

# THE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Interview with Chris Sidey  
Founder Director, QTD



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.

# Investigating a different approach

“A competitor can copy what you do – apart that is from your ethos. So I see a sustainable company that develops business opportunities which also improve environmental sustainability as squaring the circle.”

In contemporary parlance, Chris Sidey, the founder director of QTD walks the talk.

His story begins when he was building the decking for his parents' new home when the site manager for the housing development asked whether he would do the same for the rest of the scheme. But the only available suitable timber was tropical or Amazon hardwood, often the result of deforestation.

Sidey decided to invest time in seeing if he could find an alternative. His investigations led him to a timber mill in Finland, which was using a heat and steam process to modify sustainable softwood which would otherwise be susceptible to exposure to the UK climate. That process, resulting in what is called thermowood, means it can be used for outside and indoor applications like cladding, flooring, or the aforementioned decking because of its added stability and durability.



*Chris Sidey*

So in 2018 Sidey quit being a contractor and decided to just concentrate on manufacturing products (predominantly cladding for commercial reasons) using rough sawn timber from sustainable forestry predominantly in the UK as well as the thermowood material from mills in Finland and Turkey which had the technology that wasn't available in the UK.

"The market is saturated with decking," he explains, "but with cladding, the UK is importing uPVC plastic products from China, while composite products made in the UK will also end up in landfill because they aren't one hundred per cent recyclable.

"Then we thought what else can we do in our limited capacity as an SME. As a result, any remnants and sawdust which would otherwise be waste material we make into briquettes for home



heating, which have the additional benefit of producing little ash and smoke and a higher heat output than conventional wood.”

Another example of Sidey’s thinking was to also use a mill in Scotland applying the thermowood process to dispatch QTD branded product direct to customers in the north of the UK to minimise carbon miles and at the same time be more local to the potential customer in that region.

“We see ourselves as being on a journey to actively look at alternatives which will take the pressure off the planet,” he says.

“I think it’s difficult for companies and consumers alike who want to live a more sustainable lifestyle. Take electric cars. Personally I’m not in favour because we haven’t got adequate infrastructure and we’ll still be causing environmental issues because of what we are extracting from the planet to make the batteries and how we’re doing it. And it wasn’t that long ago that we were being encouraged to buy diesel cars. We were pushed down that route before abruptly it was classified as a dirty fuel.”

According to Sidey, to be sustainable a company needs to be in control of as many of its processes as possible. “I’d like to have



a thermowood kiln which would enable us to bring in timber from countries which haven't embraced the technology or where their mills haven't sufficient capacity," he says. "But that would require a £1million investment.

"Government also needs better joined up writing. We wanted to apply for a grant to install a warm air heating system at our new workshop which would burn our own generated wood waste. But the criterion was that the grant would only be available for companies transitioning from a dirty fuel."

Ironically, Sidey points out, promoting a sustainable way forward could result in quite different effect for an SME trailblazer. “Once it becomes apparent that what they are doing is the way forward,” he muses, “a corporate competitor can just throw a cheque at the available resource. We embraced a new concept because of a sense of purpose. They would just jump on the bandwagon because they see a commercial and a financial opportunity.”

For the UK economy to be made up of sustainable businesses, Sidey says investing in the country’s manufacturing capability should be a priority.

He hints at the need to be more self-sustainable. “We need blast coated stainless screws which have a particularly small head, but they have to be sourced from China because they’re not made in this country. The UK will only become truly sustainable when it relies less on imports.”

“The challenge,” Sidey believes, “is balancing profitability with sustainable practices, and maintaining that balance during periods of rapid growth.

“My belief is a sustainable business also means having the ability to adapt to market and environmental changes while staying committed to your core values. It’s about resilience.”

[www.qtdgroup.com](http://www.qtdgroup.com)

## About Brevity Marketing



***Kaia Vincent***

The interview with Chris Sidey 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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