



the
marketing
pod



BIG GREEN FEARS

Tackling the monster under the corporate desk

INTRODUCTION

In the world of corporate sustainability comms, as in life, our fears may not always reflect reality - but may be holding us back from success.

Today's organisations are finding themselves increasingly fearful of speaking up about sustainability achievements and initiatives; keeping quiet for fear of getting it wrong.

Some are paralysed by the looming threat of regulatory fines or public scrutiny. Others are struggling to get the information they need, or lack confidence in the accuracy of their data. All are missing the quieter, more insidious danger hiding under their desks.

THE MONSTER UNDER THE CORPORATE DESK

Drawing on data gathered from a survey of **250 senior level decision makers** in mid-sized and large UK organisations, this report reveals a growing epidemic of greenhushing, examines the reasons why organisations are choosing not to share information about their progress towards green goals, and delves into the very real dangers of staying silent.

In this report, discover:

- **Why sharing sustainability success has become so difficult**
- **The long-term economic consequences of green hushing**
- **How to overcome green fears and communicate with confidence**

85% of organisations have intentionally reduced sustainability comms to the public.

98% have lost a business opportunity because they could not substantiate green claims.

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SHHH... DON'T WAKE THE GREEN MONSTER

WHAT IS THE DEADLIEST ANIMAL IN THE WORLD?

You might be thinking about large bears, sharp-toothed sharks or exotic venomous snakes – but the answer is much smaller and closer to home. With about 1 million deaths a year, the humble mosquito beats them all, with no other animal coming even remotely close to this level of lethality.



Sometimes our fears don't match reality. Some dangers become so much greater in our heads than they actually are. On the other hand, we might dismiss real risks or threats as unimportant.

When it comes to corporate sustainability, the fear of 'getting it wrong' might lead decision-makers to inertia, despite the clear benefits of moving forward with their sustainability agenda, and of transparently communicating successes and setbacks.

Staying silent on sustainability progress might be tempting, but regulatory compliance, and the risk of a PR sting, pale in comparison to a much bigger threat: B2B businesses face a very real commercial danger when competitors stretch their sustainability targets, gather verified data, communicate progress with authenticity – and beat them to new business opportunities as a result.

As seasoned sustainability marketing professionals, we were keen to take the pulse of the situation and gather original insights from business decision-makers.

- **What is slowing down their sustainability journey?**
- **What are their biggest 'green fears'?**
- **What kind of support do they need when it comes to marketing and communications?**

Merging original research with advice informed by over a decade of work in thoughtful sustainability comms, this report is your roadmap to outgrowing those fears – helping you turn transparent communication into your greatest competitive advantage.

It's time to stop worrying about the 'green monster' of public opinion, and start addressing the quiet (and much sneakier) risk of staying still while your competitors grow.



WHO'S AFRAID OF SUSTAINABILITY COMMS?

85% of respondents said their organisations have **intentionally reduced public communications about sustainability**, despite celebrating progress internally.

Most people are now familiar with the term '**greenwashing**' – the deliberate use of vague, unsubstantiated sustainability claims to raise a company's profile and upsell its products or services.

However, a more recent phenomenon is quietly emerging in the world of sustainability comms. '**Greenhushing**' is spreading as a reaction to tighter regulations against empty, misleading green marketing, leading organisations to avoid sharing sustainability information for fear of public scrutiny or regulatory backlash.

Our survey confirms that a vast majority of organisations (85% of respondents) have **intentionally reduced public communications about sustainability**, despite celebrating progress internally.

This shows that although organisations feel there's something to celebrate, they lack the confidence to communicate it to the public and possibly to important and influential stakeholders.

Greenhushing has long-term economic consequences.

By failing to disclose their sustainability targets and report on progress, decision-makers miss out on the opportunity to improve their brand reputation, boost customer engagement, and demonstrate progress to investors and stakeholders. In other words, they are trading short-term safety for long-term stagnation.



