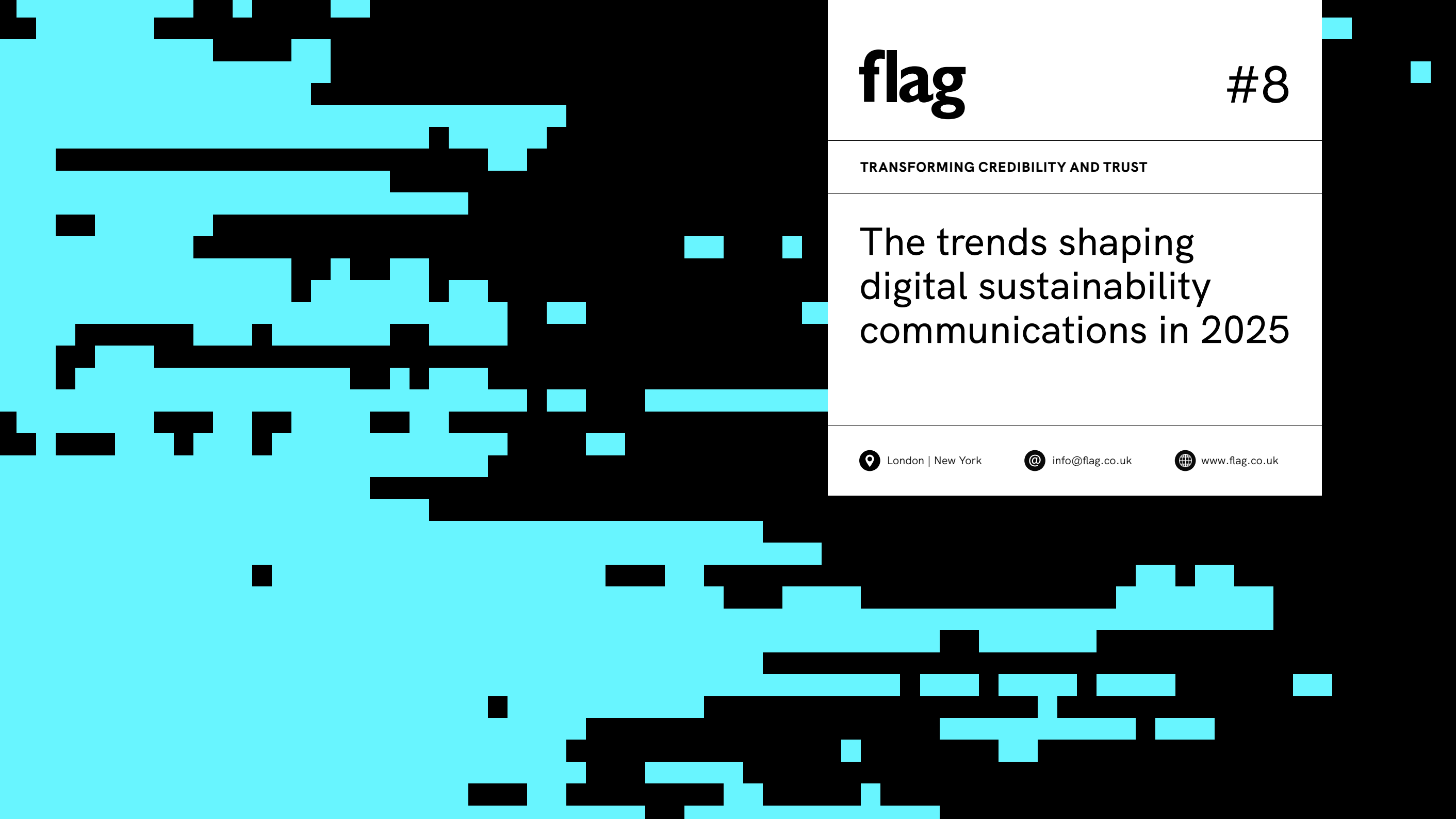




flag

#8

TRANSFORMING CREDIBILITY AND TRUST

The trends shaping digital sustainability communications in 2025

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FOREWORD

Amid growing scrutiny and rapidly shifting expectations, companies face unprecedented challenges in communicating their sustainability strategies, commitments and progress.

Sustainability reporting, driven by regulations such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), is diverging into compliance-focused content and story-driven narratives, prompting organisations to reimagine how to harness the power of digital platforms to foster deeper engagement and find opportunities for greater storytelling.

In their messaging, organisations must perform an increasingly delicate balancing act. While the changing political landscape puts sustainability at the centre of polarised debates, the growing threat of misinformation and greater scrutiny from customers, investors and regulators makes it even more important for companies to be clear about their sustainability position – to prevent it being shaped for them.

Digital channels are critical tools for navigating this complex landscape and unlocking opportunities for deeper engagement. They offer unparalleled reach across diverse audience groups – audiences that themselves are changing. Today, ‘digital native’ generations represent over 70% of B2B buyers and millennials are now the largest adult generation in the US, with significant buying power at work and at a home.

In sustainability communications, the ability to harness digital channels effectively is no longer optional – it is essential to staying relevant, credible and impactful.

At Flag, we help our clients unlock the full potential of digital messaging to communicate their sustainability story. We craft powerful digital platforms, assets and campaigns – always drawing inspiration from our decades of expertise and the world around us.



