

‘Sustainable Solutions Inevitable in a World Starved of Natural Resources’

By Invitation

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There is seldom a business leader in today's world who would argue against the need for sustainable growth. The case for sustainability is widely accepted. Yet, we have seen only a few products and services actually making a mark because of their sustainability. This is because the initial step is often the hardest and the untried solution is always put off to another day. As a result, the market continues to be fed with what we know will be accepted and consumed.

One of the biggest challenges I have found in embedding issues of sustainability into the core of business operations is the mindset that apportioning a cost to such endeavours – a cost that is loaded on top of the existing costs, and one that is not similarly borne by other competitors. So the thinking most likely to be encountered is: "I can design for sustainability but will incur a cost which competition will not. That translates to a higher market price. Now how's that good for our business?"

It is this approach that makes driving sustainability a challenge in business operations today. In my view, sustainable



solutions are not something that we can negotiate; they are inevitable in a world starved of natural resources. The only question is how soon we embrace them.

We needn't be prisoners to the dominant logic that sees sustainability through the limited prism of costs. I can think of examples – not a whole lot but certainly a few – that have challenged the dominant mindset and have delivered sustainable solutions while simultaneously improving the consumer value proposition.

Across South East Asia, we launched Comfort One Rinse fabric conditioner which needs only one bucket of water for rinsing instead of three. This saves 30 litres of water per wash for the average household. Now this is clearly great for the environment but importantly is also a great value proposition for consumers

in large parts of the world who are struggling to cope with the acute shortage of water. If we could convert all our laundry product users in Asia and South Africa to Comfort One Rinse, we would save more than 500 billion litres of water a year.

Similarly Pureit, our water purifier was designed with the consumer insight that a majority of the people in India do not have access to either electricity or flowing water. So it had to work with no electricity with no flowing water and deliver clean and safe drinking water at a very low cost. When we achieved that, we delivered a product that is as sustainable as it is successful.

We haven't found such a magic answer for all our brands but the answers exist. We need to look for them free of the mindset that sees sustainability as a 'cost' that reduces our competitive abilities.

It is our belief that over time, consumers will increasingly demand sustainable solutions and prefer them over products that do not carry such a conviction. Working with sustainability solutions today is to take an early lead in preparing the organisation for an entirely new set of aspirations that all brands must strive to meet in the near future.

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