

Susty Story Ranking

Which Coffee Brands Tell Their Sustainability Story Best?

Everyone has a story to tell.
But who tells it best?

We reveal the best in the
coffee business.

Want to improve your
communications? Read on.



Other companies reviewed (alphabetically):



Context has 22 years experience in sustainability strategy and communications.
We work across business sectors, specialising in food, agriculture and agtech.
We operate globally, with offices in London and Los Angeles.

Talk to us about how to tell your sustainability story better.

Francesca Ward (francesca.ward@contexteurope.com) or Peter Knight (peter.knight@contexteurope.com)

Welcome

Good story telling is good for business. It reassures customers, attracts and retains top talent, and boosts your reputation with consumers, customers, investors and civil society. Two things differentiate the leaders: having a good sustainability story to tell - and telling it well.

We help companies develop their sustainability strategies and then support them in telling their sustainability stories. Here's our latest analysis in the food and agriculture sector: which coffee brands tell their stories best.

Our Approach

We selected 11 top coffee brands, all owned by companies committed to improving the sustainability of their coffee. Given their parentage, each brand should have a sustainability story to tell about their sourcing. To understand if the brands are making the most of their story, we analysed the US or UK brand and parent company websites containing the most content on sustainability.

First, we scored if the brand has a good story to tell – from 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent):

- Does the brand have a sustainable sourcing strategy with timebound and measurable goals that cover the environmental, social and economic issues facing coffee farms?
- Has the brand reported against its sustainability strategy since 2017?

Second, we scored how well the story is told – from 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent) across four categories:

- **Messaging:** Does the brand tell its sustainable sourcing story clearly and concisely?
- **Liveliness:** Has the brand shared progress in the last three months via a blog or news update?
- **Multimedia:** Does the brand make good use of videos and/or infographics to explain its sustainable sourcing strategy in a sharable, engaging way?
- **Social media:** How often does the brand share sustainable coffee sourcing posts on Twitter? On average, what level of engagement (comments, likes, shares) do these posts generate?

Results

Do coffee brands have a good story to tell? Mostly.

All brands have a coffee sustainability strategy and most report their progress in meeting their commitments. But the level of detail varies dramatically between brands.

Many brands use sustainability certification – such as Rainforest Alliance, Fairtrade and UTZ – to source coffee responsibly. Some brands have developed individual sustainability programmes, with McDonald's, Nespresso, Starbucks and Nescafé providing the best examples. Having measurable and timebound goals help brands discuss their sustainable sourcing journey with greater clarity.

Do coffee brands tell their sustainability story well? There's room for improvement.

All 11 brands reviewed have exciting stories to tell – but many are failing to reap the story-telling benefits from their investment in sustainability.

McDonald's, Nescafé and Illy are the leaders. They have developed clear, personalised messaging, use videos and infographics to explain the meaning behind their work.

Here's a breakdown of our findings. Find examples of best practice on the next page.

	Messaging	Liveliness	Multimedia	Social media
Why it matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The right messaging is vital if you want your story to resonate with target audiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fresh content (at least once a quarter) shows you are actively engaged. It makes your story believable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infographics and videos make your sustainability story understandable and memorable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social media is one of the best ways to reach key audiences and to get your company's work known.
What we found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some companies tell their story in a straight-forward and individualised way, but most fail to explain themselves concisely and accessibly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brands are divided. Half share news regularly, with most posting at least once per quarter. The other half miss the opportunity to share updates, leaving their stories feeling static. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Around a third of brands use videos and infographics to explain their coffee sustainability strategy in an easy-to-understand way. The remainder could use multimedia more effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just over half the brands use Twitter to share their coffee sustainability story. These companies post 1-4 times per month, with posts getting an average of 53 engagements.
Top tips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Don't just name drop. Simply naming arcane organisations isn't helpful to consumers. ✓ Get to the point. Provide readers with a simple strategy overview, ideally on a webpage. Don't make people plough through lengthy reports. ✓ Be individual. A personalised tone stands out. Develop your own distinctive messaging that reflects your brand values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Keep it brief – and regular. It's best to share your work in short, bite-size chunks that readers remember. Posting regularly shows you're actively implementing your strategy. ✓ Words don't always say it best. Plan your blogs around key events. If you're preparing a video or graphic for a presentation, reuse it in a blog. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Make it personal. The best brands use videos to explain why coffee sustainability matters. They often use a personal lens to tell the story, for example an employee's or farmer's experience of working with the brand. ✓ Bring it all together. Not everyone knows about the sustainability challenges facing coffee. Most brands miss the chance to explain this visually in a simple graphic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Get the balance right. If you've invested in coffee sustainability, make sure you share! Otherwise, you won't get the most from your work. ✓ Keep it simple. Posts need to be interesting, but also need to make sense to non-experts. ✓ Influence the influencers. Twitter is like a networking event. Have a hit-list of those you want to impress and engage them.

Best messaging



- Distinctive messaging **frames the strategy**: “We’ve been building respectful relationships with our farmers for more than 80 years. The world needs a plan to help coffee continue to thrive, and we’ve got one. It’s called Grown Respectfully.”



- Simplifies complex topics – such as traceability – allowing every reader to understand why it matters (see [page 10](#)).

Best liveliness



- **Beautiful articles** on coffee sourcing. Good imagery, clear explanations and stylish design help bring Nespresso’s work to life.



of Harrogate - since 1886

- Writes with a journal-like feel. The casual and insightful tone tells Taylor’s story in a **personal way**.

Best multimedia



- Makes excellent use of infographics to explain their sustainability strategy. The ‘**What is Ethically Sourced Coffee?**’ infographic explains the story in a way all can follow.



- **Lots of short videos** explain the challenges facing coffee. **Interviews with farmers** help contextualise Nescafé’s work, making the story feel authentic.

Best social media



- Tweets about coffee sustainability the most. **Use hashtags** and rhetorical questions to spark curiosity.



- Celebrates key events – such as **Earth Day** – by sharing their coffee sustainability work, leading to a high level of engagement.

About Context

Strategy

We’ll help you make a better business by devising the right strategy.

Our custom services include:

- Material issues assessment
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement
- Strategy development
- Implementation planning
- Risk forecasting and management
- Issue deep-briefings
- Sector and best practice benchmarking

Impact

We’ll help you connect with stakeholders, across platforms:

Communications

- Websites
- Sustainability reporting
- Content from infographics to video
- Employee briefing materials
- Executive presentations
- Event and meeting facilitation

Social media

- Platform selection and strategy
- Content development and scheduling
- Influencer engagement
- Analytics and reporting

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social

environmental

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