



# Brands join fight against climate change

Climate change has produced a landscape where products are marketed on their environmental credentials. **Mike Fletcher** finds out whether their communication strategies are just a “greenwash”

**A**riel is asking you to “Turn to 30” when using your washing machine. In its current campaign, the Procter & Gamble brand is attracting plaudits from environmentalists and the media industry alike for communicating the message that by turning to 30 degrees on a washing machine, households can save, on average, 41% on energy consumption.

By offering a sustainable solution, Ariel has successfully and responsibly aligned its brand with the fight against climate change – a concept WPP’s Sir Martin Sorrell recently described as “no longer the fanciful risk of marginal changes in weather, based on scant evidence”.

Climate change has led to a landscape in which products are marketed on their environmental credentials, while communications strategies are devised around the purchasing habits of the ethical buyer.

According to the Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP), the market for green goods changes fast, as does the data advertisers must use to substantiate their claims and avoid accusations of “greenwash” – a practice defined by John Grant, the co-founder of agency St Luke’s, in his book *The Green Marketing Manifesto*. He says: “You can’t put a lettuce in the window of a butcher’s shop and declare that you are now ‘turning vegetarian.’”

Several brands have already fallen foul of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). On 26 March, Renault was forced to withdraw a press ad showing leaves emerging from the exhaust pipe of its Twingo car after the ASA ruled that the company had “exaggerated the environmental benefits” of the vehicle.

And in May 2007, a magazine ad for the Lexus RX400h was headlined “High performance, low emissions, zero guilt”. The ASA upheld complaints that Lexus had exaggerated how environmentally friendly an SUV hybrid could be.

In fact, in the first six months of 2007, the ASA

received 268 complaints about 200 “green ads”. And the number has risen greatly from 2006 as green communications have become more commonplace.

Speaking at the Branding for Good summit at Canary Wharf in March this year, Sorrell went on to say: “You may be able to fool people once, but not twice. You will be found out if your green claims do not stand up to scrutiny. Long-term brand building depends critically on an understanding of the needs of all constituencies.”

For those that plan green communications, therefore, factual up-to-the-minute evidence to substantiate environmental claims is, and will continue to be, a constant challenge. But with “greenwash” an all-too-easy accusation to throw, it’s not just consumer-facing communications strategies that need to have all the facts. Agencies, media owners and brands are making sure corporate social responsibility (CSR) is high up the agenda in the workplace as well, ensuring an ethically sound environment from which to communicate responsible sustainable messages.

year to hopefully exceed our target.

“The creation of CRAG came about as a method of giving the whole company ownership of both the issue and the solution. It operates on a process of continuous feedback between the group and the rest of the company.

“We also wanted to take the project beyond energy usage to encompass broader environmental issues and produce a new

environmental policy for the company by finding out what the staff personally feel are the important issues. We’ve had an overwhelming response with more than 200 ideas submitted.”

Five director of strategy Charles Constable is the one company director who sits on the CRAG steering committee. The other members of the group, which meets once a month, comprise one Five representative from each department.



**“It’s not cod-liver oil that people will simply take because it’s good for you despite the taste”**

Charles Constable  
Director of strategy  
Five

## THE AGENCY

With Volkswagen knocked off its environmental pedestal by the introduction of the Toyota Prius hybrid, last year the car manufacturer turned to Tribal DDB, a division of DDB UK, to communicate the credentials of its diesel BlueMotion Polo.

The BlueMotion campaign ran from October for six weeks and featured different executions across television, cinema, press and online.

According to Tribal DDB digital director John Goodbody, the amount of green communication messages that exist, particularly around cars and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, have made it confusing for the consumer. The answer was to go back to basics and communicate the benefits of driving the BlueMotion Polo by comparing it to recycling – the one environmental message everybody understands.

The result was two TV ads focused on recycling plastic bags and paper. The first features plastic bags growing in quantity as they float across the cityscape before the voiced message: “Driving a BlueMotion Polo for a year instead of your normal small car could reduce your carbon footprint by as much as recycling around 25,000 plastic bags.” The second is a drawing animation featuring the car on a journey across pencilled landscapes. The message is: “Driving a BlueMotion Polo for a week instead of your normal small car could reduce your carbon footprint. In fact, it could reduce it as much as recycling 2,669 sheets of paper.”

