefits to showing that your company has an effective carbon programme. Talking confidently and clearly about your beliefs, activities and future plans helps you to communicate effectively and build stakeholder trust.

Benefits of communicating about carbon

- Build brand value
- Win new business, and support customer loyalty
- Provide job satisfaction to your staff, and help with recruitment
- Show you are doing as well as or better than your competitors in terms of environmental performance
- Generate media coverage
- Reduce energy costs
- Provide a platform and common language with which to connect with all of your stakeholders.

Step 1

Create credible messages + avoid greenwash

Lots of people talk about carbon, and it can be difficult to understand or judge the validity of these messages. If the message is not clear, it can alienate the reader or listener, create distrust or confusion, or it will simply be ignored. By following some simple rules, you can help ensure that your carbon messages hit the spot.

Explain the problem...

Not everyone understands what climate change is. Although it is proven beyond doubt that climate change exists and is driven by human activities, media stories about climate science have generated some confusion and a lack of confidence about what is really happening.

By explaining the basic facts about climate change clearly, you can help to educate your stakeholders about why you are taking action to help prevent it.

If you are a Carbon Clear client, ask your account manager for sample copy to help you explain climate change, carbon footprinting, carbon offsetting and carbon neutrality.

... and your response

It is easy to forget, but it is important to state your commitment to taking action and why you think it is important. It is not necessary to make it appear that you are doing everything possible to tackle your carbon emissions from day 1. It is better to be honest and to state how your first actions – for example undertaking a carbon footprint – fit into a larger plan for the future.



Keep terminology consistent and jargon to a minimum

Carbon footprint? Carbon markets? Greenhouse gas effect? Arghhhh.... it is easy to get overwhelmed by terminology when talking about climate change and carbon!

Use normal everyday language where you can, and be mindful when using technical language or jargon. When you refer to something like a carbon footprint, try to keep the language consistent across all communications to avoid confusion.

See the useful Carbon Jargon section on Carbon Clear's website to make sure you and your team are clear about carbon-related terms.

Avoid 'greenwash'

Key to building trust in your carbon programme will be transparency and clarity. Greenwash occurs when an organisation tries to make its environmental activities sound bigger or better than they are, or uses confusing or meaningless language.

To avoid this, make sure that you can substantiate any claims you make. Don't use generic terms such as 'green' or 'eco' without being clear about exactly what you are referring to. And be honest – it is better to recognise the limitations of your programme and explain how you will address these in the future rather than making out to be doing more than you actually are.

Tell your story

Stories are nearly always more compelling than simple facts or information. Explaining the 'why' as well as the 'how' is a great way to generate interest and gain trust. This might include telling the story of how your organisation first decided to manage carbon, why it is important, or asking different members of your staff to explain what carbon management means to them.

10 signs of greenwash

1) Fluffy language

Words or terms with no clear meaning, e.g. 'eco-friendly'

2) Green products v dirty company

Such as efficient light bulbs made in a factory which pollutes rivers

3) Suggestive pictures

Green images that indicate a (un-justified) green impact e.g. flowers blooming from exhaust pipes

4) Irrelevant claims

Emphasising one tiny green attribute when everything else is un-green

5) Best in class?

Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are pretty terrible

6) Just not credible

'Greening' a dangerous product doesn't make it safe

7) Gobbledygook

Jargon and information that only a scientist could check or understand

8) Imaginary friends

A 'label' that looks like third party endorsement ... except it's made up

9) No proof

It could be right, but where's the evidence?

10) Out-right lying

Totally fabricated claims or data

Source: Futerra, The Greenwash Guide

Step 2

Hold a programme launch for staff

Research has shown that people like working for organisations that take their environmental and social responsibilities seriously. So it is important and in your interest to tell your employees about your carbon plan, and what it looks like.

It is also helpful to get your staff engaged from an early stage if you expect them to participate in your carbon programme, for example by turning off equipment at night. Explaining to them how their actions fit into a larger, exciting plan means you are far more likely to get buy-in than if you simply lay down rules for your staff to follow!