Joanna Harrod
Senior account director, Flag



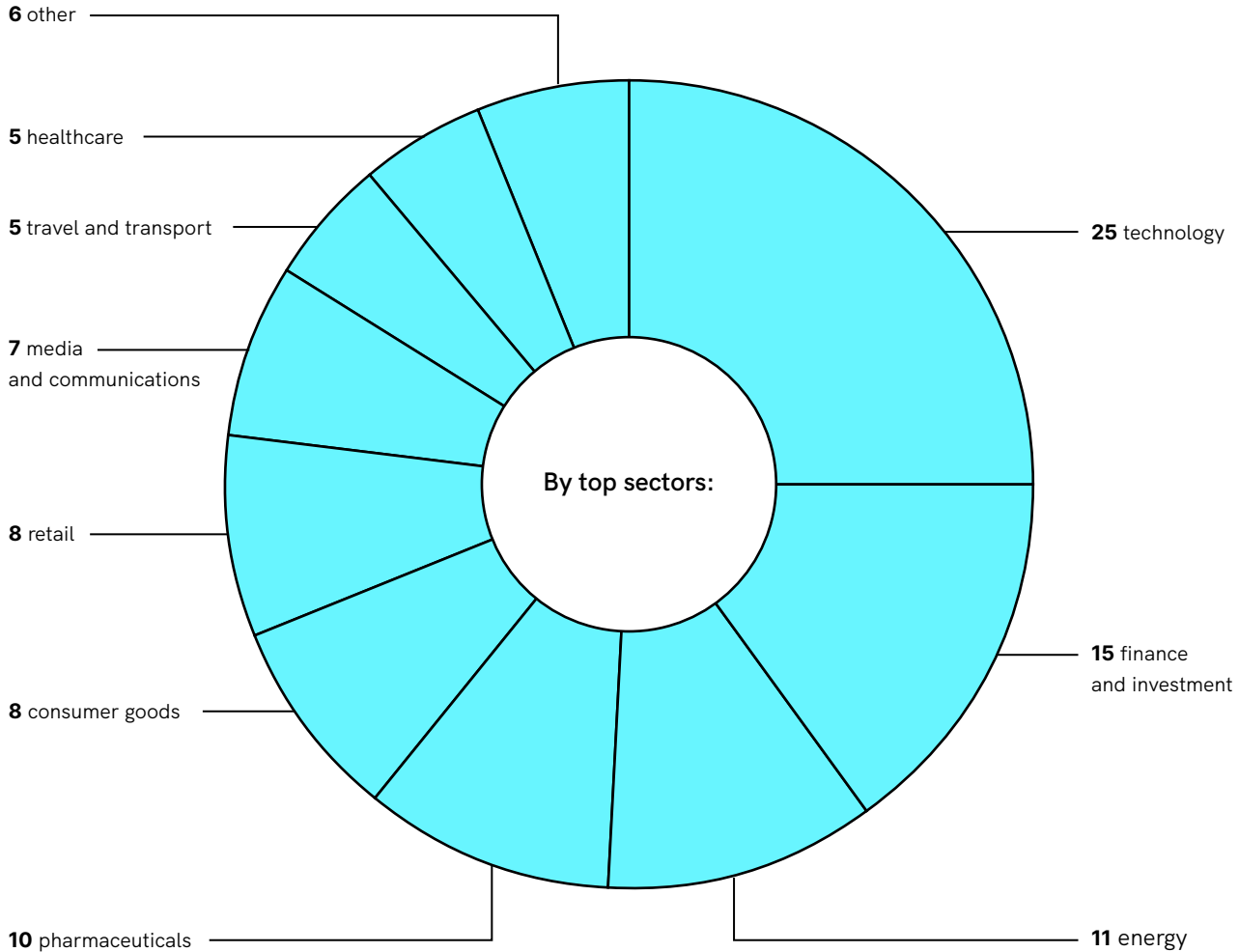
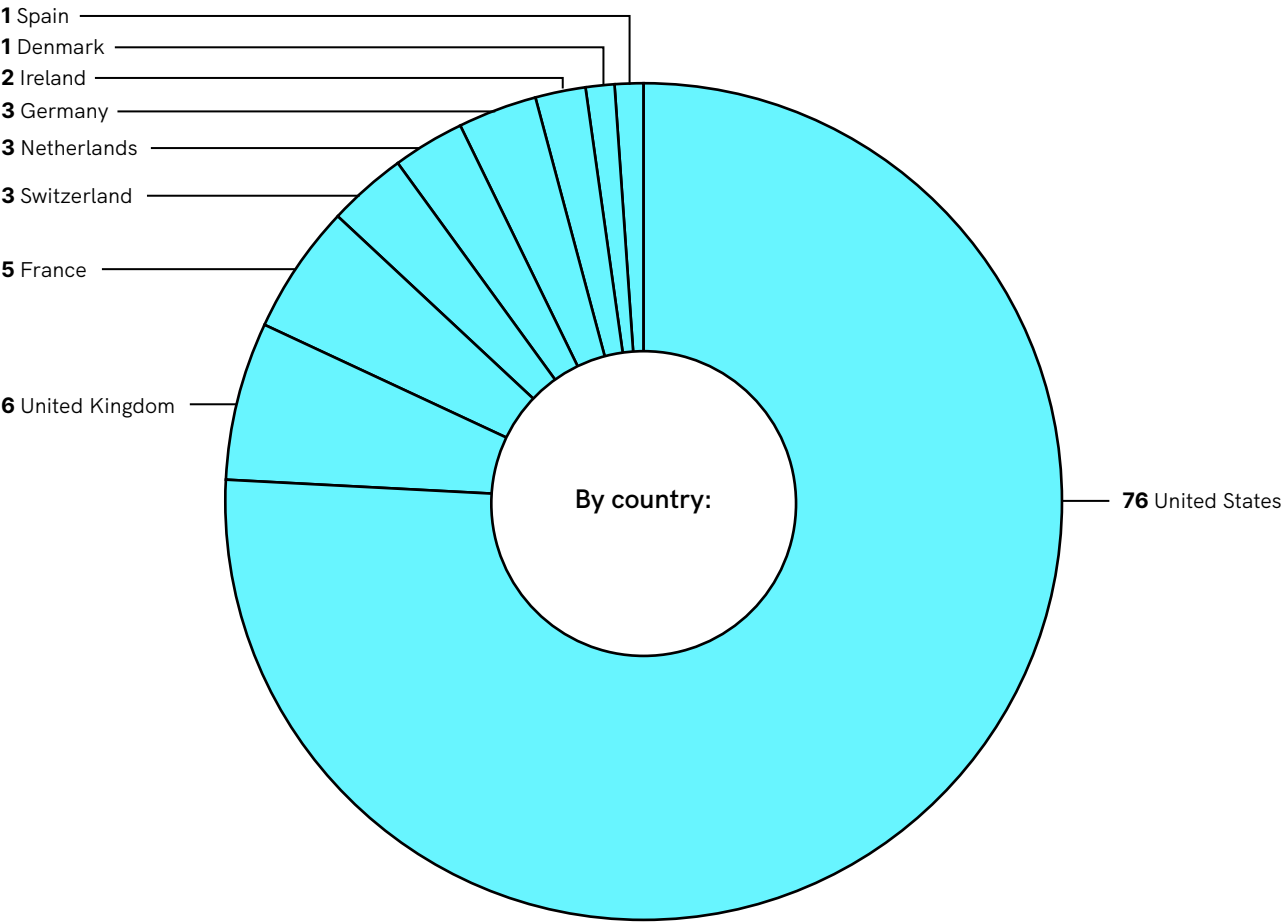
To understand how effectively digital platforms are being used in sustainability communications and reporting, we've analysed the websites and social media channels of some of the world's largest companies.

