



## Corporate Green: New Study Reveals How Perceptions Don't Match Reality

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It happens to all of us from the moment we step outside of our door and re-enter the deafening and hyper-competitive world consumerism – we are subjected to an all-out-assault of strategic advertising geared toward seducing us to reach deep down into our pockets and hand over our hard earned money. Manufacturers, always eager to maintain an ever-growing revenue stream, are constantly on the search for the latest, greatest way to keep us engaged and buying. Not surprisingly, they've found that surfing the green wave for the last several years has been quite a boon for business, but there's been a dark side to all of their claims of "eco friendly" this and "sustainable" that – a relatively new linguistic term known as greenwashing. Essentially, it refers to the fact that there are some companies that create planet-friendly airs despite their not-so-green and preferably well-concealed leanings.

According to [SinsOfGreenwashing.org](http://SinsOfGreenwashing.org), there are six typical sins that manufacturers of purportedly "green" products and services commit, including the lesser of two evils sin as well as the sins of vagueness, lying, no proof, irrelevance, and the worst offender of all, the sin of the hidden trade off. Furthermore, they found that 98% of the

products they analyzed committed at least one of the aforementioned sins, which happens to gel with what two research companies – Earthsense and Trucost – recently discovered after conducting a comprehensive assessment of the global eco-impact of today's most notable companies. Bottom line? We're all pretty confused. Despite what consumers may be led to believe or simply presume on their own, a surprising number of corporations that are benefiting from their purported green street cred are actually hiding some skeletons in their closet and we're none the wiser. Conversely, some aren't tooting their own horn when they actually should be, presumably out of concern that their boasting will be seen as a typical greenwashing move.

30,000 American consumers were asked to gauge the green factor of a variety of major manufacturer's products/services via Earthsense and Trucost's fact finding experiment and it soon became apparent that they had "little idea about companies' environmental performance relative to each other." Of all the categories assessed – including retail, food/beverages, media, travel & leisure, personal/household goods, industrial goods, technology, chemicals and construction/materials – companies that

produce food and drink products were generally perceived by consumers to be among the more eco-responsible outfits out there despite the reality that they tend to cause the highest eco-impact.

Interesting to note is the fact that Whole Foods hasn't disclosed information about their greenhouse gas emissions, etc. which is somewhat suspicious given the great efforts they've taken to create a solid green branding among their clientele and within the community consciousness. On the other end of the spectrum, consumers imagine that Coca-Cola consumes a great deal of precious resources, but it turns out that they have the second-lowest eco-impact of the 22 food and beverage purveyors analyzed. The beverage giant has made big changes by using high-pressure air rather than water to rinse their beverage containers as well as sustainably managing river basins and sourcing water-efficient sugarcane. Consumers can easily be caught up in the perceived eco-glow of companies like Discovery Communications (which owns TreeHugger, PlanetGreen and Animal Planet) because their business revolves around promoting appreciation for our planet's resources, however, the same study revealed the seemingly green media trinity is almost exactly in line with Viacom (which owns MTV, Comedy Central and creates Paramount Pictures flicks) in terms of their environmental impact ratio.

Education is always the best line of defense, and fortunately there are two relatively new online tools that consumers can rely on to gain a greater understanding of which companies are showing their true green colors (and which lack the best of intentions). The first is called Project Label, and it offers the 'nutritional facts' such as a comprehensive business profile, eco-rating

summary, rankings, an analysis of how their label is built, related articles and even recent tweets about them. If you're curious about which companies have earned the unsavory distinction of committing all-out greenwashing or you have a few of your own examples to submit to the pool, then the Greenwashing Index may be more your style. Either way, emerging more eco-empowered consumers will help all of us to embrace a legitimately greener economy and channel our money into corporations that are truly worthy.