

## Greenwashing – The eco-marketing trend leaving consumers hung out to dry

Environmental awareness is a growing trend, but along with it has emerged a marketing ploy that is taking advantage of consumers' good intentions.

'Greenwashing' is used by some organisations to steer environmentally concerned consumers towards their falsely labelled 'green' products.

Managing Director of BBS, Amanda Newbery spoke to ABC Radio about the dangers of consumers not doing their homework when shopping for eco-friendly products.

"It is really hard for consumers to figure out whether a company is pulling the wool over their eyes or if they're being honest," she said.

"The research is showing there is a strong demand for consumers who are willing to pay a little bit extra if they think that their product is green.

"The sad thing is that obviously there are some companies who push those claims too far."

Since Al Gore's hard-hitting film *An Inconvenient Truth* was released in 2005, the number of companies claiming green credentials jumped significantly.

Car manufacturers are one of the main culprits, but green-washed products are also found in the supermarket.

Ms Newbery said we are starting to see a new wave of greenwashing in the form of carbon claims.

"'Carbon neutral' means very little to most people – it just sounds good that people are reducing their emissions," she said.

"It's up to consumers to report misleading claims to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to prevent the spread of greenwashing."

She said consumers should no longer accept vague phrases like 'environmentally friendly' and 'environmentally safe' and should be questioning companies' claims.

"Unfortunately we're in a time where consumers probably have to do a little bit of homework," she said.

"If you're going to pay a premium, and you want to do the right thing, you really want to make sure you're spending your money in the right way.

"If we're really serious about having products that are better for the environment then all of us as consumers need to stand up and be heard around claims that we think are false or misleading."

### Guide for marketers:

- Avoid words like 'safe' and 'friendly';
- Avoid misleading pictures or graphics;
- Clearly explain what is beneficial about the product so the consumer can understand;
- Link the benefit to a specific part of the product or its production;
- Ensure you are able to justify your claims if an enquiry is made;
- Explain specifically how the product is better for the environment;
- Use the claim only in an appropriate context.

Guidelines from the ACCC: [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au)

It can be difficult for organisations to effectively communicate their green credentials to their consumers and stakeholders.

BBS has a long track record in assisting organisations to convey their environmental commitments and eco-friendly products and services. If you would like to discuss this emerging marketing issue further please email Amanda Newbery on [anewbery@bbspr.com.au](mailto:anewbery@bbspr.com.au).

If you would like more information, download the Green marketing and the Trade Practices Act or the Carbon claims and the Trade Practices Act publications from the ACCC website, [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au).

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