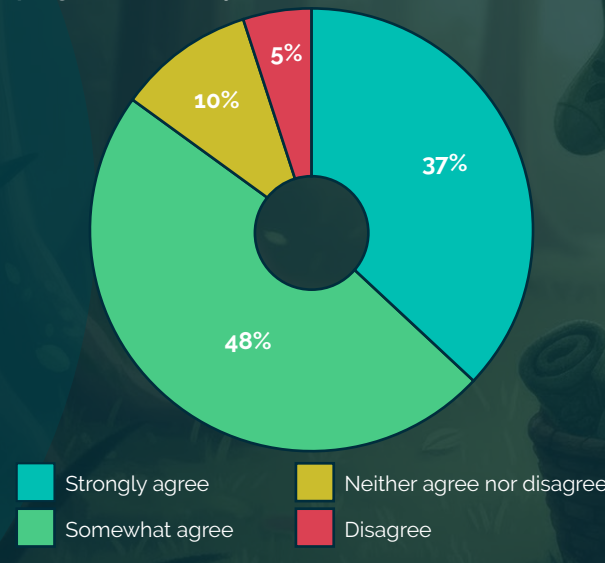
GREENHUSHING AND TRUST EROSION

GlobeScan found that only **36%** of consumers reported seeing brand sustainability messaging in 2025, compared to 49% in 2023. The same report revealed that trust is in decline, with only **65%** of consumers now believing those messages, down from 79% in 2022.

Greenhushing could also put funding at stake, as communicating sustainability enhances investor confidence. According to PwC's *Global Investor Survey 2025*, **61%** of investors would increase investment for companies using sustainability data to improve energy efficiency, and 53% would increase investment for companies building resilience to climate risks.

While the fear of public scrutiny feels like a looming danger, it is the quiet threat of missed opportunity that is the real monster.

To what extent do you agree that in the past year, your organisation has intentionally reduced public comms about sustainability despite celebrating progress internally?



A COMPLEX REGULATORY LANDSCAPE

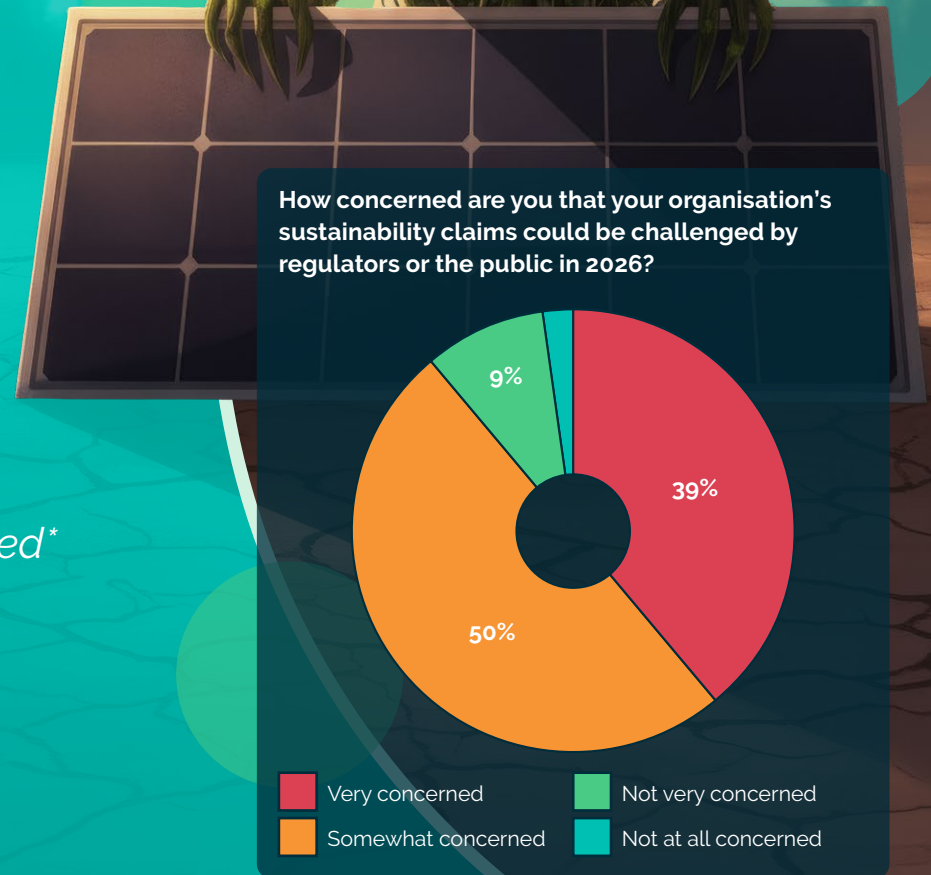
The top green fears of 2026

- 29% - Keeping up with the latest regulations
- 19% - Risk to professional reputation
- 17% - Lack of resources to revisit data
- 16% - Lack of personal knowledge
- 15% - No confidence that claims are data-backed*

The risk of non-compliance

89% fear their organisation's claims could be challenged by regulators or the public.