In the print ads, a BlueMotion Polo is dwarfed against a wall of recycled cans. The strapline reads: “Driving a BlueMotion Polo for a year could prevent as much carbon pollution as recycling 5,000 cans.”

Goodbody, who was heavily involved in the VW campaign, says: “Everything about the campaign was thought through responsibly. Direct mail was dismissed and we added a strong online presence

According to Constable, it’s important to distinguish Five’s strategy of carbon reduction from carbon offsetting.

He comments: “To offset feels to us like a cop-out. We’ve set targets to reduce energy, waste, use of paper and transport. It may be the harder road and it’s not cod-liver oil that people will simply take because it’s good for you, despite the taste.

“This is something that needs communication and encouragement. We’re building a dedicated intranet site, we’ve had a cycle to work scheme for six months, and we’d like to see a reduction in the number of taxis we use around central London by encouraging staff to walk from our Covent Garden location instead.”

The broadcaster has joined other brands, including BSKyB, in signing up to The Green 500, a London Development Agency and Mayoral initiative to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the capital by 60% before 2025.



that’s measurable and highly targeted. Overseas locations for shooting the ads were ruled out and every element of production was offset.

“We had other campaign ideas to prove how efficient the car was. We wanted to send it on a long drive from one side of Europe to the other to prove it could achieve it on one tank of fuel. The journey was deemed unnecessary, however, so we waited until this year’s Geneva Motor Show and then filmed the journey from London to Geneva on one tank of diesel.”

Goodbody is also the agency’s most active CSR campaigner, constantly striving to change staff mindsets and office culture so that computers and lights are turned off after working hours and all staff contribute to a more environmentally friendly workplace.

He says: “We’ve put in place things such as joining a car-sharing firm nearby, called Street Car, to get staff to think more about their decision-making processes. But you need the infrastructure in place to completely change the working culture and we still need things such as more bike spaces before we can really make a difference.”

But Five’s overall philosophy is to get its own house in order before attempting to tackle the environmental credentials of its production suppliers or programming schedules.

And, by Constable’s own admittance, it still has much to do to change its internal culture. He says: “We’re proud of the things we’ve achieved, from adding timers to kitchen boilers to putting daily press cuttings and monthly press highlights online.

“But we still struggle to cope with transport targets, especially when flying is key to communicating with our parent company RTL based in Luxembourg.”

He adds: “Should we be pushing for environmental programming on our schedules and greener production suppliers? In the fullness of time perhaps, but we’re a young company and right now it’s more important to our young staff base that they work in an environmentally responsible environment.”

## THE CLIENT

On 13 February, HP signed up to join the WWF Climate Savers Program, a group of leading corporations from around the world that work with the World Wildlife Fund to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. In the same month, at a Climate Savers summit held in Tokyo, senior HP directors pledged to reduce emissions from operations and use of its products by six million tonnes below 2005 levels, before 2010.

Closer to home, throughout January and February, HP in conjunction with the Hertfordshire Waste Aware Partnership, completed four recycling events as part of its effort to encourage Hertfordshire residents to donate their old IT equipment to local charities. Across the four events, 46 tonnes of unwanted IT

equipment was collected. Almost 30% will be professionally refurbished and given to local charities. The remaining equipment will be recycled by a specialist recycling plant, minimising the electronic waste that goes to landfill and reducing its environmental impact.

HP chairman and chief executive Mark Hudd best answers why the firm chooses not to communicate these little-known green credentials via sustained media and marketing campaigns. He says: “HP has been an environmentally sensitive company for decades. It’s simply part of our culture and DNA.”

According to HP UK and Ireland environmental manager Bruno Zago, the company’s actions speak louder than words. Its CSR communication tools are reserved for tender documents and HP’s annual Global Citizenship Customer Report, *The Hidden Component*, which can be downloaded from HP’s website. He says: “We’ve been recycling hardware since 1987 and, in June last year, we reached a milestone of one billion pounds in weight. We now aim to reach our second billion by 2010 in a rapidly accelerating programme. Energy is on everyone’s agenda and in January, we announced a commitment to reduce the energy consumption of our volume desktop and notebook PC families by 25% by 2010. We are also working to consolidate 85 data centres worldwide into six with high-efficiency servers and cooling technology.”

So, in a landscape that’s filled with accusations of “greenwash” and with the ASA proposing to clamp down harder on over-claims in a market in which consumers will often have more brand loyalty to ethical traders, HP says it is simply getting on with it.

