



Jump on the Green Train With Your Eyes Open

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The consumer packaged goods industry has a long history of duking out margins and shelf space to drive sales and build brand loyalty. For many consumers, making healthy and eco-friendly choices, is becoming a strong deciding factor to select one brand over another. The packaging, messaging, and claims all look promising at first glance, but as you dig deeper, you'll uncover false claims and certifications that, yes, even you've fallen for.

A marketing firm by the name of Terra Choice Environmental Marketing regularly checks in on the environmental claims made by consumer markets. In 2009, they published *The Seven Sins of Greenwashing*. A group of researchers took a deeper look at product details and claims and found that on 2,219 products, nearly 5,000 green claims were made. Ninety-eight percent of those claims committed at least one Greenwashing Sin.

The first and probably the biggest issue highlighted in "The Seven Sins of Greenwashing Report" were the creation of

fake labels or false suggestions of third-party endorsements. Unfortunately, as consumers, it's partially our fault, because we're demanding to see these third-party certifications on the products we buy. Companies are only too happy to meet that demand with their own made up certifications and endorsements that seem real to the average consumer. How can you tell if a third party certification label is legitimate? Consumer Reports has launched their Greener Choices website. Their Eco-labels center allows you to verify any suspect labels. "As a consumer, look for a third party certification — not just a shiny graphic and educate yourself about what these labels mean. As a designer, ask lots of questions and take responsibility for verifying the claims on your own work", suggests Vancouver-based design consultant Lisa Hemingway who teaches Design for Sustainability in Langara's Communication and Ideation Design program.

Kids (toys and baby) products, cosmetics and cleaning products are the three categories in which green claims — and greenwashing are the most common. Consumers often fall victim to the vague or no proof claims that a particular product is "biodegradable", 'natural', 'organic', 'made with natural materials', and 'earth-friendly' and so forth. Natural doesn't mean it's green. Didn't you know, arsenic, mercury, formaldehyde are all '100% natural'?

With the heightened awareness of the impact people have had on the environment, consumers make feel good purchasing decisions in the hopes of creating a better future. The good news is green product claims are on the rise, because companies are working to meet the needs of the green consumer movement. With proper education around these certifications, ideally we will get

to a point where consumers demand a standard to a point where you can't just call it green without backing it up. Consumers are getting wiser and an army of sources is ready to tell them what's a fact and what's fiction, like the EnviroMedia Greenwashing Index. It's a great source that's helping consumers become more savvy about evaluating environmental marketing claims and holding businesses accountable for these claims.

Well, after playing "the sins of greenwashing game, I've gone home to take a look inside my own cupboards. I now know that I've unassumingly brought shampoo, dishwasher soap, and even tetra pak juice that all committed one or more Greenwashing Sins. On your next shopping trip, can you spot the Greenwashing Sins?

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