*respondents were asked to choose up to three answers



For decades, terms like 'green' or 'eco-friendly' have been used as generic labels to make unsubstantiated sustainability claims – but things have changed in the past few years.

Recently, regulators have taken a much stronger stance against greenwashing. Before 2025, organisations accused of greenwashing could expect a warning from the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Now, consequences can be much more serious. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) can bypass courts to fine companies **up to 10% of their annual global turnover** for misleading environmental claims.

In January 22, 2026, the CMA further strengthened regulations against greenwashing, issuing new guidance specifically on supply chain responsibility. This means organisations are now legally liable for their suppliers' green claims, and must conduct audits to ensure they are backed up by data.

The [CMA's Green Claims Code](#) also mandates that sustainability claims must:

- **Be truthful and accurate**
- **Be clear and unambiguous**
- **Not omit or hide important information**
- **Only make fair and meaningful comparisons**
- **Consider the full life cycle of a product**
- **Be substantiated with data**

This turning of the screw on greenwashing regulations has been essential in protecting consumers' right to truthful, factual information.

However, it has also changed how organisations shape their communication strategies, driving some of them to be much more cautious than in the past. While the new regulations encourage honesty and transparency, some organisations are finding it difficult to gather reliable data to prove all six criteria of the Green Claims Code for all of their products or services. As a result, they might choose to not make any sustainability claims at all.

This silence is not without cost. Keeping up with ESG reporting regulations and green marketing comms guidelines might be complex, but shying away from this complexity is costing organisations real money in terms of lost business and brand equity.

[How can I keep up with sustainability regulations?](#)



In the UK, under the **Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024**, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) can bypass courts to fine greenwashing companies up to **10% of their global annual turnover**.

THE PRICE OF SILENCE

Understandably, fears of regulatory non-compliance and PR disasters can push businesses towards silence. But there's a much more concrete threat looming on the horizon.

The inability to substantiate sustainability claims is a primary reason for losing contracts.

Virtually all of our respondents (98%) have been excluded from a new contract opportunity, or have lost business, due to their inability to back up their sustainability credentials.

The problem reaches emergency status in the utilities sector, where **100% of respondents agree** that this occurs regularly:

33% state this happens 'always'

67% state this happens 'often'

Yet, when asked about barriers to advancing their sustainability agenda, over a third (**37%**) answered that sustainability is not enough of a priority, **35%** said there's short-term profit pressure, and **32%** said there's a lack of a clear ROI.

There is an obvious contradiction between the need to put sustainability front and centre of decision-makers' agenda, and a reluctance to see sustainability as the business asset it actually is.



THE VALUE OF SUSTAINABILITY

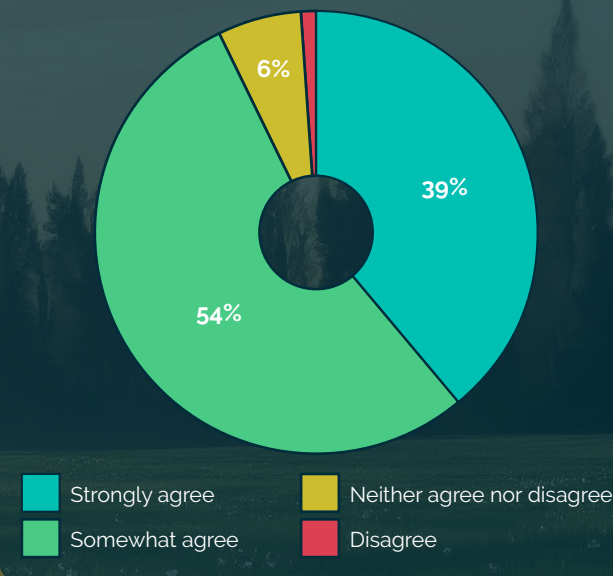
Would customers be **willing to pay a premium** for a truly sustainable product or service? Yes, and even in the current business climate, according to the vast majority of our respondents (**93%**).

This shows that customers have already made the shift from considering sustainability a cost to bear, to seeing the inherent value it brings to the products and services they purchase.



The reality of lost business and the willingness of customers to pay a premium prove a crucial point: sustainability is indeed a priority, and an ambitious ESG agenda can drive clear ROI without compromising short-term profits.

