

# Greenwashing

*Where companies make themselves appear more environmentally friendly than they really are*



# Apparently

BY MIKE BARFIELD

## GREENWASHING: SOME EXTREME EXAMPLES

COAL



'PLANT-BASED'

SHALE GAS



'LOCALLY-SOURCED'

OIL



'PEAT-FREE'

CEMENT



'MEAT-FREE'

CARBON DIOXIDE



'ESSENTIAL PLANT NUTRIENT'

PLANET EARTH



'COMPOSTABLE'

## A few slides to start ...

- Why do companies Greenwash ?
- The 7 Deadly sins of greenwashing
- Different Types
- Different Flavours
- Where to find help ...
- 3 Essential ways to avoid Greenwash

# Why do Companies Greenwash ?

- The pressure is coming from all sides for businesses to become and be far more sustainable and responsible
- Companies apply greenwashing techniques to the promotion of their products in order to appeal to the environmentally-conscious consumer, which is a £122Bn consumer market in the UK.
- Claims that align a product or campaign can gain market share and a competitive advantage over their rivals
- Doing things 'properly' can be difficult ...



***I don't understand***



***... I don't know***



***... I don't care***

- According to a recent CMA report 40% of website environmental claims were misleading

# THE 7 SINS OF Greenwashing

1

## No Proof

Not having accessible evidence of the environmental impact the company has

2

## Vagueness

Using labels that are ambiguous and poorly defined

3

## Irrelevance

Using labels that are insignificant to whether the product/service is eco-friendly

4

## Lying

Marketing facts that aren't true

5

## Hidden Trade Off

Advertising only a small set of attributes and not the whole picture

6

## Worshipping False Labels

Creating fake certification labels or endorsements from a third-party

7

## Lesser of 2 Evils

Comparing products to be greener when they are all non eco-friendly

# Different Types ...



- **Greencrowding** is built on the belief that you can hide in a crowd to avoid discovery, it relies on safety in numbers. eg Industry Initiatives
- **Greenlighting** occurs when company communications spotlights a particularly green feature of its operations or products, however small, in order to draw attention away from environmentally damaging activities being conducted elsewhere
- **Greenshifting** is when companies imply that the consumer is at fault and shift the blame on to them.
- **Greenlabelling** is a practice where marketers call something green or sustainable, but a closer examination reveals that their words are misleading
- **Greenrinsing** refers to when a company regularly changes its ESG targets before they are achieved
- **Greenhushing** refers to the act of corporate management teams under-reporting or hiding their sustainability credentials in order to evade investor scrutiny

# Different Flavours

- There are currently at least 12 different flavours of greenwashing ...
- But all fundamentally are designed to make a company

*“appear greener, more sustainable, more ethical, local or ecologically friendlier than it actually is”*

- See *Ethical Consumer Magazine*

1. ***Bee-washing***
2. ***Blue-washing***
3. ***Brit-washing***
4. ***Carbon-washing***
5. ***Pink-washing***
6. ***Purple-washing***
7. ***Red-washing***
8. ***Rainbow-washing***
9. ***Share-washing***
10. ***Sports-washing***
11. ***Vegan-washing***
12. ***Woke-washing***



# The UK Competition & Markets Authority (CMA)



## Make sure ALL claims

- are truthful and accurate;
- are clear and unambiguous;
- do not omit or hide important;
- compare goods or services in a fair and meaningful way;
- consider the full life cycle of the product or service;
- are substantiated.

<https://greenclaims.campaign.gov.uk/>

# Green claims checklist



1. The claim is accurate and clear for all to understand.
2. There's up-to-date, credible evidence to show that the green claim is true.
3. The claim clearly tells the whole story of a product or service; or relates to one part of the product or service without misleading people about the other parts or the overall impact on the environment.
4. The claim doesn't contain partially correct or incorrect aspects or conditions that apply.
5. Where general claims (eco-friendly, green or sustainable for example) are being made, the claim reflects the whole life cycle of the brand, product, business or service and is justified by the evidence.
6. If conditions (or caveats) apply to the claim, they're clearly set out and can be understood by all.

7. The claim won't mislead customers or other suppliers.
8. The claim doesn't exaggerate its positive environmental impact, or contain anything untrue – whether clearly stated or implied.
9. Durability or disposability information is clearly explained and labelled.
10. The claim doesn't miss out or hide information about the environmental impact that people need to make informed choices.
11. Information that really can't fit into the claim can be easily accessed by customers in another way (QR code, website, etc).
12. Features or benefits that are necessary standard features or legal requirements of that product or service type, aren't claimed as environmental benefits.
13. If a comparison is being used, the basis of it is fair and accurate, and is clear for all to understand.

# How to Avoid Greenwash

Beware of Hubris ...

1. Use the Green claims checklist
2. Put yourself in the mind of a cynical consumer
3. Follow the mantra *Truth Well Told*