How to get the message out

The communication channels that you use will depend on your size and organisational structure. Here are some ideas as to how you might get the ball rolling:

- Send an email or newsletter to staff introducing the new carbon plan or programme
- Publish information on the intranet, with links to resources and more information
- Hold a 'lunch and learn' session where staff can hear about the programme and ask any questions

What will you say?

Going back to Step 1 about credible messages, you may want to provide some background information about climate change and provide some details about your carbon programme. Think about:

- When you are launching your carbon plan
- Why, and how it fits in with wider company values
- What it will look like. Are you going to measure your carbon footprint annually? Are you starting to offset your carbon emissions?
- How your carbon programme might evolve in the future
- How it might affect or benefit staff
- How staff can be involved (see Section 8 for more information)

Step 3

Tell the story on your website

Your corporate website will be the first point of contact for many of your stakeholders. It is important that they can find out information about your carbon policy and activities.

You may decide to have a page dedicated to your approach to carbon, or an entire section. Alternatively, it might fit into a pre-existing section about Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

As your carbon programme develops, you can build on your website content. Even if you haven't done much to date, a statement of your commitment and a plan of action will help to drive momentum and start to build value from your carbon programme.

Consider scheduling regular updates to the website content, for example providing progress reports or news, to keep visitors interested and engaged.



What to include on your website

The presentation will depend on the structure of your website and the extent of your carbon management programme, but you may want to consider including:

- A short explanation of climate change
- A statement of your commitment to tackling carbon emissions as an organisation
- What your carbon programme aims to do, and how
- A report of your carbon footprint data
- If you offset, information about how many tonnes, and with which projects
- A certificate of carbon offsetting, if applicable
- If you have achieved carbon reductions, how many tonnes – and how you got there
- Any activities that you do with staff or the community
- Any targets that you have set for the future
- Details of long-term plans or aspirations
- Carbon Clear's logo, if you have a license to use this, and website address

Step 4

Issue a press release

You may decide to accompany the launch of your carbon programme, or any reductions that you have achieved, by issuing a press release. Gaining recognition for your commitment or achievements is a great way to build momentum for your programme, and stimulate further development.

A press release should be interesting but factual, so make careful use of terminology and statistics. We would recommend that you include a statement from a key programme director, to provide context and to reiterate your organisation's values and commitment. If you are a Carbon Clear client, ask your account manager for a press release template.

If your press release focuses on your carbon reductions, consider stating what the carbon savings are equivalent to, or how much money you have saved.

If you do not have your own PR function, you may decide to use a paid press release service, or a free one such as www.ukprwire.com.

It is also useful to start to build up a database of contacts for journalists and publications within your industry or sector, so that you can start to generate PR around your carbon management activities (see section 5).



Step 5

Write an article or comment piece

The key to getting publicity for your carbon management activities is presenting an interesting story.

Are you the first company in your sector to offset your emissions, or to go carbon neutral? Can you demonstrate an impressive reduction in your carbon footprint, and show what this means in pounds and pence? Does your low carbon product or service help your customers reduce their carbon footprint? Or have you found an innovative way of engaging your staff to reduce their energy consumption? Whatever your achievement, try to find an interesting and original angle to present.

Writing an article

Publications that focus on your industry or business sector, or local press, may be the most approachable. Have your story outline to hand and start to get in touch with journalists or editors listed on the publications' websites.

Most articles are around 500 – 600 words long, so you may prefer to have this pre-prepared when you make first contact. Alternatively you may want to get an initial agreement before putting the work in.

Remember the rules for communicating carbon – keep it interesting but simple, and give as many real facts and examples as you can to demonstrate your points. You may like to mention your staff environmental achievements as these provide a useful human interest angle to your story and reward your staff for their efforts.

Providing commentary

There are lots of different ways to provide commentary that relate to your carbon experiences. Keep your eye out for any carbon-related stories on industry websites, and contribute your opinions or experiences in the comments section. Alternatively write to the letter pages of industry journals if you see a relevant article in a current issue.