To what extent do you agree that customers are willing to pay a premium for a more sustainable product or service in the current business climate?



KNOWLEDGE IS THE ANSWER



Keeping up with regulations and knowing how to communicate sustainability progress effectively and transparently could unlock business opportunities – from winning more work, to increasing the value of products and services, all the way to boosting customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

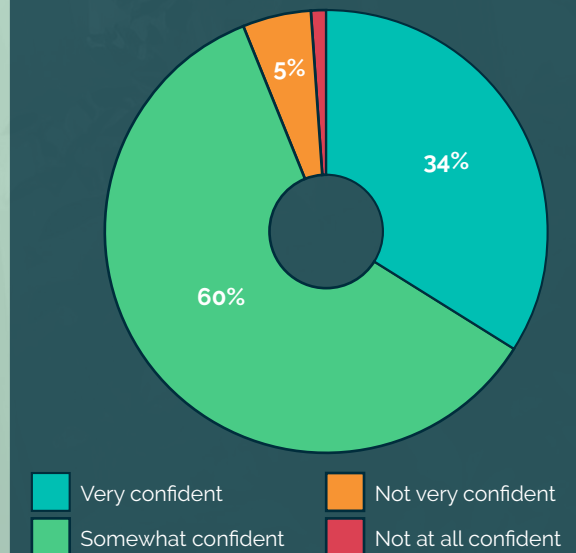
But are management teams knowledgeable enough to bring about change?

60% of respondents are somewhat confident that management has the right 'green skills' to execute the board's sustainability vision, with **34%** being very confident. Yet, a lack of internal expertise is mentioned by **42%** of respondents as the biggest challenge when discussing barriers to accelerating organisations' sustainability strategies.

It seems that, despite management's expertise, sustainability knowledge is not being shared across departments. But locking 'green skills' in silos can only weaken their impact, as well as further deepen the divide between legal, sales and marketing.

On the other hand, structured opportunities for knowledge sharing could give teams more confidence in their sustainability data and how to back them up, minimising fears of greenwashing and reducing instances of greenhushing.

How confident are you, if at all, that your current management has the appropriate 'green skills' to execute your board's sustainability vision?



A PATHWAY TO OVERCOMING GREEN FEARS



1

ESTABLISH THE BASELINE



- What sustainability data is available?
- How was it gathered? Is it reliable, up to date and science-backed? Is it third-party verified?
- What tools are in place to gather new data?

2

EDUCATE YOUR TEAMS



- Assess the current level of 'green skills' across teams
- Ensure all departments know where sustainability data can be found and how it was gathered (including software, databases etc.)
- Ensure all departments know their own role in capturing important data
- Establish formal training sessions to share sustainability know-how internally
- Identify skill and knowledge gaps and plan external training
- Organise regular opportunities for different departments to communicate (lunch & learn, mentor/mentee schemes etc.)
- Create an attention-grabbing internal campaign in collaboration with sustainability experts
- Co-create sustainability initiatives and encourage everyone to be a part of it. Make sustainability part of your culture, and everyone's concern

3

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY



- Prioritise progress over perfection – share your journey with authenticity
- Don't be afraid to address the reasons for setbacks and challenges
- Stick to verified data and mention your sources
- No one likes to read a dry ESG report: use storytelling to 'humanise' your content, infuse data with values, and showcase your sustainability champions

COMMUNICATING AUTHENTICALLY

How can organisations move beyond greenhushing and share their sustainability story with confidence?

Backing up claims with solid data is the first crucial step, as well as being a legal requirement. But data alone is unlikely to make for an interesting read.

Sustainability has the potential to trigger a **high emotional response** – and rightly so. Most of us care deeply about the environment we inhabit, the communities we live and work in, and the kind of legacy we'll leave to future generations. Data about eco-anxiety is clear: climate change and other environmental challenges are having a [big impact on mental health](#), especially among younger generations.

At the same time, leadership teams might be concerned about the fine balance between profits and ESG investments – and could struggle to communicate their choices to the public without triggering a backlash.

This makes sustainability a complex, delicate topic to tackle – but also one that offers a **unique opportunity for communications to drive real change**.

