

GREENWASHING

'Greenwashing' Origin: Jay Westerveld

By Bruce Watson - Theguardian.com

The term greenwashing was coined by environmentalist Jay Westerveld in 1986, back when most consumers received their news from television, radio and print media – the same outlets that corporations regularly flooded with a wave of high-priced, slickly-produced commercials and print ads. The combination of limited public access to information and seemingly unlimited advertising enabled companies to present themselves as caring environmental stewards, even as they were engaging in environmentally unsustainable practices.

But greenwashing dates back even earlier. American electrical behemoth Westinghouse's nuclear power division was a greenwashing pioneer. Threatened by the 1960's anti-nuclear movement, which raised questions about its safety and environmental impact, it fought back with a series of ads proclaiming the cleanliness and safety of nuclear power plants. One, featuring a photograph of a nuclear plant nestled by a pristine lake, proclaimed that "We're building nuclear power plants to give you

more electricity," and went on to say that nuclear plants were "odorless [...] neat, clean, and safe". Some of these claims were true: in 1969, Westinghouse nuclear plants were producing large amounts of cheap electricity with far less air pollution than competing coal plants. However, given that the ads appeared after nuclear meltdowns had already occurred in Michigan and Idaho, the word "safe" was arguable. Westinghouse's ads also ignored concerns about the environmental impact of nuclear waste, which has continued to be a problem.

The mysterious case of the stolen towels In 1983, when Jay Westerveld first got the idea for the term greenwashing, he wasn't thinking about nuclear power – he was thinking about towels. An undergraduate student on a research trip to Samoa, he stopped off in Fiji to surf. At the sprawling Beachcomber Resort, he saw a note asking customers to pick up their towels. "It basically said that the oceans and reefs are an important resource, and that reusing the towels would reduce ecological damage," Westerveld recalls. "They finished by saying something like, 'Help us

to help our environment.'" Westerveld wasn't actually staying at the resort – he was lodging at a "grubby" guesthouse nearby, and had just snuck in to steal some clean towels. Even so, he was struck by the note's irony: while it claimed to be protecting the island's ecosystem, he says, the Beachcomber – which, today, describes itself as "the most sought-after destination in the South Pacific" – was expanding. "I don't think they really cared all that much about the coral reefs," he says. "They were in the middle of expanding at the time, and were building more bungalows."

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Three years later, in 1986, when he was writing a term paper on multiculturalism, Westerveld remembered the note. "I finally wrote something like, 'It all comes out in the greenwash.' A guy in the class with me worked for a literary magazine and had me write an essay about it." And, as the magazine had a large readership in nearby New York City, it wasn't long before the term caught on in the wider media.

Original photography used, which has been heavily edited:
<https://pixabay.com/photos/nuclear-power-plant-cooling-tower-3140401/>
<https://pixabay.com/photos/nuclear-waste-radioactive-waste-1471361/>

Westerveld's essay came out a year after the launch of Chevron's People Do campaign. As critics later pointed out, many of the environmental programs that Chevron promoted in its campaign were mandated by law. They were also relatively inexpensive when compared with the cost of Chevron's ad budget: environmental activist Joshua Karliner estimated that Chevron's butterfly preserve cost it \$5,000 per year to run, while the ads promoting it cost millions of dollars to produce and broadcast.

The People Do campaign also 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. But Chevron was far from the only company digging deep into the greenwashing cesspool. In 1989, chemical company DuPont announced its new double-hulled oil tankers with ads featuring marine animals clapping their flippers and wings in chorus to Beethoven's Ode to Joy. However, as environmental

nonprofit Friends of the Earth pointed out in its report Hold the Applause, the company was the single largest corporate polluter in the US.

Another trend, says Jonah Sachs, CEO of branding agency Free Range Studios, is linking sustainability claims to other issues, such as personal health. "There's this perception that personal health and environmental sustainability are two sides of the same coin," he says. "Sometimes this is true, but many times it isn't. Bottled water is a great example: in terms of health, it's much better than soda or other drinks, but in terms of the environment and sustainability, it's ridiculous."