Within time you may be able to establish yourself as an opinion-leader, and journalists will seek your comments on news or feature articles that they are writing – a great way of getting your company into the limelight!

Step 6

Include carbon in company reporting

If you issue an annual company report to shareholders, consider including a section on your approach to carbon management.

Carbon is increasingly seen as both a risk and an opportunity, for example due to the likelihood of new carbon-related legislation in the future, and the increasing price of energy. Outlining your approach to measuring and mitigating this risk can be valuable.

At a basic level this may simply consist of a statement of activities and the provision of your carbon footprint data for the year, and details of any carbon offsetting.

If you have a more comprehensive carbon management programme, you could use the checklist on the right which was developed as part of our FTSE 100 Carbon Performance Report in 2011.

We would also recommend that you consider participation in the Carbon Disclosure Project, which is the primary resource used by investors to evaluate companies' carbon performance.

What to consider:

- Do you make carbon footprint data publically available in a timely manner and detail the scope and methodology used?
- Do you provide past data to allow comparisons and are reduction measures both relevant and consistent?
- Have you set carbon reduction targets for the short and long term that are both ambitious and achievable?
- Have you outlined a plan of action to achieve these goals and how you are going to measure progress and success?
- Have you reported operational, technical and behavioural change initiatives that are part of your carbon reduction programme and documented their results?
- Do you offset your residual carbon emissions? If so, do you document the type of carbon offset credits and the amount?
- If you claim carbon neutrality, do you document the methodology and/or standards used, such as PAS 2060?
- Do you develop low-carbon products or services, and if so do you document the basis on which low-carbon claims are made?
- Do you engage with your customers on carbon-related issues, and if so do you go beyond information provision to encourage low-carbon behavioural change?
- Do you engage your supply chain to ensure that your carbon reduction activities extend beyond your operational boundaries?
- Do you encourage your staff to contribute to your carbon management programme, and keep them informed of progress and plans?
- Do you undertake initiatives in the community to promote environmental or low-carbon messages, or to promote sustainable behaviours?
- Do you report to your investors, e.g. via the CDP?
- Are you involved in shaping policy at local or national government level, by participation in carbon or energy-related consultations?
- Is your executive team committed to your carbon management agenda, and how?

Step 7

Build carbon messages into sales collateral and communications

If your company produces any sales or marketing collateral, consider using it as an opportunity to leverage commercial benefit from your carbon programme.

Here are some ideas as to where you might like to feature your carbon credentials. In most cases, you will not be providing the whole story about your carbon programme, but can refer your customers to your website for more information. You may be able to include the Carbon Clear, Carbon Trust Standard, PAS 2060 or other relevant logos and credentials.



- Sales brochures
- Letterheads
- Posters / customer notices in shops or offices
- Customer newsletters
- Trade or exhibition stands
- Speaking opportunities
- Product labels or packaging
- Company vehicles
- Information to attach to tenders or RFPs
- Supply chain assessments and briefings
- Industry forums
- Advertising

You could also brief your sales teams so that they are confident speaking about the environmental credentials of your company and products, and can incorporate the information into their sales strategy.



Step 8

Engage your team

Involving staff in your carbon management activities offers multiple opportunities. Staff participation is often critical to meeting operational carbon reduction targets, and creating a space for a dialogue with employees will help generate new ideas and ensure that your plans are relevant and achievable. Sending a strong message about your environmental commitment to staff is likely to improve morale and engender a sense of pride amongst your workforce.

In addition, research has shown that a strong environmental policy is a key criterion upon which potential employers are assessed by candidates. Presenting a strong environmental programme will assist your company in recruiting high quality individuals.

Developing an effective staff engagement programme will require a coordinated effort and a well-thought out plan, and will differ depending on the type and size of your business.