"We're increasingly seeing companies recognising the need to use digital channels effectively to communicate their sustainability goals and progress. A website and social media serve as a digital shopfront – often the first place people look for sustainability information. If key messages are buried in reports, they risk being overlooked."

Joanna Harrod

Senior account director, Flag

Top 100 companies by market cap in North America and Europe (January 2025)



Our key findings

1.

Sustainability remains a cornerstone of corporate communications. Organisations are dedicating prominent space to sustainability on their websites, reflecting its critical importance in building trust with stakeholders. This often includes expansive sustainability sections or standalone reporting microsites, with sustainability featured within the main navigation.

2.

Tailored communications for diverse audiences. By leveraging a mix of digital channels and incorporating digital elements such as interactivity, video and animation, most of the companies we reviewed have fine-tuned their sustainability communications to engage a wide spectrum of audiences, from casual skim-readers to in-depth topic experts.

3.

From words to action. While every surveyed company has at least one page dedicated to sustainability on their website, this doesn't always ensure clear communication of strategy and commitments. To be seen as credible and avoid greenwashing pitfalls, companies must focus on telling an honest sustainability story, backed up by a robust strategy with credible data and evidence.

4.

There's no 'one size fits all' to impactful storytelling. In very different ways, over half of our surveyed companies are stepping beyond the data, connecting with digital audiences on a human level through powerful language and visuals.

5.

In web accessibility, there's still room for improvement. Sustainability content should be designed to ensure everyone, whoever and wherever they are, can access, understand and engage with it. Yet many of our surveyed company websites lacked an accessibility statement.

Transparency is key to building trust with stakeholders, and prominently showcasing sustainability ambitions and approach on corporate or brand websites plays a vital role in credible communication.

Every website we reviewed featured sustainability content, often serving as a platform for in-depth exploration of sustainability strategies and commitments. Many websites provide evergreen information alongside time-sensitive performance updates found in sustainability reports, ensuring a comprehensive and accessible view of corporate sustainability efforts.

While all websites had at least one page dedicated to sustainability, 22% of companies chose not to make sustainability website content available from the main website navigation. When sustainability information is hard to find, it can appear (intentional or not) that both sustainability and transparency more broadly are not core business priorities. As consumers, investors and regulators are increasingly demanding clear and open communications on sustainability, making content easily accessible is an important step in building trust and credibility.

How to get it right

1.

Create a dedicated sustainability hub.

Develop a well-structured section on your website focused on communicating your sustainability strategy, commitments and progress. For those restricted by a CMS with limited capabilities for creative storytelling, microsites or standalone landing pages can help encourage interaction and provide a more immersive experience.

2.

Integrate sustainability throughout your website.

Weaving your sustainability narrative across your website helps demonstrate that sustainability is integral to the business rather than a bolt-on. Common areas where sustainability is particularly relevant include ‘about us’ pages, investor relations, careers and product content.

3.

Communicate on sustainability across channels.

A commitment to sustainability should be reflected across a brand’s communications channels. Maintaining a consistent narrative across all digital touchpoints – social media, email campaigns, blogs and even relevant product pages will reinforce your message and demonstrate sustainability as a central value.

Key findings

Of the largest companies in North America and Europe:

100%

have a sustainability section on their website

96%

reported on sustainability in the last two years

82%

have multiple webpages dedicated to sustainability

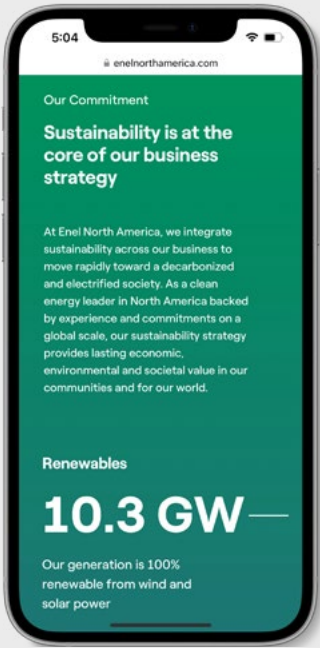
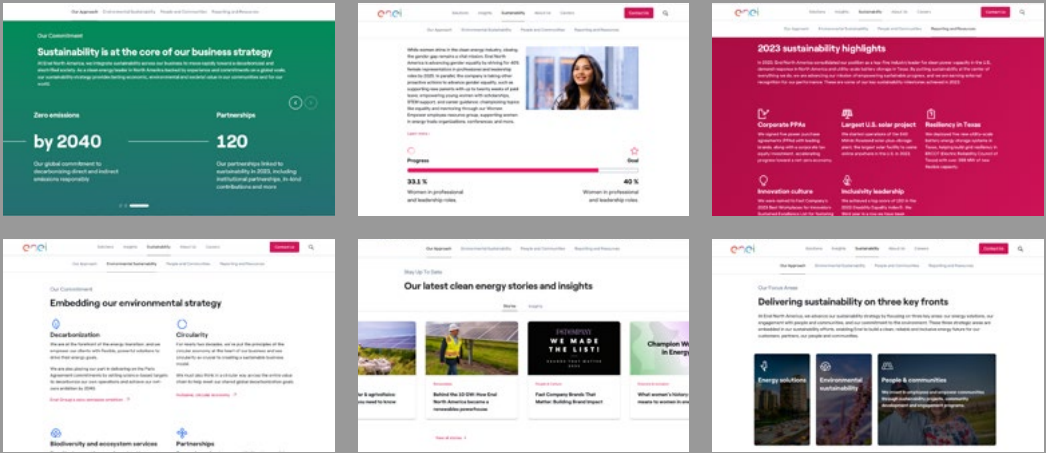
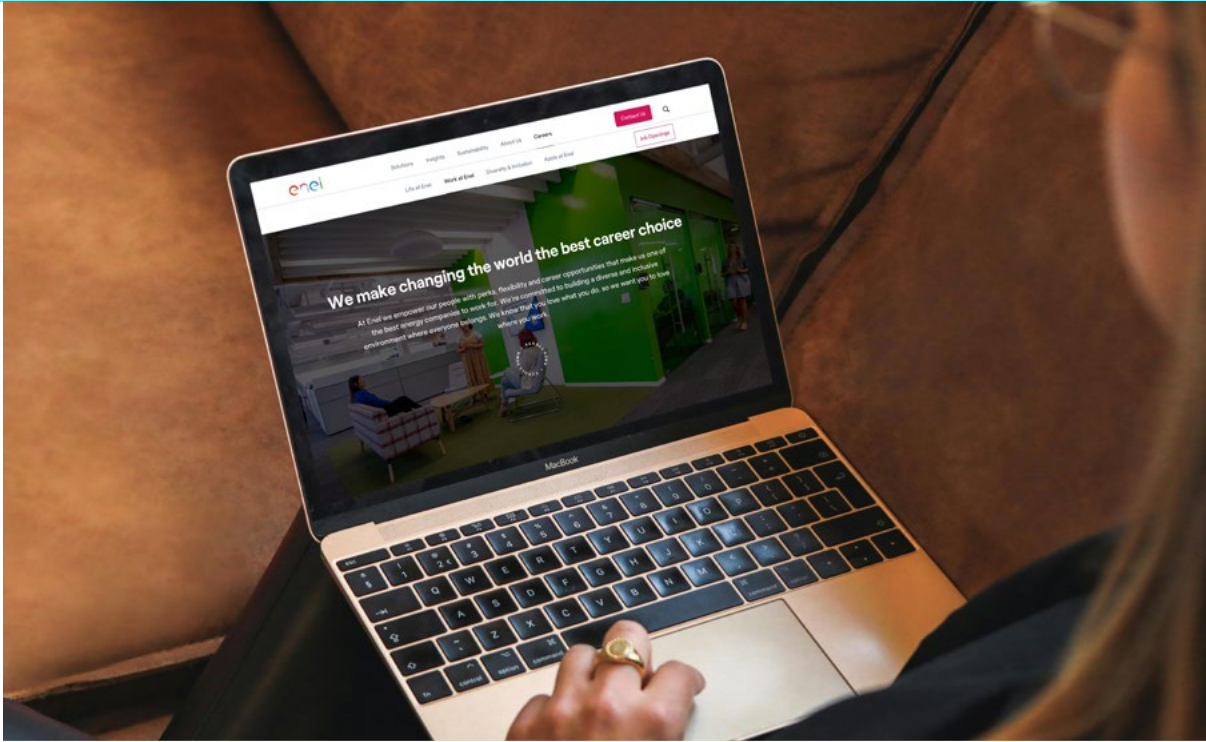
78%

