

Please, Taylor Swift: Hire a Chief Sustainability Officer

While Swift's purchase of carbon credits shows a willingness to address the sustainability issues associated with her world tour, greenwashing isn't a good look for a billionaire superstar in the position to do something truly revolutionary for the future of the planet and its population.

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That's why, instead of viewing sustainability as a reputational issue, she should put her money where her mouth is and start behaving like the leader of the multi-million dollar business that she is – starting with hiring a CSO (or outsourcing the work of a CSO to a reputable support firm).

With 5.3 million tickets sold over 84 international shows, across 19 countries, Taylor Swift's current Eras Tour is one of the most ambitious in history. We know that the tour has had a significant cultural impact around the world – but as she's in full swing of her global tour which started in Arizona on 17th March 2023, it's clear that its impact on people and planet is less positive.

Her extensive – and much-debated – use of super-pollutant private jets is just the tip of the melting iceberg. A private jet emits at least 10 times more carbon emissions than a commercial jetliner, according to a study from the *Institute of Policy Studies*, and until recently, Swift owned two. In fact, one carbon accounting firm recently found that Swift has emitted an esteemed 139.1 tonnes CO₂e emissions during the North and South American legs of her tour alone, covering a total of 107,000 kilometres by private jet.

Reports that she sold one of her jets in January 2024 were quickly followed by cease and desist threats from her legal team to the *Taylor Swift's Jets* instagram account, which tracks her jets' movements using publicly-available data. It found that Swift's whirlwind romance with Travis Kelce produced 138 tons of CO2-equivalent (Co2e) emissions in the first three months of their relationship.

Accusations that the sale was born of concern over the marketing optics of owning two jets, as opposed to any real concern for their impact on the planet's wellbeing, have only intensified as Swift's team claims she purchased "more than double the carbon credits needed to offset all tour travel." Poor and low-quality offsetting schemes have rightly attracted growing criticism and haven't provided the incentive to focus on reduction. Large corporations, including Gucci, Disney and Shell have previously come under fire over carbon offsetting projects deemed 'worthless' and fraught with human rights issues.

Businesses often fail to understand what they need to be doing to avoid accusations of greenwashing and, more importantly, why. A great CSO would be able to help Swift and her team to understand the importance of sustainability issues to the business and identify actions already being taken, the opportunities to improve and the risks that they may have been unaware of across five themes: Climate, Economic, Diversity & Inclusion, Social and Environment. Arguably, Swift has so far been most successful in promoting Diversity and Inclusion, and is known as a vocal advocate for LGBTQ+ rights.

While Swift's team appears to have calculated and attempted to offset the emissions from her jet travel, have they considered the impact of her fans travelling to her shows? According to the *New Zealand Herald*, the lack of any *Eras* tour dates in New Zealand or Western Australia led to a surge in air travel around the Eastern Australia dates, with Air New Zealand adding 2000 additional seats and Qantas adding 16 more flights

across the Tasman Sea to satisfy demand. A large PLC would need to account for and mitigate these types of business impacts.

Other considerations that Swift's CSO would tackle include: ensuring merchandise is sustainably produced, sourced and shipped; putting waste reduction and recycling measures in place at venues; assessing and promoting equity and equal pay in the extended workforce; ensuring suppliers are sustainable businesses; measuring and reducing energy usage at venues and during shows; publishing clear ESG policies and providing detailed measurement reports; and many more.

Some artists, while they haven't gone so far as hiring a CSO (yet), are starting to promote sustainability management in live music. Coldplay published the CO₂e emissions from last year's Music of the Sphere's tour dates, measuring 47% less emissions than the band's last stadium tour in 2016-7, and has now started to power live shows (including audio, lights and lasers) from an electric battery system running on renewable energy. And in August this year, Massive Attack will run a one-day festival powered by 100% renewable energy, which will involve working to reduce carbon emissions from audience travel – giving local fans priority when it comes to tickets, encouraging train travel, and putting on free electric buses to ferry crowds back to Bristol Temple Meads station.

By hiring a CSO to help implement mitigation and adaptation strategies to minimise or prevent the negative impact of her tours, Swift could not only join artists like Coldplay and Massive Attack in effecting tangible change, but she would also be able to clearly communicate her sustainability successes, ambition and also the areas that she may not have answers for yet. This not only offers a more honest and transparent view but also improves resilience against the impacts of unsustainable practices, and may also present opportunities for future developments and access to new markets.

So Taylor Swift, please: hire a CSO, and be the big reputational change we all want to see.

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