

Patagonia, A Trailblazing Brand That Walks The Walk

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On Black Friday, Patagonia ran a full-page ad in The New York Times telling consumers not to buy one of their jackets because it takes so much water and energy to make. This was one element of the company's Common Threads initiative, a brilliant brand-within-a-brand that offers a roadmap for companies trying to promote themselves as environmentally friendly.



Patagonia is one of the few corporations that has gotten credit for its environmental programs. The credit is well earned. It comes in part from their values that have driven their actions since their founding over 40 years ago. Their early niche was mountain climbing equipment with a concern for “clean climbing,” which meant reducing the damage to rock faces. Soon after they got traction in the marketplace, they were visibly supporting environmental programs with a portion of their sales and profits. Their latest initiative, [Common Threads](#), takes it to a new level.

Common Threads aims to minimize the environmental cost of clothing through its programs to **reduce, repair, reuse, and recycle** clothing. Repair clothing by returning your items to Patagonia to have the clothing repaired at nominal cost. Reuse clothing by donating clothing to charity, selling clothing through eBay's Common Threads site, or on the Patagonia website. Patagonia will give unsold items to someone in need. Recycle clothing by returning recyclable items to bins, and the raw material will be recycled into new Patagonia clothing.

Most surprisingly, Patagonia encourages consumers to reduce consumption by avoiding buying unneeded clothing in the first place. On Black Friday, Patagonia [ran a full page ad](#) in *The New York Times* telling consumers **not** to buy one of their popular jackets because it takes so much water and energy to make, explaining that the ultimate saving is to forego buying something you do not really need. What other clothing brand, whatever their environmental intentions, would go to that extreme? The whole program is remarkable in its scope, but this "reduce" component is especially remarkable.

An umbrella brand such as Common Threads that packages a basic idea and a set of supporting programs is extremely helpful to companies that have excellent and well-resourced environmental programs that are unnoticed and ad hoc. It has the potential to tie environmental programs together and provide coherence and visibility. As a result, the parent brand is perceived to be an active environmental player.

Common Threads is an excellent example of how branding can help tell the story of serious environmental programs. Without that brand, Patagonia's four programs would have less impact on the world and on their own brand.

(For more on Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard's views on green marketing, play the video below.)

Related article: [Patagonia's Founder On Why There's "No Such Thing As Sustainability"](#)

Videos: [Patagonia Founder Yvon Chouinard And Tom Brokaw Talk Green Marketing](#)

[Can Wal-Mart Be Sustainable? Ask Patagonia Founder Yvon Chouinard](#)

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