of sustainability pages/sections can be reached from the main website navigation

DEEP DIVE: SUSTAINABILITY AS A CORNERSTONE OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS

Those leading the way

Enel North America has elevated the visibility of its sustainability strategy and demonstrated that its commitment is integrated across its entire business. To do that, the company uses its website to highlight areas where it has a relevant part to play. This goes beyond a dedicated sustainability section – Enel also embeds updates into customer-facing solution pages and employee-focused careers pages.



From engaging summaries that jump off the page to detail and data on specific topics, digital channels and platforms are most effectively utilised when they cater to diverse audiences.

The companies we reviewed take various approaches to engage their different audience groups, from data-rich PDFs to concise video summaries.

Sustainability reporting formats also vary widely. While most companies publish a PDF report, many complement it with a microsite or summary pages that highlight key insights in a more digestible format. Several companies we reviewed decided to forgo a PDF entirely, opting for website-based reporting to tell their full sustainability story.

At Flag, we don't believe there's a single 'right' approach – instead, what matters most is understanding audience needs and tailoring content accordingly. The most successful examples of sustainability communications make complex information accessible and engaging. This can be achieved in many ways, from well-designed PDF reports to short-form videos or interactive digital experiences.

How to get it right

1.

Plan content around audience needs.

Effective sustainability communications start with a deep understanding of audience needs and behaviours. Wherever possible, content should cater to people with different informational needs – whether that is data-rich reports and deep-dives into specific topics or concise, engaging summaries.

2.

Take advantage of different digital elements.

Leverage video, animation and interactivity to make complex sustainability topics more engaging and accessible to those who may not want to read high levels of text-based content.

Amplify their impact by using corporate social media channels to reach those who are not actively seeking out sustainability content on a brand’s website, sparking interest through timely, engaging updates.

3.

Design a clear structure and intuitive navigation.

Whether through dedicated hubs, well-labelled sections or interactive report summaries, a well-organised website with intuitive navigation, clear signposting and logical content flow makes it easy for visitors to find and explore sustainability information.

Key findings

Of the largest companies in North America and Europe:

60%

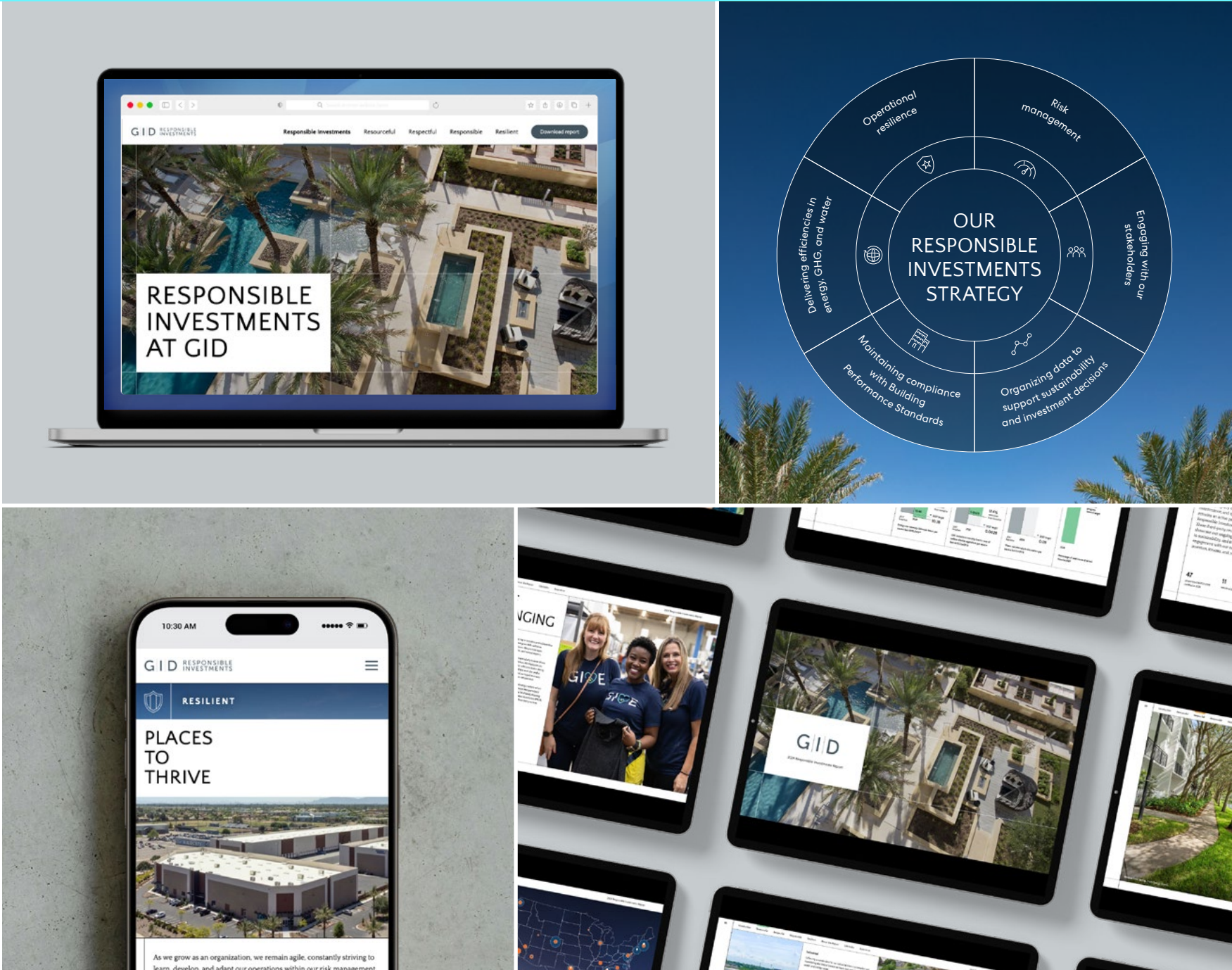
incorporate digital elements like video, animation or interactivity into their website sustainability communications.

