

You Can Encourage Companies to Reduce Waste

□ Gemma Alexander □ January 30, 2019



0
SHARES



Environmental stories about successes like cleaning up a river or building a nature preserve for endangered monkeys can be so inspiring. But sometimes we think, “I could never do that.” Not everyone can row a boat to the Great Garbage Patch. But that doesn’t mean that we can’t make a difference. Sometimes the most effective **activism** can be the everyday kind.

Do Companies Care What You Think?

A survey conducted by the Economist found that 74 percent of U.S.-based executives believe corporate citizenship can increase profits. Over 12,000 companies have signed the UN Global Compact to uphold social responsibility in human rights, labor standards, and environmental protection.

Virtually unheard of before the 1990s, there are now more than 50,000 sustainability reports in the GRI Sustainability Disclosure Database. The driving force behind these changes is marketing research indicating that millennials prioritize ethical purchasing. Don’t worry if you’re not a millennial and you’ve never been part of a marketing survey, though. About half of activists are over 50. Regardless of age, activists are engaged on both political and consumer fronts.

Boycotts

American colonists boycotted taxed goods in the lead-up to the Boston Tea Party, and in the 1800s, the Free Produce Movement boycotted goods made with slave labor. At any given time today, Ethical Consumer's list of ongoing boycotts can include dozens of companies. To be effective, a boycott must have a clear message with well-defined "asks"; it must be large enough to affect a company's overall bottom line and stock prices for an extended period time, and it must affect a brand's reputation.

Boycotts

Also known as "responsible spending," boycotts — intentionally spending more money on brands whose practices align with your values — are the corollary to the boycott and are becoming more popular.

According to PR firm Weber Shandwick's 2017 study on consumer [activism](#), 83 percent of consumer activists think supporting companies that "do the right thing" is more important than boycotting those that don't. Boycotts usually focus on brands that take a strong stand on a single political issue. Although safe-buying lists and apps are catching on in popularity, boycotts tend to be personal purchasing choices, rather than organized campaigns. Even so, companies have begun taking note of the sales gains associated with taking an ethical stand.

Reputation

Because brand reputation is so critical to brands, consumer [activism](#) nearly always has a social media component. Today, companies monitor social media for signals of support or protest. An academic study described social media native [activism](#) as the newest, and perhaps most effective, consumer activist strategy. Social media native activists don't just use technology to amplify their messages; they communicate directly with businesses and use their platforms to educate both corporations and consumers.

An Earth911 Reader's Personal Experience

Whatever the trends may be, an old-fashioned letter can still be effective. Whether you submit a formal consumer complaint letter or write an informal note, companies recognize the extra time and effort required to communicate directly. Even top executives will often respond personally to a letter.

One reader, Kristen Landman from Michigan, recently contacted Earth911 to share her experience with Old Navy. After visiting Old Navy in the summer of 2018, she looked up the customer service email address for Old Navy/Gap. She complained about the wasteful practice of shipping clothing prehung and throwing away the hangers at the time of purchase. Landman received a reply within days. Like many retailers, Old Navy does not have company-wide waste management policies. Instead, that is often left to the landlords where stores are located. In Landman's case, when she returned to the same Old Navy store in December, recycling bins had been added behind the registers and the sales staff reported that they had recently begun recycling hangers.

Like many Earth911 readers, Landman tries to reduce waste by recycling and tries to reduce recycling by not generating waste in the first place when she can. She says she often writes to companies when she sees wasteful practices. Although she doesn't always get a response, sometimes, as with her local Old Navy store, she sees a change. "Every individual can make a difference," says Landman.

We'd love to hear more from readers about their experiences communicating with companies. Have you had success influencing a company's actions? Let us know about the effects of your everyday [activism](#) in the Earthling Forum.

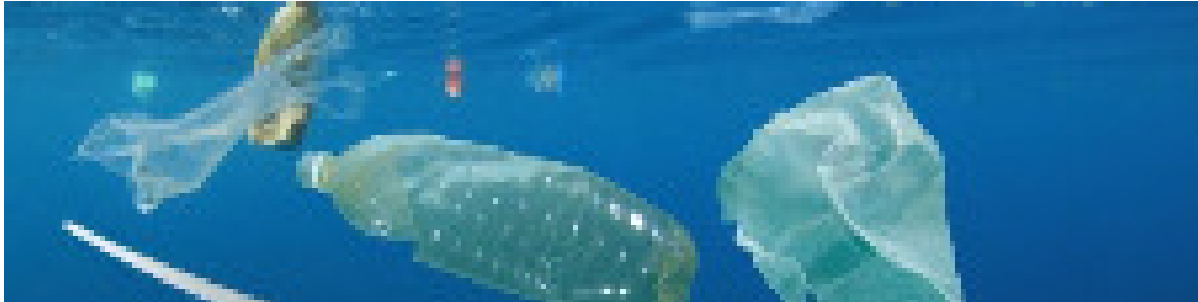
You Might Also Like...



3 Essential Steps to Starting a Sustainable Company



Precycling Helps Shoppers Save



Washed Ashore: 4 Innovative Products From Upcycled Marine Plastic

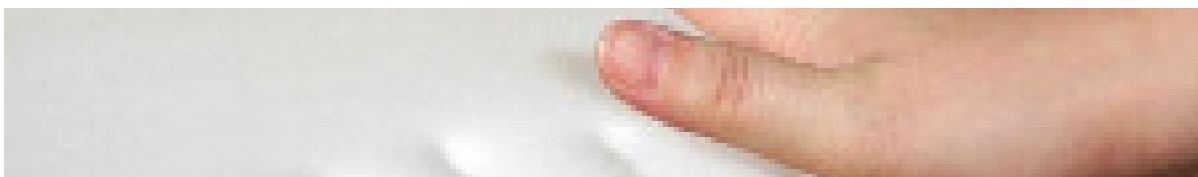
Recent Posts



You Can Encourage Companies to Reduce Waste

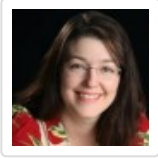


Maven Moment: The Cracked Cup Remains





Recycling Mystery: Memory Foam



Gemma Alexander

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).