



How to avoid greenwash: lessons from the UK's crackdown on misleading eco-claims –

Description



The UK's advertising watchdog is policing the language of sustainability more strictly than ever before. After a string of high-profile breaches, Iona Murphy sets out how businesses can stay on the right side of the UK's 'Green Claims Code'. Sustainability has long been plagued with greenwashing. Marketers frequently opt for vague terms like 'eco-friendly', 'green' and 'all-natural', which can mislead or outright lie to the public about a product or company's environmental impact. It's no surprise that polling from RED C Research last year discovered that 62% of the UK public found it difficult to understand which brands are sustainable and which aren't. With a third of the UK's necessary emissions cuts hinging on behavioural change, it's crucial that the public have the information they need to make more sustainable choices. 62% of the UK public found it difficult to understand which brands are sustainable

and which aren't It was therefore welcome that, after the Competition and Markets Authority's review into greenwashing concluded 40% of online green claims could be misleading, the body introduced rules on how to make meaningful environmental claims via the Green Claims Code in September 2021. Green Claims Code – Claims must be truthful and accurate.

Claims must be clear and unambiguous. Claims must not omit or hide important relevant information. Comparisons must be fair and meaningful. Claims must consider the full life cycle of the product or service. Claims must be substantiated. Which all sounds straightforward enough. Yet, over a year since the launch, brands continue to fall foul of the regulator. A minority of breaches appear to be out-and-out greenwash – for instance, a nutrition drinks company that advertised its plastic-lined bottles as plastic-free. But the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has found that even though they may not have deliberately misled consumers, many brands have ended up inadvertently breaching the code. So, brands are falling short because of unsubstantiated, misleading claims and a lack of consideration as to how the public might interpret these. The ASA's concern with the overall impression of advertising should encourage brands to pause and consider how their messaging stacks up with the rest of their approach to sustainability. We expect to see brands getting more specific about exactly how their products are 'better' for the environment and leaning less on vague claims.

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