

Navigating the tricky
waters of greenhushing
and greenwashing.

HARRISON

BRANDS

Greenhushing:

Staying silent about sustainability efforts to avoid scrutiny or backlash, even when doing good.

Greenwashing:

Making exaggerated or misleading claims about being 'eco-friendly' without real substance or evidence.

Navigating the tricky waters of greenhushing and greenwashing.

In today's landscape, sustainability communication is more important than ever, yet many businesses find themselves caught in a delicate balancing act. Between the perils of Greenhushing – saying too little – and Greenwashing – saying too much or misleadingly – businesses often struggle to communicate authentically.

This white paper explores the challenges businesses face, provides tips to avoid pitfalls, and highlights examples of both success and failure. It also underscores why truth and transparency, balanced with subtlety, are at the core of effective sustainability messaging.

Why sustainability messaging is so tricky.

For businesses with genuine sustainability efforts, getting the message right can feel like walking a tightrope. Say too much, and you risk accusations of Greenwashing; say too little, and your silence may lead to Greenhushing.

Greenhushing occurs when companies underplay their sustainability efforts, often from fear of scrutiny or a lack of confidence in how to communicate them. This silence can result in missed opportunities to build trust and showcase impact.

Greenwashing, on the other hand, involves overstating or exaggerating sustainability claims, often misleading consumers. This can severely damage brand trust, especially as consumers grow savvier and regulations tighten.

The challenges businesses face

Crafting authentic sustainability communications comes with a unique set of challenges:

Evolving Regulations: Compliance is a moving target, with frameworks like the Green Claims Code, FCA guidance, and upcoming EU regulations raising the bar.

Brand Loyalty vs. Risks: Today's consumers demand transparency and accountability. But one misstep – real or perceived – can undermine trust.

Fear of Missteps: Many businesses fall into inertia, paralysed by the fear of getting it wrong. This hesitation can leave them lagging more proactive competitors.

What not to do: common pitfalls



The words, the images and the claims all need to be considered before making a damaging mistake!

The Wrong Words

Overused terms like “sustainability,” “eco-friendly,” and “green” can come across as hollow or misleading without evidence to back them up. Ask yourself: Can this claim stand up to scrutiny?

Misleading Imagery

A lush forest or a serene ocean doesn't tell the full story unless it's directly tied to actions. For instance, planting saplings in a barren field isn't the same as regenerating a forest. Make sure your visuals align with your narrative.

Empty Promises

Bold claims without measurable results breed scepticism. Consumers expect tangible outcomes supported by hard data—not lofty statements without substance.

What to do instead: tips for authenticity

To build trust, businesses must focus on clarity, evidence, and honesty:

Use Data

Show measurable outcomes to demonstrate real impact. Data speaks louder than vague promises.

Choose the Right Words

Clear, specific, and concise language ensures your message lands effectively. Avoid jargon or overly technical terms that alienate your audience.

Be Transparent

Acknowledge your limitations. Consumers value brands that admit where they are on their journey rather than pretending to have all the answers.

When sustainability takes a backseat

One key lesson is that sustainability shouldn't always take centre stage in your messaging. While it's essential, shouting about it can alienate or confuse audiences who may not prioritise it.

For instance, don't plaster your B Corp certification across every piece of communication. Not everyone understands what it means, and for some, it may feel irrelevant. Instead, let them discover it naturally, supported by context and backed by evidence. This approach builds intrigue and credibility.

Real-life lessons: success stories



Who Gives a Crap

Their no-nonsense tone of voice and comprehensive impact reports have made them leaders in the toiletries sector. They balance transparency with personality, making sustainability approachable.



Faith in Nature

By literally giving nature a seat at the boardroom table, they exemplify authenticity. They openly share their challenges and progress, fostering trust.



Octopus Energy

With investments in green tech and renewable energy, Octopus delivers affordable solutions while staying true to their mission.

Real-life lessons: what to avoid



Brewdog

Misleading claims about tree planting and other initiatives undermined their credibility, revealing inconsistencies in their messaging.



EasyJet

Their "Destination: Net Zero" campaign was widely criticised for its lack of substance. Consumers saw it as misleading, and regulators forced them to pull the ads.



Boohoo

Partnering with Kourtney Kardashian Barker under the guise of sustainability was a clear case of greenwashing. Consumers quickly saw through the façade.

How to succeed

Success lies in action, authenticity, and boldness. Here's how:

Act Now

Don't wait for perfection. Start small but start somewhere. Progress, however incremental, is better than inaction.

Be Subtle

Let your sustainability credentials emerge naturally. Audiences respond better when they feel they've discovered something rather than being told outright.

Focus on Truth

Truth is the cornerstone of trust. At Harrison Brands, we dig deep to uncover your brand's authentic story, ensuring your sustainability messaging resonates and drives real impact.

Our approach: unearthing deeper truths

Crafting authentic sustainability communications comes with a unique set of challenges:

Too many designers and marketers stop at the surface. They create what looks good and sells – but rarely go deeper.

At Harrison Brands, we believe in going beyond the superficial to reveal the hidden truths that truly define a brand. We understand that many clients struggle to articulate their core truths. That's where we come in. We listen carefully, ask the

right questions, and dive deep to uncover what really matters. These truths form the foundation for communication that builds trust, looks great, resonates with audiences, and delivers results.

But, our method doesn't stop at communication. By revealing deeper truths, we often uncover opportunities for stronger strategic direction, shaping

not just how a brand communicates, but how it moves forward.

This isn't about creating something that just works today—it's about creating something enduring. Something that resonates, inspires, and connects with both clients and stakeholders alike.

Let's Talk Truth: Navigating sustainability messaging isn't easy, but it's essential. The path to authenticity starts with a conversation. Let's work together to craft communications that reflect your values, inspire trust, and drive change.