

THE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Interview with Andy Best
Managing Director, Change ++



Extract from book commissioned by
Brevity Marketing

Introduction

A relatively new addition to the business vocabulary, but mission-critical if a company is going to be looking long-term.

But what does 'sustainable' really mean?

With 'sustainability' it has become locked in the crosshairs of the pursuit of environmental best practice, which arguably is the commercial equivalent of cart before horse.

The very *modus operandi* of a sustainable business means that one of the outputs will be environmental responsibility, though a company delivering environmental sustainability won't necessarily be a sustainable business.

Arguably 'sustainable' is kind of a business definition of holistic, with everything it does interconnected by its culture.

In other words its about sense of purpose, values, behaviours, active brand, internal/external engagement with all of the stakeholders, relationship optimisation, consistency, resilience, a mindset which sees challenges as opportunities, a desire to develop a circular economy, all of which combines to deliver sustainability, all rooted in responsible practices that will serve to preserve our planet.

For a series of papers and subsequent book commissioned by Brevity Marketing and to be published by DECISION magazine, business owners and directors from across generations and market sectors share their thoughts about how they would define the characteristics of a sustainable business, and what the journey might hold.

This is one of the interviews to be included.

Prepared to face up to difficult issues

“Don’t be surprised when you start tripping over the carpet you keep sweeping stuff under.”

Now it wasn’t Andy Best who actually said that, but the managing director of Change++ is at one with the message.

“A characteristic of a sustainable business is that it is prepared to address difficult issues,” he maintains. “There has to be openness about mental health for example, but there is still a lot of fear about saying the wrong thing. If a colleague asks for a couple of days away from the business to get their head straight, I’d say of course, but we have to work out how we will play this, because in a small firm an absence is noticeable, and questions, not unnaturally, will be asked by colleagues.

“If people are comfortable coming to you when they are struggling, they remember it. This is support they might not get elsewhere and rather than them taking advantage, they will have a sense of loyalty, and that is part of building the long-term, which helps make a business sustainable. And if there is mutual trust, conversations don’t have to be guarded.”



Andy Best

Building a sustainable company comes from the core thinking of the business, rather than well-meaning individual initiatives around the edges, says Best. “It also goes deeper. Is your vending machine being filled with products from multi-nationals which have little regard for our planet and people?”

“You’ve got to encourage business partners to accompany you on your journey. That can come at a cost to the business but the easy things to do well aren’t the ones which have the greatest impact.

“A sustainable business does need to have relationships with like-minded suppliers and customers for that matter who share its characteristics.

“When we meet a new client we will talk about how we want to build a long-term relationship because it’s fulfilling to be with them on their journey. When we build a data solution, the customer will own it rather than them being financially obligated in perpetuity. The point I’m making is that ethos and values must run through the commercial arrangements of the business.

“I’d love to say you should be able to work with any company but the truth is that to build a sustainable company, you can’t. Their particular social or political leanings in this day and age have impact if they are conflicted with your values. ‘I don’t like your approach to business or life for that matter, but I’ll take the money from you’ – that’s not going to be the basis of a long-term relationship and it will damage your culture.

“Understand that I’m talking about complete opposites, where there is no middle ground where you can meet and have a positive influence. If you have beliefs, you really have to stand by them.”

“We’ve never had our values formally written down,” explains Best. “I went on a management course and was told we should define and present those values. I thought, do we?”

“I realise that the company’s values will reflect more of the founder or CEO and that having them written down makes them more understood as a company grows. But values on a website can often be so boiler plate. The real impact comes from the importance the company places on establishing relationships.

change

“For a small business, that includes growing its people, something which has always been the right thing to do but wasn’t necessarily considered an imperative. We hear so much these days about the mentality of the new generation, and that business has to keep them on board by allowing them the opportunities in terms of developing their skills, gaining experiences, and being given responsibilities if they are going to feel engaged long-term.

“Then they are going to be interested in working for a small business because of its ethos rather than seeing it as a stepping stone, and a sustainable business needs the oxygen of consistency.

“So if someone says their area of work isn’t ticking boxes for them anymore, then let’s see where else their skills can be applied.

“And in terms of scaling the business, a short-term approach would be to recruit those with years of experience because it doesn’t matter if they retire in the next few years. But then there’s no next generation coming through and nobody for those experienced people to pass their knowledge onto, an approach which isn’t going to result in a sustainable platform going further forward, so it’s important to strike a balance.”

Best introduces an interesting dimension to what constitutes a sustainable company. “I can genuinely not think of a time when I didn’t want to come to work, either when I was an employee of the company or when me and my business partner took over,” he avers.

“Don’t get me wrong; there are times when I’d rather have stayed in bed an extra hour, but if everyone can enjoy what they do at work, not necessarily all the time, and get a sense of satisfaction of a job well done rather than just a job which is paid for, that means a culture is in place which encourages long-term engagement.

“I firmly believe that the company’s culture should result in everyone knowing how their role is helping deliver the service the customer deserves. That’s what will have a lasting impression on a company’s staff as well as the customer.”

Post pandemic, Change++, which enables companies to view and understand data from across their business in real time so informed decisions can be made minute by minute, opted to forsake their offices.

Especially for a small firm though, can hybrid or remote working impact on long-term engagement and result in a dilution of its culture?

“I do miss being in the office with the team but the challenge is how to have open communication with people whether they

are together working in the office or not,” says Best. “We tried having a Teams call open all day which meant nobody missed out on conversations wherever they were. However this didn’t work well for us in the longer term.

“The goal remains to make sure nobody is out of the loop so we have a stand-up meeting with everyone each morning as well as having an on-line coffee morning once a fortnight on a Friday to shoot the breeze.

“A problem with hybrid working is that people don’t necessarily see their colleagues if they are coming into the office on different days. You can’t underestimate the importance of there being a sense of belonging in building a sustainable business. A lot of what is talked about when people are in an office isn’t directly work related, which means you get to know more about your colleagues which strengthens the team.”

And a legacy of building a sustainable business? “When I come to retire I want to pass on the way we do business, not just the business itself,” Best explains.

changepp.co.uk

About Brevity Marketing



Kaia Vincent

The interview with Andy Best was undertaken with Brevity Marketing founder and managing director Kaia Vincent FCIM.

Brevity Marketing is on a mission to empower business leaders and teams to succeed in today's competitive market while at the same time considering their impact on people and planet, providing tailored strategic and tactical marketing that tell a company's story and drive results – helping business to be seen, heard, and chosen above the noise.

Brevity achieved B Corporation status in 2023.

Kaia Vincent began her career in the beverage industry as an editor at Canadean (now Global Data), a leading analysis firm in that sector. After earning a master's in marketing (CIM Level 7 Diploma), she transitioned into the corporate marketing department and was responsible for leading high-profile events across Europe for c-suite executives.

Seeking new challenges, Kaia left Canadean to pursue a career in the fast-paced tech sector as marketing manager for a Novell and VMWare platinum partner. Then following a stint in the agency world, she founded her own consultancy, Brevity Marketing in 2010. With over twenty-five years of experience and a chartered marketer and marketing fellow designations, Kaia has worked with more than one hundred SME leaders throughout her career. She practices continuous professional development (CPD) including more recent studies in artificial intelligence and neuroscience.

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About DECISION magazine

First published in 1988, DECISION magazine reflects the business lifestyle, the trials and tribulations, the hopes and aspirations of business owners and directors responsible for businesses with a turnover of £5million and above.

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