



Tony Hall

Despite the distraction of the financial market mayhem, green is good, green is right and green works.

Green companies really have nothing to lose.

They save energy and waste costs, they attract and retain staff and they attract the new breed of eco-savvy customers.

Of course they also make a contribution to the long-term survival of our planet.

We must continue with accelerating environmental initiatives regardless of the distraction of media-driven financial hysteria.

The financial crisis is temporary but the damage we are doing to our natural resources is permanent.

There are now many opportunities for companies and individuals to take action.

Most people already understand the risks of climate change and genuinely want to make an effort.

Companies should choose a green program that is well researched, credible and focused on taking action.

Although Australian companies are well behind their European counterparts, early signs of sustainability initiatives are emerging.

We have seen tree planting to offset carbon emissions, airline offsetting programs and other commitments to achieve carbon neutrality.

AVOID MISLEADING STATEMENTS

While taking action is very much encouraged, marketers must tread carefully when trumpeting newly acquired green credentials.

Consumers are now well educated on environmental issues and misleading green marketing messages may actually have the opposite effect.

Already we have seen the ACCC penalise companies that exaggerate green credentials.

Planting trees or offering an offset program that consumers pay for themselves is a small step in the right direction, but not nearly as powerful as a large company taking responsibility itself.

Large companies are generally the largest polluters and energy users.

It is their actions that will benefit the environment the most, even though the actions of many individuals will also equate to substantial reductions in emissions and waste.

Consumers are now well aware of green-washing — the term used to describe companies that embellish green credentials.

Simply reducing emissions or even aiming for the admirable target of carbon-neutral is not enough for a company to boast that it is green.

A good example of this is the new A380 dubbed "The Jolly Green Giant."

Just because its carbon emissions are less than the 25-year-old 747 it replaces, it doesn't mean it is not belching thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide into our stratosphere every flight.

COMMUNICATING CREDENTIALS

We should encourage the corporate sector to take action rather than solely conducting lengthy carbon audits through fear of future penalties.

There is really no excuse not to take steps to reduce carbon emissions. At the very worst, companies will save money in reduced energy and fuel costs.

The best way to communicate green credentials is obvious — tell the truth. Smart consumers know when an obviously visible polluter is trying to cover up a much bigger environmental problem. Mining companies are a good example. A good strategy for miners is to clean up their mess, over-offset or compensate for their emissions and then tell the public and shareholders what they have done to dramatically reduce their impact on our landscape.

A goal of carbon neutrality is admirable, but only in addition to dramatic cuts in carbon emissions.

Offsetting can take many years to have any effect and often costs of delivery can result in a much smaller amount of offset funds actually invested in the

GREEN MARKETING: DOS AND DON'TS

Do:

- A fast, low-cost audit and action plan
- Independent outside advice or certification
- Honest communications about the actions you have taken
- Simple statements which are better than sweeping claims
- Case studies on your website outlining your actions
- Continual communication of environmental progress so consumers don't think you are only doing it for the publicity
- Clearly substantiated claims
- A partner with an environmental consulting company that is a specialist in this area and know exactly what works
- Utilising a carbon offset or compensation program that doesn't take many years to absorb carbon or are subject to high administration costs
- Advice and feedback from customers and clients about environmental actions important to them rather than making assumptions.

Conversely, here are some tips on what NOT to do:

- Don't make bold, unsubstantiated claims
- Don't pass the cost and responsibility of your carbon emissions onto your customers
- Don't get bogged down in long energy audits for the sake of a big report — take action
- Don't boast you have gone green just because you have bought some carbon offsets
- Don't set up a sustainability position or division without any budget or control
- Don't join with the corporate environmental movement unless you are really taking significant action to reduce and save energy and waste.

offset program. Green marketing is still a new and relatively unregulated field. Companies are best advised to take substantial action on reducing carbon emissions but keep green claims conservative. Consumers will begin to associate a brand or company with environmentally-friendly initiatives and slowly build up a more enduring degree of trust. ■

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