74%

posted sustainability content on their corporate LinkedIn channel in the last 12 months.

Those leading the way

GID has evolved its approach to digital Responsible Investments content by transitioning from a content-heavy online environment to an engaging and visual experience for time-poor audiences. To do this, the US-based real estate company launched a new five-page, highly visual Responsible Investments microsite, which provides highlights of key achievements and initiatives. To continue catering to audiences looking for more detailed disclosure, GID also publishes a Responsible Investments report and four investor supplementary PDFs.



A 2023 YouGov poll found that 55% of global consumers are wary of brand's sustainability claims, highlighting the critical need for authenticity in digital storytelling.

As a cornerstone of a brand's image, websites play a crucial role in communicating sustainability with integrity. To build trust, online communications must be transparent, credible and backed by evidence.

Websites should clearly outline sustainability strategies, commitments and measurable proof points to reinforce stakeholder confidence. Overstating progress or omitting key details can lead to accusations of greenwashing, undermining even genuine efforts. Our research shows that while 93% of reviewed companies present a sustainability strategy online, only 66% provided detailed information, such as sharing strategy pillars, timebound targets and progress updates.

To foster trust, digital sustainability communications must go beyond bold statements and glossy campaigns, leveraging brand or corporate websites to back up claims with facts to enhance transparency and accountability.

How to get it right

1.

Set a robust strategy with clear, quantifiable goals and share progress against them. A strong sustainability strategy starts with clear, timebound and measurable goals that are easily accessible and clearly communicated on a brand or corporate website.

2.

Acknowledge challenges and limitations to progress. Being transparent about obstacles enhances credibility and demonstrates a genuine commitment to improvement. Openly addressing limitations fosters trust and helps stakeholders understand the complexities of your business or sector.

3.

Make progress updates accessible. Sharing reports, data indices and an archive of past updates enables stakeholders to track progress over time, demonstrating a commitment to accountability.