The water industry trades heavily on images of rugged mountains and pristine lakes to sell its products. And many companies – Nestle, in particular – spend millions of dollars trying

to convince the public that their bottled water isn't only good to drink, but is also good for the planet. Over the past few years, the bottled water giant has claimed that its Eco-Shape bottle is more efficient, that its Resource recycled plastic bottle is more environmentally responsible and that its use of plant-based plastics is less damaging to the planet.

In 2008, Nestle Waters Canada even ran an ad claiming: "Bottled water is the most environmentally responsible consumer product in the world." Several Canadian groups quickly filed a complaint against the company. Five years later, during Earth Day 2013, the International Bottled Water Association doubled down

on the sustainability claims, announcing that bottled water was "the face of positive change" because the industry was using less plastic in its bottles and relying more on recycled plastic.

Sustainability promises aside, only about 31% of plastic bottles end up getting recycled, which means that "the face of positive change" creates millions of tons of garbage every year, much of which ends up in landfills or the ocean.

And the water that goes in the bottles is often equally unsustainable. Nestle's Arrowhead water claims that "Mother Nature is our muse" and boasts that it "has a team of experts dedicated to watching over each one of our 13 spring sources" to ensure responsible water stewardship. This sounds promising until one considers that those springs are in California, which has been in a state of drought for five years. The company also bottles water in Arizona and Oregon, both of which are also experiencing droughts. ■

Companies are Valuing Profit Over People by Greenwashing

By Tori Everson
Duclarion.com

This is extremely misleading to the public.

In 2018, Nestle, one of the world's top plastic polluters, said they would have recyclable or reusable packaging by 2025. Their statement was vague, and Greenpeace said it "sets an incredibly low standard as the largest food and beverage company in the world."

This creates unfavorable consequences for the consumer because they are not actually purchasing a sustainable product, and it is also negatively impacting the environment. These products contribute to environmental pollution, global carbon emissions and unsustainable practices. Companies are taking advantage of the influx of sustainable consumers by using greenwashing tactics to promote their businesses. This is extremely misleading to the public, as they are deceiving them.

The reason greenwashing has become so popular across popular brands—like Volkswagen, Starbucks, IKEA, Zara—is because these companies want to maintain the appearance that they are environmentally friendly. The act of being sustainable and purchasing eco-friendly products is trendy.

The University of Denver has fallen subject to this method of marketing through creating a faculty-led Carbon Neutral Task Force, opening up a mountain campus, adding a sustainability minor and developing new LEED

buildings, all while remaining invested in fossil fuels. These actions are a form of diversion from the real issues of climate change, which is an example of greenwashing. It is difficult to celebrate these steps in the right direction for the environment when the university is contributing to the number one cause of climate change.

Students at other universities have exposed their institution for greenwashing. At Cambridge University, students accused the institution for greenwashing because of their ties with oil firms. The university was continuously promoting sustainability projects and the creation of green technology, which the students were not satisfied with due to their connection to the fossil fuel industry.

So why even do the smaller-scale actions if it is not making a direct impact on our environment? That is a question many people may be battling with because they want to be socially responsible and practice sustainably, but the act of fighting climate change is much too large for only one person.

This article is not meant to stop you from completing your small-scale sustainable efforts like recycling, composting, using reusable water bottles and straws. This article is meant to inform you of the sad reality of many large business models, and

how they are not actually benefiting the consumer and the environment, but rather are making grand statements to appease the people, but not follow through with sustainable and ethical practices.

Are companies for the environmental movement or the economic gains received from using this movement to their advantage? This is a question that many ethical consumers may want to start asking before purchasing an item that is marketed as being sustainable.

The solution to this problematic practice is to educate yourself on which companies are using greenwashing tactics, and to protest and avoid these labels. There needs to be greater public awareness on the relationship between companies and their use of marketing unsustainable products to be viewed as sustainable. At a broader level, there needs to be rules and regulations set in place that control greenwashing within businesses. ■