
RAINBOW
COLLECTION

THE ANTI GREENWASHING GUIDE



Challenges and
solutions for
ACM-proof
sustainability
communication

Read all about it



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CONTENT

03. ANTI
GREENWASHING

05. GREENWASHING
DOESN'T OFTEN
HAPPEN ON
PURPOSE...

06. GREENWASHING
VERSUS
GREENHUSHING

07. WHY IS
GREENHUSHING
A PROBLEM?

08. PLEASE DON'T
MISLEAD,
BUT DO LEAD

11. THE 5 ACM
GUIDELINES
EXPLAINED

09. GET STARTED

- Be clear, correct, specific, and complete
- Make claims based on up to date facts
- Use comparisons to help consumers
- Make sure your ambitions are realistic
- Make your visual claims useful

ANTI GREEN- WASHING

Have you heard about clothing store H&M's and sporting goods retail chain *Decathlon's misleading sustainability claims*? The ACM (the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets) sure did, and ordered both companies to compensate for their inaccurate statements by donating respectively 400,000 and 500,000 euros to sustainability projects.



Besides the donations, both companies now pledged to revamp or cease using sustainability claims on their clothes and website. Moreover, they are now committed to boost transparency, preventing any future misleading claims and ensuring that consumers receive accurate information. With that, they got away without further sanctions by ACM.

So, why are we telling you about these cases? We don't mean to spread fear. Sure, ACM is keeping an eye on things, but don't let that slow down your sustainability communication efforts. In fact, we encourage you to communicate even more. Keep on reading to understand what you can and cannot say when it comes to sustainability claims and why you should keep the communication going.

GREENWASHING

In short, greenwashing is when companies falsely claim their products are environmentally friendly to attract customers, often without evidence to support these claims.

GREEN- WASHING DOESN'T OFTEN HAPPEN ON PURPOSE...

...it's usually caused by a lack of knowledge of sustainability. Also, it often happens due to sensitivities and misunderstandings between the sustainability and communication teams, especially regarding claims about ingredients, production methods, certifications, or performance.



GREENWASHING VERSUS GREENHUSHING

The opposite of greenwashing is greenhushing. But, just like greenwashing, it's a trend that raises concerns. While companies are still making progress on sustainability, they suddenly communicate way less about it lately.

Research shows that almost 25% of companies chose not to highlight achievements beyond the minimum requirements (source: Swiss carbon finance firm South Pole).

It's because they are concerned about:

- The increased actions taken by the EU against misleading sustainability claims.
- The recent legal actions taken against companies like Dasani and Whole Foods.
- Being accused of using misleading claims themselves.

GREENHUSHING

Greenhushing is when companies downplay their genuine environmental efforts (unlike greenwashing which exaggerates them), usually due to image or legal concerns.

WHY IS GREENHUSHING A PROBLEM?

01.

Making sustainability profitable is crucial. Although some CFOs view it as an expense, connecting sustainability with customer value can be transformative. However, when companies engage in greenwashing, it limits marketing efforts and leads to lower returns.

02.

People change when they see others changing, research says. That's why companies have the power to catalyze widespread changes across the industry, just by communicating. By not saying anything, sustainability progressions will slow down.

03.

Companies tend to stay silent in climate debates, unintentionally giving weight to climate skeptics, which harms the planet in the end.



PLEASE DON'T MISLEAD, BUT DO LEAD

We find it super important that brands don't mislead consumers with false sustainability claims. But with stricter communication laws, we fear brands might go silent on sustainability altogether. And that's what we absolutely don't want to happen. Brands play a crucial role in leading the way towards a more sustainable planet. When brands open up, invite everyone in, set daring goals, learn from their mistakes and stay transparent, they inspire others and pave the way for a more sustainable future through their communication.



Want to read more about

greenhushing



greenwashing



GET STARTED

WITH ACM COMPLIANT
COMMUNICATION YOURSELF

When it comes to sustainability communication, we've got your back with a variety of tools (like the Scan, Training and Checklist & Roadmap) designed for specific needs as each case requires a different approach. But there are four general things you can get started with yourself right away.

01.

SET UP A SYSTEM

Set up a system for sharing accurate info about your products, ambitions, and claims both in data but also in person. Data alone might miss important details, so regular check-ins will help share info and ensure better sustainability communication.

02.

CREATE A SOLID SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Only communicate about your sustainability ambitions when you have an accessible plan that's backing it up. Your strategy should include continuous, specific and practical steps for improvement that are already happening or about to start. Also, set achievable goals that you can measure. ACM advises to have the feasibility of your sustainability goals checked by an independent third party.

Would you like to verify the feasibility of your sustainability ambitions? Rainbow Collection developed a Sustainability Strategy Check. Contact us for more information.

