Greenwash is a term that emerged from Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and stated in the Concise Oxford Dictionary in 1999. Green marketing has been dramatically rising in the corporate field because of the corporation's awareness in the consumer's interest in 'eco-friendly' products(2).

Greenwash is the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service. (7)

Ogilvyearth advisor Ma Jun, of China, warns that greenwash is a "key subject arousing big attention in [his] part of the world" as well. He told us that local and multinational corporations have amassed 57,000 greenwash violations, now on the public record books (6).

According to TerraChoice "Green" products have increased by 95% since 2009 but more than 73% are guilty of greenwashing.

10 SIGNS OF GREENWASHING

1. Fluffy Language
   Words or terms with no clear meaning (e.g. "eco-friendly").

2. Green Product vs. Dirty Company
   Such as efficient lightbulbs made in a factory that pollutes rivers.

3. Suggestive Pictures
   Green images that indicate a (unjustified) green impact (e.g. flowers blooming from exhaust pipes).

4. Irrelevant Claims
   Emphasizing one tiny green attribute when everything else is not green.

5. Best in Class
   Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are pretty terrible.

6. Just Not Credible
   "Eco friendly" cigarettes, anyone? "Greening" a dangerous product doesn’t make it safe.

7. Jargon
   Information that only an expert or a scientist could check or understand.

8. Imaginary Friends
   A "label" that looks like third party endorsement—except that it’s made up.

9. No Proof
   It could be right, but where’s the evidence? All facts should be accompanied by research and evidence.

10. Out-right Lying
    Totally fabricated claims or data.

AVOIDING GREENWASHING

For industries in general, Futerra, a sustainability communications agency has provided a couple of simple ways of approaching greenmarketing.

Step 1. Know Thyself
Before starting any green marketing, make sure you are green.

Step 2. Green By Design, not Luck
If after step 1, you realise you are not green, innovate. Redesign your product.

Step 3. Check and Check Again
Check again with external experts about your product.

Step 4. Choose your Friends wisely
Invite third parties to endorse your product. This will act as a powerful indicator for consumers.

Step 5. Words can hurt you
Watch out for words like ‘eco-friendly’ or ‘non-toxic’. Images can also be misleading.

Step 6. Greenwash Health Check
Health-check all channels for greenwash infestation (e.g. PR, advertising packaging).
According to Thomas Lyon and John Maxwell, they came to a theory that corporate greenwashing is narrowed down to companies presenting positive information out of context in a particular way that could mislead their audience who aren’t aware of the full condition (5).

From the excerpt of "Greenwash: Corporate Environmental Disclosure under Threat of Audit" let us take an example of the Royal Caribbean cruise ship in 2003. The Royal Caribbean decided to advance their wastewater treatment systems as an action of environmental “progressiveness” however, this feature is only installed on three of the 26 cruise ships that they have.

In this case, the Royal Caribbean is telling the truth however, not necessarily the entire truth(5).

Walmart is the largest retailer in the world, the largest private employer in the world and has the most revenue of any company in the world. Walmart has pursued a strategy of sustainability, however, there is a tension whether it is only a public relations strategy or not. However after further research, it proves the opposite.

Walmart is known to lead the consumers into a car-dependent lifestyle in which, you would only be able to access their stores with cars because of the location that they are placed in. Thus increasing the number of emissions to the atmosphere.

Other arguments include that Walmart encourages its suppliers to compete against each other in order to reduce cost and thus resulting in low prices pushes the consumers to giving more waste. Therefore an increase in the amount of landfill (3).

Coca-cola is a large soft-drink producing company that uses plastic bottles to contain their product. Coca-cola made their research on finding new ways to play the environmental friendly role.

PlantBottle packaging, is plastic which is "up to 30% plant-based and 100% recyclable bottle". Coca-cola was very careful not to mislead their consumer therefore they state all the details openly within their product. PlantBottle was honored at 2011 Edison Awards for Best New Product - Sustainable Packaging and is a Winner of prestigious DuPont Award for Packaging Innovation (6).

Look for these environmental organizations:

- FSC
- SFI
- Green Seal
- ENERGY STAR
- and more...

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Case 2 : Retail Bluff

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