

# *Greenwashing in Advertising*

## Being an informed consumer

PwC's Earn Your Future™ Curriculum

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# ***Best Brand chocolate chip cookies***

## ***Strategy #1***

***Best Brand has made a pledge that no dolphins are injured in the production of our cookies.***

### ***Erroneous claims***

- Sounds nice, but when have dolphins ever been hurt in making cookies?
- Some ads will claim the benefits of something obvious, but do so in a way that makes it sound as though the product is making a sacrifice for the environment.
- Think critically about the benefits that a product claims.

## ***Strategy #2***

***Our cookies are 100% all-natural produced using Earth-friendly techniques***

### ***Words with no clear meaning***

- What do 'all-natural' and 'Earth-friendly techniques' mean exactly?
- Look for words that are not clearly defined on the packaging.
- Specific, clear information is more trustworthy than vague wording.

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# ***Earth Brand chocolate chip cookies***

## ***Strategy #3***



## ***Names, pictures, and color schemes***

- Does the name 'Earth Brand' actually say anything about the company's practices?
- What do polar bears have to do with cookies?
- Earthy colors and images of nature are often meant to give the impression of environmental responsibility.

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# ***Best Brand chocolate chip cookies***

## ***Strategy #4***



***Certified Eco-Friendly***

### ***Unidentified certifications***

- Who certified these cookies? What are the criteria for certification?
- Certifications that do not specify the certifying organization should be investigated.
- Third party and governmental certifications are the most trustworthy.

## ***Strategy #5***

***\$1 from every package sold goes to protect wildlife***

Donation is made when customer creates an account with Best Brand and certifies their package number online. Once this information has been submitted, Best Brand will notify the customer by mail. At which point the customer must write a 3 page explanation as to their definition of 'wildlife'. Once this has been approved, a \$1 donation (minus a 50 cent processing fee) will be made.

### ***Fine print***

- Important information can be concealed in fine print.
- Be weary of packaging with large amounts of fine print or asterisks (\*) next to claims.
- Asterisks are usually explained at the bottom of packaging or the end of an ad.
- Evaluate this information closely when something sounds too good to be true.

## ***Strategy #6***

***Our cookies produce 20% less carbon dioxide compared to other major producers.***

### ***Baseless comparisons***

- How much carbon dioxide do 'other major producers' produce?
- 'Major producers' of what?
- Think critically about comparisons that don't provide information about what the product is actually being compared to.

## Are all green ads misleading?

- What can be trusted?
- Are there any specific products you trust?
  - Why or why not?
- Fortunately, many products which make green claims are sincere.

**For each of the following ads, consider: ‘what is different about these claims than those in the previous ads?’**

### Reliability sign #1



*Best Brand is committed to the environment by only using ingredients that are Certified Organic by the US Department of Agriculture.*

### USDA, EPA, and Third Party Certifications

Many government agencies and reputable third party organizations sponsor certifications with real meaning.



- USDA Organic – US Dept. of Agriculture
  - Certifies that 95% of a food product was produced organically.



- Energy Star – EPA and US Dept. of Energy
  - Certifies that appliances meet strict energy efficiency requirements.



- Forestry Stewardship Council
  - Certifies wood products and building materials that come from sustainably managed forests.



- Green Seal
  - Sets sustainability standards for household products—such as cleaning products—business practices, and services.

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## ***Reliability sign #2***

***Best Brand Cookies are made in factories powered by 100% solar-produced energy. Best Brand sources all of our ingredients locally—from within 150 miles of each factory.***

### ***Specific language***

- How much of Best Brand's electricity is produced with solar?
- What do they mean by local?
- This ad use clear language and specific explanations of the environmental benefits of their products.
- Generally, if a company isn't trying to hide something, they won't word their ads like they are.