Drop us a line for more info

03.

TRAIN THE RIGHT PEOPLE

The ACM guidelines are relevant for different teams in your organization, not just one person. Designers should know about the right imagery and colors, copywriters about the right wordings, the buyers about proof and the sustainability manager should oversee it all.

In need of training? Rainbow Collection developed a training that enables you and your colleagues to communicate about sustainability in an ACM proof way.



04.

DELVE INTO THE ACM GUIDELINES

Someone in your team needs to become the ACM guideline guru. For that lucky person, we created **this overview** with examples of what you can and cannot say. The official guidelines from ACM itself can be found **here**.

And don't forget the most important thing: Do communicate about sustainability. It speeds up the progress of industry-wide transformation, and that's exactly what we need right now.

NEED SOME HELP?

Rainbow Collection is on a mission to support brands with their sustainability communication.

We make sure their communication

- Is legally compliant
- Is relevant
- Is positive
- Includes a concrete call-to-action whenever possible.

THE 5 ACM GUIDELINES EXPLAINED

Say goodbye to greenwashing. The ACM (the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets) recently sharpened the regulations around sustainability communication. Want to make sure your company communicates in the right way? Check out our explanation and examples of the guidelines below.

01. *Be clear, correct, specific, and complete* →
02. *Make claims based on up to date facts* →
03. *Use comparisons to help consumers* →
04. *Make sure your ambitions are realistic* →
05. *Make your visual claims useful* →



01.

BE CLEAR, CORRECT, SPECIFIC, AND COMPLETE WHEN COMMUNICATING ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY

Certain combinations of words, imagery and colors might make it seem like you're saying your product is sustainable when it's not. That is not allowed.

In case you do have a valid sustainability claim, it should be correct, specific and

in plain language. You are not allowed to use objectives, standard characteristics of a product and/or statutory requirements for promotional purposes. And be aware that additional guidelines apply for claims related to CO2 and organic.



 <p>Shower head shower for good</p>	 <p>Shower head 50% water reduction* <i>*per minute, compared to our 2020 model</i></p>
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02.

MAKE SPECIFIC SUSTAINABILITY CLAIMS BASED ON UP TO DATE FACTS

Absolute claims like 'sustainable product' suggests the product does not have any negative influence on, for example, animals, humans and/or the environment. That is not possible, ever. So avoid such absolute claims. Be specific about the sustainable impact



instead. What is sustainable about your product? Use percentages or numbers and link to additional information to clarify the sustainability benefit. You may only communicate when the benefit is substantial and has a significant positive impact that you can support with proof.

 <p>Sustainable chair</p>	 <p>100% recycled wood</p>
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03.

USE COMPARISONS TO HELP CONSUMERS

Comparisons are useful for consumers to understand sustainability benefits. But of course, these comparisons should be fair. They should be easy to understand, substantial, factual, actual and involve a similar product in a similar fashion. When comparing, make sure you specifically mention what product you are comparing to and don't forget to provide proof for your findings.

 <p>Cotton B is better cotton</p>	 <p>The cotton used for B contains 50% less chemicals compared to A*</p> <p><i>*Chemical report is available online</i></p>
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04.

MAKE SURE YOUR AMBITIONS ARE REALISTIC, VERIFIABLE AND CONCRETE

Only communicate about your sustainability ambitions when you have an accessible plan that's backing it up. Your strategy should include continuous, specific and practical steps for improvement that are already happening or about to start. Also, set achievable goals that you can measure. ACM advises to have the feasibility of your sustainability goals checked by an independent third party.

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Drop us a line for more info

<p>Your luggage travels environmentally friendly, as we have the ambition to be the most sustainable airport in 2030</p> 	 <p>On this airport, we carry your luggage with a 100% electric cart</p>
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05.

MAKE YOUR VISUAL CLAIMS AND LABELS USEFUL

You can use visual claims like symbols, colors or pictures when it supports a correctly written claim (see above). Don't create your own sustainability label but use independent labels that are created by accredited certification bodies. These are reliable and independent. Make sure you gather the proof and work

according to the certification standards. For instance, you can only use the FSC logo when you're a member, or the GOTS logo when your organization is GOTS certified.



WE'RE HERE TO HELP.

Need support with your sustainability communication? [Drop us a message.](#)
Or, if you are looking for inspiration, check out this *Nestle case* or *read this article*.



MARGREET IS HERE
TO HELP WITH
ALL YOUR ANTI
GREENWASHING
QUESTIONS

Margreet van Schaijck

Brand Strategist

Rainbow Collection

Margreet@rainbowcollection.nl

LinkedIn

Plan a video call



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