

**PRESS RELEASE
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**Web-based communication about sustainable development in large Canadian businesses
is now a top priority**

Montreal, September 13, 2011 – Web-based communication about sustainable development in large Canadian businesses has increased significantly over the last five years. This is the conclusion of a study, the first of its kind in Canada, that examined the long-term evolution of web-based communication about sustainable development and social responsibility by large Canadian businesses. Conducted over a period of five years—from 2006 to 2010—with some one hundred of the largest businesses in terms of revenue in Quebec and Canada, the study shows a strong trend in this direction. In 2010, more than 70% of these businesses had a section on sustainable development or social responsibility on their website, a 60% increase from 2006. This trend also manifests itself by the increasingly strategic placement of such information on websites, by enhanced accessibility to these sections, and by an eagerness on the part of the companies to improve the quantity and quality of the information.

Intituled *The Communication of Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility in Large Canadian Companies - Communication Trends on the Web: 2006 to 2010*, the study was conducted by two members of Groupe DURABILITÉ|COMMUNICATION: Solange Tremblay, Associate Professor at the Department of Social and Public Communication at UQAM and research director for this study, and Jacques Baronet, Professor at the Faculty of Administration of the University of Sherbrooke.

A response to the challenges of globalization

For the two researchers, these results reflect the interconnectedness of business and social networks and the broader issues of globalization. “Regularly confronted with complex issues, both at the local and global scale, and more exposed in a globalized context, large businesses are increasingly expected to demonstrate a sense of responsibility for their community and their markets. The growing effort of these companies to build a web presence with regard to their sustainable development and social responsibility performance confirms a major turning point in their communication strategies,” says Solange Tremblay.

High-priority communication

In addition, the study found that communication on sustainable development and social responsibility is now clearly prioritized over all other forms of extra-financial communication. Conversely, communication that is exclusively centred on the environment or on corporate philanthropy, as categories, is now limited to only a small number of company sites. Furthermore, the complete absence of extra-financial information is no longer an option for large companies, only a few exceptions remain.

“That said, Canadian businesses do not all have the same understanding of sustainable development and social responsibility,” notes Solange Tremblay. “ In 10% of the sites studied, this section is dedicated to corporate giving or to environmental policies, without any other mention of the company’s responsibility for the social, economic and environmental impacts of their decisions in their community and their markets, underlining the importance of responsible communication and the need for adequate guidance on these questions.”

The goal of the study was to establish an overview of the web-based discourse on sustainable development and social responsibility of the largest Canadian and Quebec businesses. The quality and authenticity of the organizations’ information were not verified by the study. The sample of businesses was taken from the 2006 edition of the *Les Affaires 500* ranking of the largest businesses in terms of revenue in Canada and Quebec.

Groupe DURABILITÉ|COMMUNICATION is a centre of expertise focusing on the issues of communications, sustainable development and corporate social responsibility, as well as on ethics in professional practice. For more information, please visit www.durabilitecommunication.com.

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