

SEVEN
AVOIDING THE ~~SIX~~
SINS OF GREENWASHING™



**A Marketer's Guide
2009**

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What Marketers Can Do

Green marketing is a vast commercial opportunity, and so it should be. When it works – when it is scientifically sound and commercially successful – it is an important catalyst toward sustainability. The purpose of the Seven Sins of Greenwashing report is to encourage green marketing and to help marketers improve their claims so that:

- Genuinely ‘greener’ products excel;
- Competitive pressure from illegitimate green claims is diminished;
- Consumers do not become jaded and unduly skeptical of green claims; and,
- Marketers employ environmental concerns to establish honest, trustworthy, and long-lasting dialogue with their customers.

Green marketers and consumers are learning about the pitfalls of greenwashing together. This is a shared problem and opportunity.

The Seven Sins of Greenwashing do NOT suggest that only perfectly ‘green’ products should be marketed as environmentally preferable.

There is no such thing as a perfectly ‘green’ product: environmentally preferable products are ‘greener’ not ‘green’, and marketing them as such is entirely fair.

2,219

Number of products surveyed in North America. Over 98% of products committed at least one of the Sins of Greenwashing.

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Environmental progress will happen one step at a time. Not only should gradually ‘greener’ innovations and products be encouraged, consumers should and will reward this incremental progress.

Avoiding greenwashing does not mean waiting for a perfect product. It does mean that sound science, honesty, and transparency are paramount. It means avoiding the Seven Sins of Greenwashing.

TerraChoice Environmental Marketing has prepared the following checklist as a guide for manufacturers, retailers and marketers to help them avoid the Sins of Greenwashing. For more information on how to avoid the sins of greenwashing, please contact enquiries@terrachoice.com or 613-247-1900.

Marketer's Checklist: Avoiding the Sins of Greenwashing

Avoid the **Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off.**

- Start with an honest understanding of all of the environmental impacts of your product across its entire lifecycle.
- Emphasize specific messages (particularly when you know your audiences care about those issues) but don't use single issues to distract attention from other impacts.
- Don't make claims about a single environmental impact or benefit, without knowing how your product performs in terms of its other impacts, and without sharing that information with your customers.
- Pursue continual improvement of your environmental footprint (across the entire lifecycle), and encourage your customers to join you on that journey.



Avoid the **Sin of No Proof.**

- Understand and confirm the scientific case behind each green marketing claim.
- Make evidence readily available, or rely on third-party certifications whose standards are publically available.



Avoid the **Sin of Vagueness.**

- Use language that resonates with your customers, as long as that language is truthful.
- Don't use vague names and terms (e.g. 'environmentally-friendly') without providing precise explanations of your meaning.



Avoid the **Sin of Worshiping False Labels.**

- If third-party endorsement of your claims is important: **Get it, don't fake it.**
- Favor eco-labels that are themselves accredited, and that address the entire lifecycle of the product. (Refer to Table 2 in the Seven Sins of Greenwashing report.)



Avoid the **Sin of Irrelevance.**

- Don't claim CFC-free, unless it is a legitimate point of competitive differentiation.
- Don't claim any environmental benefit that is shared by all or most of your competitors.



Avoid the **Sin of the Lesser of Two Evils.**

- Help each customer find the product that is right for them, based on their needs and wants.
- Don't try to make a customer feel 'green' about a choice that is harmful or unnecessary.



Avoid the **Sin of Fibbing.**

- Tell the truth. Always.
- Always tell the truth.



Questions?

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