



# How Data Will Help Protect You Against Greenwashing

## *What is Greenwashing?*

Businesses know consumers are becoming increasingly conscious about which brands they support. Especially among young consumers, specifically Millennials and Gen Z'ers, ESG (environmental, social, governance) issues are at the forefront of making purchasing decisions. Forbes has called Gen Z "the Sustainability generation" and notes how "Generation Z along with Millennials are the most likely to make purchase decisions based on values and principles (personal, social, and environmental)."

Greenwashing, a term that was coined in the mid 1980s by environmentalist Jay Westerveld, is the practice of using "unsubstantiated claim to deceive consumers into believing that a company's products are environmentally friendly" and "an attempt to capitalize on the growing demand for environmentally sound products" without the data or effort to back it up (Investopedia).

Authenticity around ESG claims are of utmost importance to consumers, especially among the younger generations, who will be the first to sound an alarm if claims are purely performative.

An example of Greenwashing in action? One of the most nefarious cases points back to oil company, Chevron, in the 80s with their "People Do" Campaign. According to The Guardian, "The People Do campaign ... ignored Chevron's spotty environmental record: while it was running the ads, it was also violating the clean air act, the clean water act and spilling oil into wildlife refuges."



In 2021, the Changing Markets Foundation found that 96% of H&M's sustainability claims were unsubstantiated. This is a great example of what happens when businesses choose to focus their efforts around sustainability on PR and marketing efforts before doing the work necessary to make impactful change. Change must come from within the organization.



Photo Source: The Sustainable Agency

## *How to Combat Greenwashing*

We've written about how Sustainability can be your next biggest marketing tool—that is, if you do it right. Today's marketplace is full of data-oriented and conscious consumers. Here are some steps you can take to ensure you leave greenwashing behind, and embrace authenticity.

**Start from the top down.** Getting buy-in from executive leadership is paramount. If you cannot advocate for authenticity to the decision-makers at your company, but they're saying they care about sustainability from a marketing perspective, then your company is moving in the direction of greenwashing.

**Metrics-driven goals.** Specificity matters! Having goals that you can track against with tangible data (i.e. Making X percentage of your materials come from renewable resources) will allow you to identify where you're falling short, and when you hit benchmarks that you can share with consumers.

**Invest in reliable data organization and traceability.** Traceability is key with any sustainability goal. Knowing where your products are made and what's going into them allows you to better identify if materials are coming from unauthorized, unsustainable sources and if manufacturing facilities are being wasteful in their processes.

**Align messaging with data.** Avoiding "fluff" words like "natural" or "eco-friendly" only mean something in today's market when they can be backed up by data. Consumers appreciate specificity in marketing—where they can clearly understand the impact their purchases have on the planet.

**Ready to connect?**

Please contact:

Doug Olsen, Chief Executive Officer

***Vi3 at [info@vi3global.com](mailto:info@vi3global.com)***