

BSkyB's Bigger Picture Review 2009

Sharp and focused

By Aleksandra Dobkowski-Joy

Sky's sustainability report provides a clear picture of the company's activities

In a visually engaging and easily navigable micro site, British Sky Broadcasting, better known as the satellite TV brand Sky, delivers a comprehensive “behind the scenes” look at its approach to sustainability.

Sky's 2009 Bigger Picture Review and accompanying Bigger Picture web pages cover topics explicitly shaped by its stakeholder commentary, including insights culled from employee and customer outreach as well as three stakeholder focus group sessions. The printed report provides extensive coverage on responsibility in core business activities, more quantitative data and targets, and a fuller accounting of company involvement in promoting sports and the arts in the communities served by Sky.

Sky certainly has the right idea on seeking stakeholder input, and it is helpful to understand how the company takes consultative information into account. Yet despite the clear availability of stakeholder information, Sky does not take the next step and document a full materiality analysis of issues both integral to stakeholders and vital to company strategy.

The opportunity for joining up stakeholder input with core strategy (and not just for purposes of publishing a report) seems quite achievable, especially in light of Sky's high-level oversight of sustainability. Indeed, Sky is among a still-scarce group of companies that can boast a sustainability steering committee with sitting non-executive directors as well as senior company executives, complete with direct reporting lines to the board of directors.

Good balance

Materiality analysis or no, Sky strikes a good balance between providing procedural information and engaging the reader with illustrative case studies and a fair amount of data to boot. The company addresses major industry issues, chief among them the development and distribution of acceptable content through its media channels.

In addition to explaining its approach to covering sensitive or controversial topics, Sky provides background and links to information about the way it commissions, develops, produces, and airs news and entertainment programmes. The company also discloses the incident rate of complaints lodged with Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator, and highlights a near-perfect record of a single upheld complaint in the past three years (related to unannounced flash photography).

Sky's disclosures around programming are

substantial, but where the company truly demonstrates leadership is in taking stock of rising sustainability challenges – for example, supply chain responsibility. Sky has new responsible sourcing principles and is rolling out a supplier evaluation programme. More impressively, Sky also announces its support for a prompt payment code. This type of two-way commitment and accountability should be the norm in supply chain relationships.

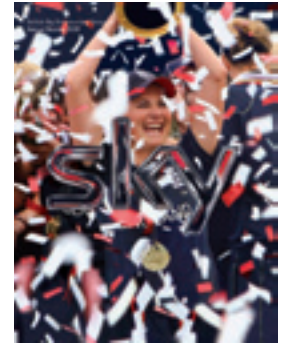
Another area where Sky is forging ahead is in buying carbon offsets for all emissions it cannot reduce or eliminate. Sky backs up this commitment with an accounting of emissions rates, and lists the offset projects that ensure the company's carbon neutrality. Sky is also making progress in providing robust environmental metrics in the areas of waste, recycling and water consumption, and promises that future reports will contain more comprehensive data.

Sky's desire to be comprehensive and yet stay topical has perhaps led to the biggest drawback of the report: too many places with information on the same topics. The micro site, which Sky intends as a snapshot of performance, is in reality quite hefty and overlaps to a great degree with Sky's Bigger Picture web pages.

Consequently, depending on whether you first open the Bigger Picture web pages or go straight into the micro site, you could come away with a different perspective on Sky's performance. For example, although Sky actually has a full set of environmental goals and targets, these are only tangentially referenced on the micro site. Instead of making the reader search the accompanying Bigger Picture web pages, Sky could easily collate all of its goals and targets and present these under a “Targets” tab similar to the “Close Ups” and “Data/Assurance” tabs prominently featured in the left margin of each micro site page.

Finally, in the interest of accessibility, Sky should invest in a custom PDF-builder and printing option for both the review and its Bigger Picture web pages. The current option of printing page by page hampers offline report reading and could be frustrating for those looking to dig deep into the full content.

Online reporting is an evolving field, and these improvements are admittedly minor criticisms to what is a fine report. As Sky further develops its data and metrics, its solid reporting foundation will surely continue to support its broadcasting of sustainability performance. ■



Snapshot

Follows GRI? No mention of GRI.

Assured? Some environmental and community investment data has been assured.

Materiality analysis? No

Goals? Yes

Targets? Yes, mostly environmental.

Stakeholder input? Yes

Seeks feedback? Yes

Key strength: Clear navigation

Chief weakness: Overlaps and gaps between micro site and the Bigger Picture web pages.

Pleasant surprise: Sky documents carbon neutrality with links to descriptions of its carbon offset projects.

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