Almost all our respondents (**98%**) would consider allocating a budget for sustainability communications experts to safeguard their

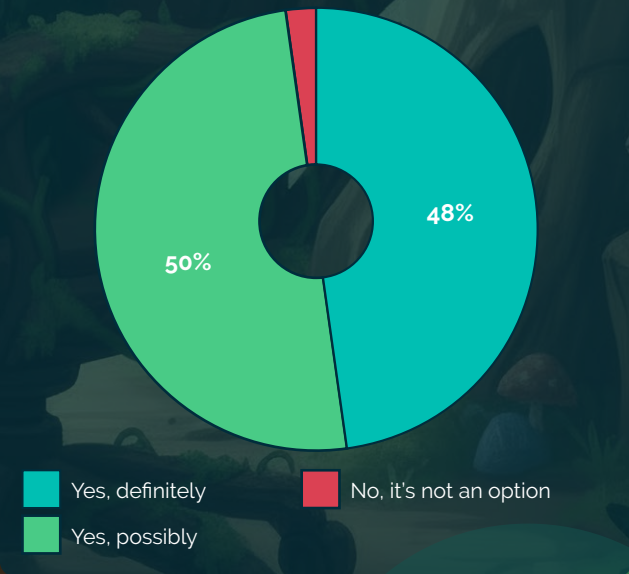
organisation's reputation, and with good reason. When **the stakes are so high**, partnering with communications professionals with a proven track record makes good business sense.

At Pod, we always recommend being open and honest. When you take your audience on the journey with you, they are more likely to get excited about your achievements and understand the reasons behind any setbacks. You will inevitably encounter challenges along the way, and progress may not be linear, so keep your updates regular and transparent if you want to build trust.



In a landscape marked by scepticism towards green marketing, a communication strategy based on **radical honesty** is a breath of fresh air.

Would you consider allocating budget for sustainability communications experts to safeguard your / your organisation's reputation?



MOVING FORWARD

What support could encourage more organisations to move forward with ambitious sustainability plans - and report on their progress?

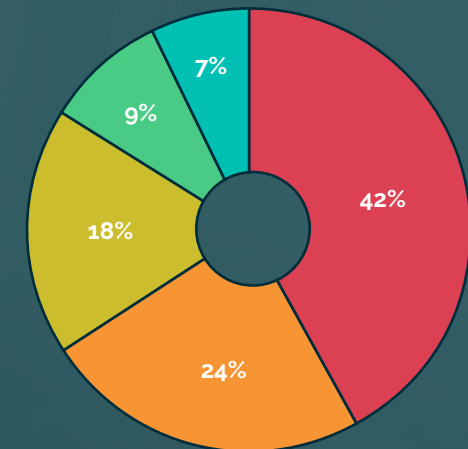
Regulators have the biggest role to play – **42%** of our respondents said that in the next 18 months, they will only do what's legally required from their organisations. This shows that policy-makers have a huge responsibility in ensuring the business community strives for constant innovation, moving from passive compliance to proactive progress.

Customers, prospects and lenders also have a big role to play, since **18%** of respondents said they will only act on requests from these groups.

But reacting to regulatory and stakeholder pressures isn't enough to gain a competitive advantage. To stay ahead of the competition, organisations should have a proactive sustainability plan in place – yet only **7%** of our respondents do.

The message is clear: the gap between compliance and thought leadership is wide, and currently only a minority of organisations are crossing it. Are you brave enough to join them?

Which, if any of the following best describes your organisation's approach to sustainability investment for the next 18 months?



- We will do what's required to meet legal requirements
- Previous investment is being paused due to economic uncertainty
- We will respond only when requested by customers, prospects or lenders
- We have signed up to stretching targets, and that is driving our investment and strategy
- We have an investment strategy in place designed to give us a competitive advantage



LET'S FACE YOUR FEARS TOGETHER

If you're ready to face your fears and find your voice, we'd love to help. Our website is loaded with resources and expert tips, or you can simply get in touch for a chat (we don't bite, promise).

And if you're keen to find a partner in comms, we can help with that too. From developing accurate and authentic messaging that keeps the monsters at bay, through to making sure your tech stack supports your sustainability goals, we've got what you need.

Find out more at www.marketingpod.com



A NOTE ON OUR DATA

The data for this report was collected in February 2026 from 250 Directors+ aged 25+ in UK organisations with 100+ employees by Censuswide.

Censuswide is a member of the Market Research Society (MRS) and the British Polling Council (BPC), and a signatory of the Global Data Quality Pledge. They adhere to the MRS Code of Conduct and ESOMAR principles.



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