

HOW CAN WE OVERCOME GREENWASHING ?

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SUMMARY

Greenwashing, or deceptive green marketing, is the deliberate promotion of eco-friendly attributes that are not consistent with reality. Even though this tactic is used by numerous businesses and people (companies, organisations, local authorities, politicians, etc.), this report will focus on greenwashing in private sector communication. This practice is particularly harmful to the environment: it spins products and services as being environmentally friendly when they actually are not, gives a clear conscience to consumers who think they are buying "green", and creates a general sense of mistrust in environmental claims. The company puts itself in economic danger if its greenwashing practices are revealed.

The measures currently in place to combat greenwashing are insufficient: even though false advertising is generally forbidden, neither European law nor French law holds companies or advertisers to account by making them prove their environmental claims. This inadequate legal system complicates legal proceedings, which are often long and unsuccessful. Nevertheless, the work done by organisations and the media to denounce greenwashing has compelled advertising and communication professionals to take up the issue and implement a self-regulation system. While the most visible types of greenwashing have been decreasing, this phenomenon continues to exist through the use of new tactics, which are more insidious and tougher to spot and combat: unfounded ecological claims on product packaging, advertising in retail outlets, the Internet, using fake quality labels, etc. Consumer citizens have become increasingly distrustful of environmental claims made by businesses, which as a result prevents those that actually are eco-friendly from standing out and being considered trustworthy when they market their good practices. It is therefore necessary for companies and advertisers to act on this, by demonstrating greater transparency and agreeing to external audits. While greater awareness needs to come from inside the company itself, external control mechanisms will need to be used to re-establish and ensure consumer confidence.

This report proposes concrete measures to strengthen them:

- 1) Strengthen the regulatory system of communication and advertising professionals by improving the dissemination of ethical rules governing environmental communication and by increasing training in this regard in communication and advertising schools. In order to enhance its legitimacy, the French advertising self-regulatory organisation (*ARPP*) could also admit representatives of civil society to its Board of Directors and stop being financed exclusively by communication professionals.
- 2) Environmental claims made by companies should be confirmed by a "trusted third-party". In order to decrease the citizens' level of mistrust and prove the veracity of their environmental claims, companies need to have them verified by a trusted third-party. This could come in the form of a quality label or official certification (AB certification mark, European Ecolabel, ISO 14001, etc.), or through the intervention of independent organisations responsible for guaranteeing the outcomes expected by the public via control and verification measures.