Key findings

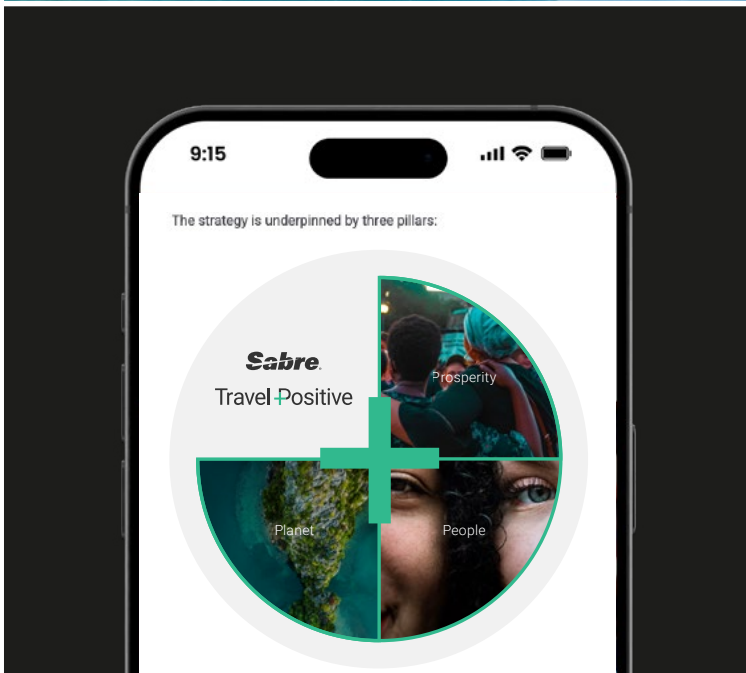
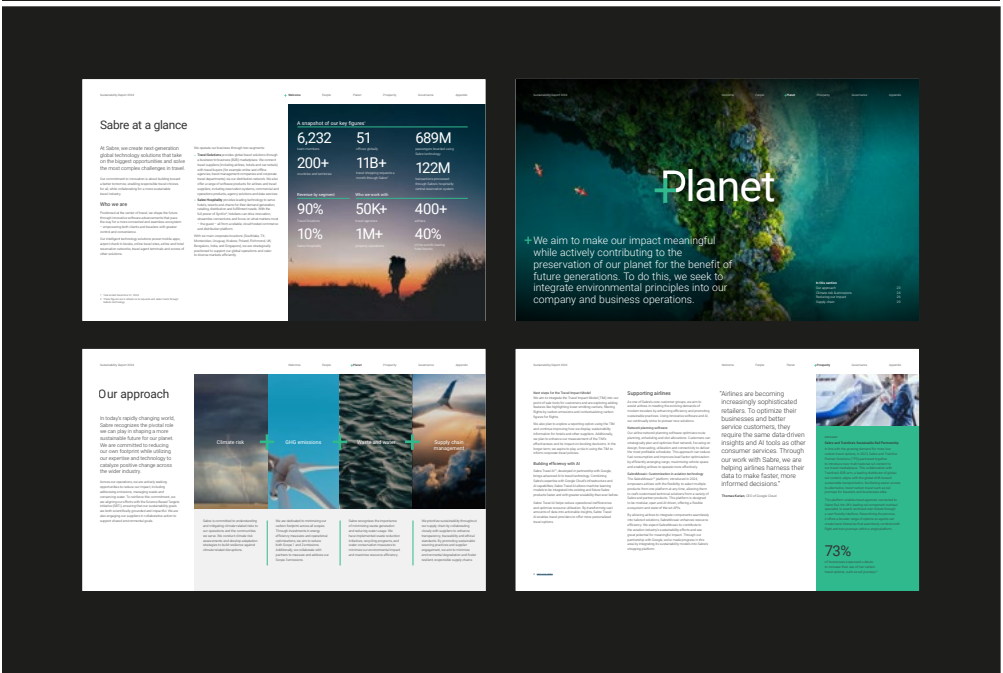
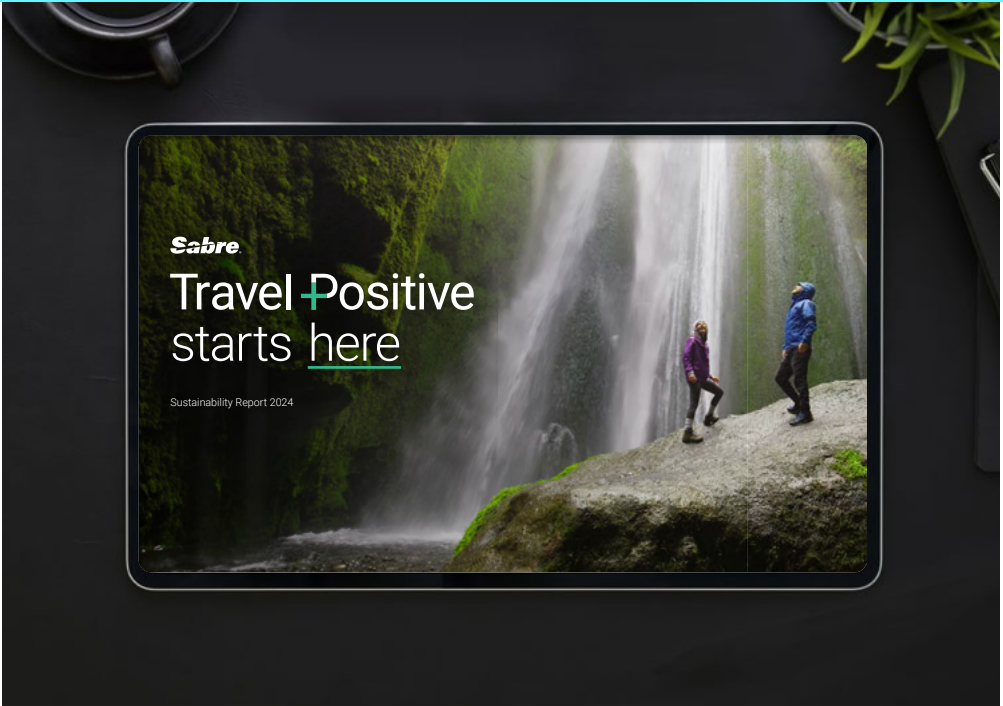
Of the largest companies in North America and Europe:

93%

have outlined their sustainability strategy on their websites, 66% in detail

Those leading the way

Sabre sets out its Travel Positive strategy clearly on its corporate website. The one-page overview outlines the company’s bold ambition and focus areas and backs this up with clear proof points of how it’s putting the strategy into action. The summary digital content is supplemented with a detailed sustainability report providing an in-depth performance update.



Impactful storytelling is crucial for engaging audiences and transforming complex sustainability strategies into relatable, inspiring narratives.

By using storytelling techniques such as case studies, testimonials and thought leadership, companies can effectively highlight the real-world impact of their sustainability efforts.

Case studies offer tangible examples of how sustainability commitments can drive meaningful change, while testimonials from employees, partners or local communities amplify the voices of those directly involved or impacted by sustainability initiatives.

However, only 54% of the companies we reviewed used storytelling techniques on their websites to drive engagement, highlighting significant untapped potential in making sustainability communications more compelling. Though thought leadership is more widely used, there remains ample opportunity to further enhance its effectiveness in driving deeper engagement and understanding.

How to get it right

1.

Humanise the sustainability journey.

Whether its sharing personal stories from employees, community members or partners, or using thought leadership to explain the strategy driving sustainability efforts, incorporating diverse voices adds credibility and demonstrates sustainability progress as a collective effort.

2.

Showcase tangible impact.

Highlight case studies that demonstrate how sustainability initiatives have resulted in measurable outcomes. Make the most of your data – using graphics to spotlight key statistics, illustrating the progress made.

3.

Take advantage of your visual content.

High-quality photos, videos and data visualisations are powerful storytelling tools that foster emotional connections and simplify complex messages. These visuals are just as crucial as the text on your webpage, so ensure they’re given equal attention and aren’t treated as an afterthought.

Key findings

Of the largest companies in North America and Europe:

67%

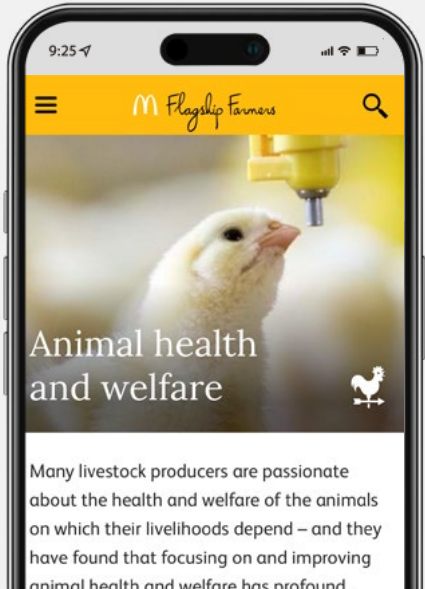
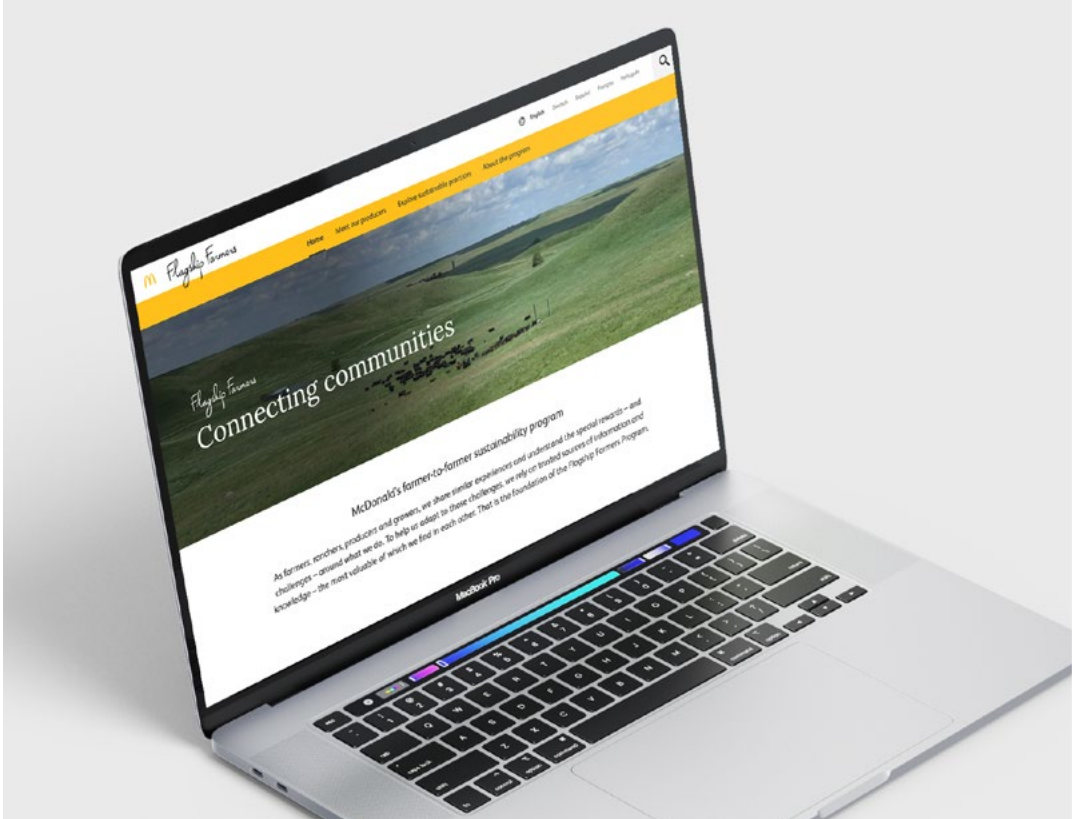
have published sustainability-related thought leadership content on their websites in the last 12 months

54%

have utilised storytelling techniques, such as case studies or testimonials, on their sustainability website content

Those leading the way

McDonald's Flagship Farmers microsite uses storytelling to build engagement among its key audiences. By allowing the passionate voices of its most progressive producers to shine through, the site promotes and demystifies innovative farming practices. As a result, McDonald's provides a platform for those within and beyond its supply chain to adopt or adapt practices that improve their impacts on the environment and their livestock, and increase the economic success of their businesses.



Accessibility is essential for clear, transparent and inclusive communication. An accessible website ensures that all audiences, including those with disabilities, can easily access and engage with sustainability content.

While not required, an accessibility statement signals a company's commitment to providing an accessible website, underscoring its commitment to inclusivity and transparency. However, many of the websites we reviewed fell short in meeting website accessibility best practice, with just over half providing an accessibility statement and only 35% specifying a WCAG AA target.*

A missing accessibility statement can suggest that accessibility is an afterthought rather than a core value. Some statements we reviewed even contained accessibility issues themselves, undermining credibility and increasing the risk of misleading customers or facing legal consequences. True commitment means embedding accessibility into a company's values and communication processes. Done right, a commitment to accessibility expands audience reach and enhances communication in a way that benefits everyone.

*The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are a widely recognised standard for ensuring web accessibility referenced in many laws worldwide, with the AA level commonly being required for compliance. It provides a balance between accessibility for a wide range of disabilities and a realistic and achievable goal.

How to get it right

1.

Embed accessibility in your digital strategy.

Accessibility should be considered throughout all processes, rather than being an afterthought. Ensure all content across your various communications channels is crafted to be inclusive, for example, by providing alternative text for imagery that serves an equivalent purpose, ensuring sufficient colour contrast and making all functionality keyboard accessible.

2.

Create an honest and transparent accessibility statement.

Communicate your target WCAG conformance level and strive to meet or exceed it. If you know parts of your website are lacking, own up to it and explain what you are doing to improve it. After all, accessibility is a journey, not a destination.

3.

Start small and grow. It can be daunting to introduce a new requirement, process or way of thinking. Small incremental changes within a company can have a large positive impact.

Key findings

Of the largest companies in North America and Europe:

42%

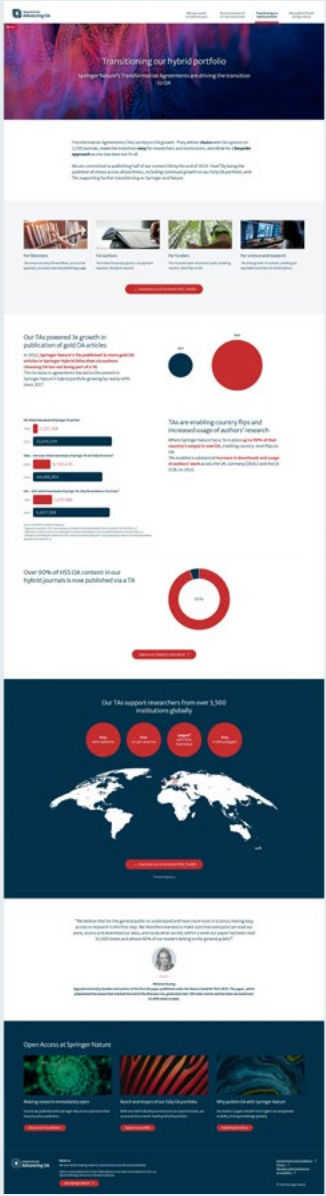
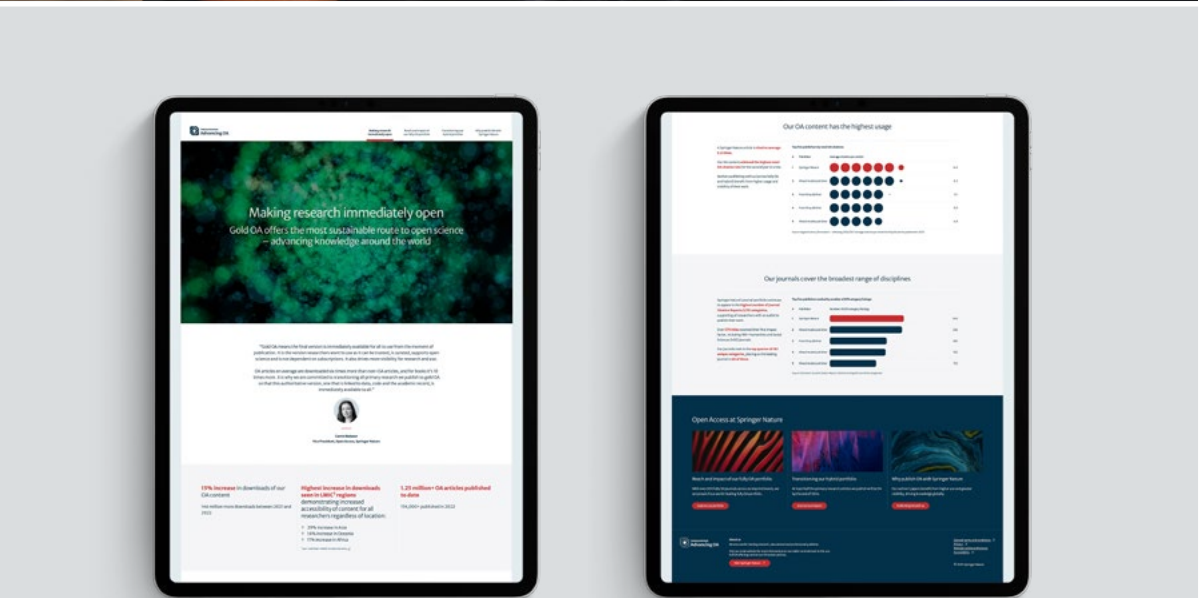
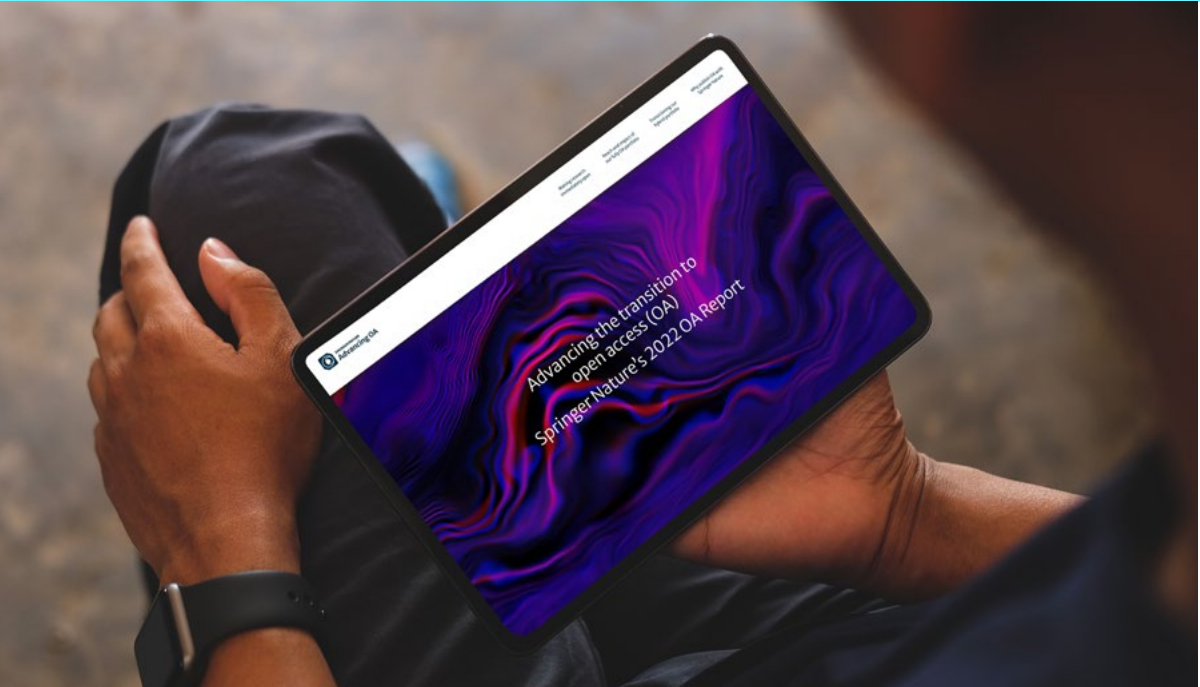
published no digital accessibility statement

35%

specify the aim for WCAG AA according to their accessibility statements.

Those leading the way

Springer Nature's open access reporting microsite takes accessibility and inclusivity into account. For example, the platform shares charts and infographics designed to ensure they are perceivable and understandable by all. This is done through the addition of alternative text for infographics and the use of tables to accompany complex charts so that they are both easy to understand visually and easy to navigate for screen reader users.



DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS REIMAGINED

As digital communication continues to evolve, companies are reimagining how to best harness their digital ecosystems to communicate sustainability effectively. Sustainability has remained a cornerstone of corporate messaging for major companies across North America and Europe, even in the face of shifting political landscapes. Yet, despite these advances, there's still opportunity for strengthened sustainability communications that meet increasingly high expectations.

To truly demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainability, sustainability communications must go beyond surface-level messaging. It requires honesty, transparency and accessibility, with a strategy that is backed by credible data and evidence.

At Flag, we help our clients unlock the full potential of digital platforms to communicate their sustainability stories. With decades of expertise and a keen understanding of the changing world around us, we create powerful digital assets and campaigns designed to build trust and drive meaningful impact.

If you're ready to elevate your sustainability communications and harness the full power of digital, we'd love to support you on that journey.

Need support with your digital sustainability communications? Flag can help.

For more than 25 years, we've helped global brands to tell their sustainability stories.

Across strategy, reporting and communications, we can help you speak about your journey with transparency, authenticity, energy and creativity. Leaning on our extensive expertise, we create digital platforms, assets and campaigns that are audience-informed and highly engaging.

If you'd like to chat about making the most of your digital channels to communicate about sustainability, please get in touch at info@flag.co.uk

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