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**Innovation and collaboration equal sustainability**

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**Many climate change sceptics have launched themselves through the media following the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Summit. Despite this flurry, the key world institutions have moved on from the whether and why of climate change. The market has shifted and the business world must move accordingly, factoring in technology, social media and new business models. By Dan Atkins.**

The increasing adoption of sustainable business practices by the world's leading businesses, combined with innovative developments in information technology, means the business context is on the verge of a rapid and dramatic change. A change, that will see unsurpassed transparency in the actions of business. A change, that will enable even more businesses to realise the true value of sustainability and present an endless list of marketing possibilities and opportunities.



The rapid emergence of social media and the development of Web 2.0 are contributing to this changing business context. The growing access to an expanding and increasingly informed market through social media, combined with the interactivity of Web 2.0, means businesses have rapidly increasing opportunities to market their sustainability credentials.

It also means businesses will be under the spotlight more than ever before as these technological advances will help to dramatically increase both corporate and government transparency.

In October I referred to the World Economic Forum's 'Driving Sustainable Consumption' meeting in New York. Nike, a participant in the meeting, demonstrates how companies can utilise this changing context to their advantage. The company is currently working on plans to enable customers to trace the origins of their products. Nike even intends to let them view, over the internet, the factories and working conditions where the products are produced.

It was as recent as 2007 that Nike was in the media regarding their use of sweatshops; this lesson allowed them to recognise the benefit of sustainable business practices and Nike intends to use this to their full advantage.

With companies such as Nike leading the charge, sustainable and transparent business practices will quickly become the way of the present, rather than the future. The message here is that if you want to be a leading company, you will have to be a leading company in sustainability.

So what does this changing context require of business? In their recent report called 'Vision 2050 – the new agenda for business', the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) describe the way forward as "a call for further dialogue... a call for action. Collaboration, conviction and courage will be required to visualise and implement the radical changes needed".

Collaboration across business, government and the community is certainly required for business to adapt to and benefit from these changing times. Business must engage stakeholders in the process and look for opportunities to collaborate where possible. Change requires innovation and to be successful in implementing change, innovation needs collaboration. The future for business will be built on sustainable innovation and collaboration.

Following on from their 2009 meeting in New York, the World Economic Forum released its 'Redesigning Business Value: a roadmap for sustainable consumption' report. The report describes how collaborative sustainability starts from within the business: "Businesses need to own the sustainability agenda within their own organisations, starting with the board and then engaging the employees and other stakeholders."

Any business wanting to embrace sustainability as a mechanism to build competitive advantage and gain the most out of the changing business context must rethink their business model and be prepared to fundamentally change their thinking and practice.

The World Economic Forum outlines six key actions for businesses to now take:

- Make the journey towards sustainability as tangible as possible;
- Engage all levels of the company;
- Change the business model;
- Shift values and culture;
- Engage all internal stakeholders; and
- Implement sustainable practices across and along the value chain.

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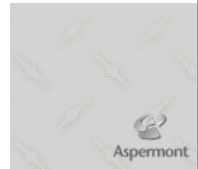
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