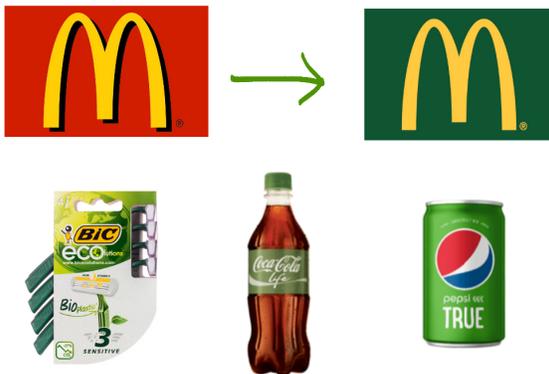


Greenwashing: A step forward or a blatant lie?

The good, the bad, and the ugly of greenwashing within the advertising industry.

By Fritha Lalit



It's a normal Sunday morning. You're walking through the aisle of a store looking to buy your weekly groceries. You've been hearing a lot of discussions on the state of the environment and you decide that you want to do something to help. Not now, though. Now you're just focused on groceries. Suddenly, you see a label on a bottle that catches your attention. It's green, and it says "environmentally friendly!" You reach out to pick it up. Stop! You're about to fall victim to greenwashing!

What is greenwashing?

Greenwashing is when a company markets their products as being "environmentally friendly" without making any real efforts to benefit the environment or showing any substantial evidence that they are. This can be both intentional and

unintentional. Intentional greenwashing is when the company is trying to mislead you on purpose so you'll buy their products. Unintentional greenwashing is when a company wants to show that they are environmentally friendly as well, but does not realize that they need to do more than just advertise.



How do I spot greenwashing?

So you found a product that you want to buy, but are not sure how to tell if it's greenwashed. Here are some ways to tell if a product has been greenwashed:

1. Look for misleading words or images

The most obvious way to tell if the product is greenwashed is to look at it. Does any of the information seem vague? Does it seem like there's more to the story of the product? Are there any images that contradict the product's purpose? (ex. pictures of

mountain streams on a plastic bottle) Is it green for no apparent reason? These are all questions you should ask yourself while checking the validity of a greenwashed product.

2. Do a quick internet search of the company

We have such a good tool on our hands, yet we don't use it enough. Searching a company up will often give you a good idea of the history and background of the company. Has this company been known to stand up for the environment? Has it taken part in any environmental initiatives recently? Are there any aspects of this company that concern you in regards to your beliefs about the environment? After all, you have a right to know who you're getting this product from, and whether or not they're legit.

3. Trust your instincts

You're the boss of your own purchases. At the end of the day, if you feel that a product being given to you is not legit, then you have the right to not buy it. Human instinct can often pick up things that facts and logic can't, so listen to that little voice in your gut. It often knows if you're making a mistake or not.



How do I go against greenwashing?

Let's say you've spotted multiple instances of greenwashing in your community and you want to do something about it, but you don't know how. Don't worry, we're here to help. Here are some options at your disposal:

1. Report it to the government.

If you think that the same company is partaking in greenwashing frequently, you can report it to the Competition Bureau of Canada. This bureau is authorized under law to take your complaint seriously and start an investigation against the company you complained about. The complaint form is linked down with the works cited in this article.

2. Write to an elected official

You might be wondering, *but what my complaint is about greenwashing in general and not a specific company?* That's fine. You can write a letter or an email to an elected official in your area. This individual will listen to your complaint and has the power to issue a law against the issue so that greenwashing in your community declines.

3. Human Nature Projects

Don't forget about us! You can become a part of HNP Ontario, so you can volunteer and get involved in projects to benefit the environment and speak out against greenwashing.

Conclusion

Greenwashing has become a serious problem, and businesses are rapidly fooling many people due to it. Which is why it is so important for the consumer to be aware of the products they are getting. Well, now you are aware. That wasn't such a bad five minutes, now was it? So stay healthy, stay safe, and most importantly, stay green!



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