Some suggestions for staff engagement

- Ask your staff what is important to them and how they think the company is doing. You can use the responses to guide your reduction programme and to measure its impact if you repeat the survey in the future.
- Create a Green Team or a Green Champion role within each department. These are often created on a voluntary basis initially. It helps if the team have a budget to work with to organise initiatives and are provided with appropriate training.
- Provide each group or departmental manager with a presentation about the organisation's carbon initiative, to deliver to staff and help answer any questions. Showing that the programme has management support is often an important part of any behaviour change programme.
- Hold an environmental day for staff and their families, with fun carbon-related activities such as tree planting, games, information sessions and competitions for good energy or waste-saving ideas.
- Create a volunteering programme where your staff can spend time within the local community carrying out environmental programmes.
- Provide a forum where staff can contribute their ideas for environmental improvements or initiatives at work.

Step 9

Get started with social media

Social media can be a great way to connect with your stakeholders and to tell your carbon story.

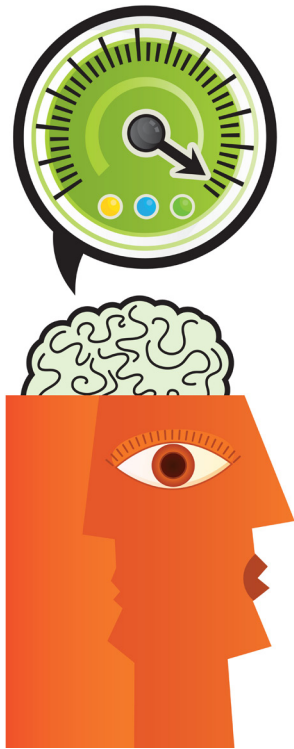
- **Twitter**
Update your followers on your carbon targets, stories and success. Or have a dedicated account for your environmental activities if you believe you will have sufficient content.
- **Facebook**
If you have a consumer-facing brand, Facebook can be a great way to establish a channel of communication with your customers. Link to videos about your environmental initiatives, or have your followers make comments or suggestions about your programme.
- **YouTube**
Film your management team speaking about why the carbon programme is important to the company, or members of staff talking about what they do on a day-to-day basis to contribute to your carbon programme. The ideas are endless, and provide great embedded content on your website or intranet.
- **LinkedIn**
Join carbon-related groups and use it as a channel to distribute your news, press releases or to have discussions with other professionals about your environmental programmes.

Step 10

Give feedback and maintain momentum

As with any project, it is often easy to lose momentum once an initiative has been launched. It is important that you plan to keep enthusiasm for your carbon programmes going, especially if you are looking for staff engagement to help you reach your carbon reduction goals.

- Plan your communications in advance, and keep to your timetable. To keep things interesting, you may choose to feature one topic every month or quarter – from lighting to recycling to carbon offsetting, for example.
- Say thank you! If you have asked for the participation of your stakeholders, make sure that you communicate your appreciation and feedback how their participation has made a difference to your carbon programme.
- Provide regular updates, for example your progress towards targets, or the results of your annual carbon footprint.
- Convert statistics into meaningful equivalents. For example, carbon emissions can be explained in terms of distance travelled in a car, cups of tea boiled in a kettle, or energy used by an average home in a year.
- Run competitions and prizes relating to your carbon activities.
- Get some recognition. There are lots of national, local and industry awards and certifications that are open to organisations, such as the 'Sunday Times Best Green Companies' or the 'Green Tourism' business scheme.



A final word from Mark Chadwick, CEO of Carbon Clear:

“Organisations that are carbon-efficient are the companies of the future. Communicating how your organisation is meeting the challenge of climate change provides an unbeatable platform from which to connect with and impress all of your stakeholders.”

We hope you have found this guide helpful and inspiring. As your carbon reduction plans develop and gain pace, they should feed into an ongoing communications programme.

If you would like to talk to a member of the Carbon Clear about any aspect of carbon management we'd be delighted to hear from you.

ABOUT CARBON CLEAR

Carbon Clear is a leading carbon management company that provides advisory services and carbon offset credits to organisations around the world.

Carbon Clear is a founding member of the International Carbon Reduction and Offset Alliance (ICROA), and was on the advisory board developing the British Standards Institute's recently released PAS 2060 specification for Carbon Neutrality.

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