



## Preventing Greenwash Report

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A new report from Business for Social Responsibility and Futerra Sustainability Communications aims to help businesses avoid what they call the 'seven sins of greenwashing'. The report lays out a "greenwash matrix" of the different types of poor communication about corporate environmental activities, and explores the ways firms can move toward messages that more clearly explain their green works.

### Key Findings

To avoid greenwash, a company's sustainability practices or products must be based on real, significant environmental impact. If a company is spending more on communications about their green projects than the green project itself, it's a likely sign of greenwashing.

- To properly align a green project, companies need to make sure there is significant internal and external support for the practice.
  - The report authors recommend working with a credible third party to impartially evaluate the impact of any green activity.
  - When communicating their successes, companies should focus on clarity and transparency, making sure that customers understand what the company has achieved and that the company can back their claims up with hard data.
- The report also includes a list of the top 10 "signs of greenwash" to help companies avoid making any unintentional mistakes. Those signs are:
    - **Fluffy language.** Words or terms with no clear meaning (e.g. "eco-friendly").
    - **Green product vs. dirty company.** Such as efficient lightbulbs made in a factory that pollutes rivers.
    - **Suggestive pictures.** Green images that indicate a (unjustified) green impact (e.g. flowers blooming from exhaust pipes).
    - **Irrelevant claims.** Emphasizing one tiny green attribute when everything else is not green.
    - **Best in class.** Declaring you are slightly greener than the rest, even if the rest are pretty terrible.
    - **Just not credible.** "Eco friendly" cigarettes, anyone? "Greening" a dangerous product doesn't make it safe.
    - **Jargon.** Information that only a scientist could check or understand.
    - **Imaginary friends.** A "label" that looks like third party endorsement - except that it's made up.
    - **No proof.** It could be right, but where's the evidence?
    - **Out-right lying.** Totally fabricated claims or data.