

# How to Spot and Avoid Greenwashing

As an advocate of eco-friendly products, we love that more and more people are making the switch to a zero-waste lifestyle. We are delighted that a rising number of modern consumers question where their products come from and the how they were sourced, produced, and distributed.

Organic beauty products, locally-grown produce, hand-crafted gifts, sustainable clothing brands, responsible tourism initiatives, and zero-waste stores: it's all music to our green ears!

But what we really *don't* like is greenwashing.

Greenwashing is where brands and companies tout themselves as being environmentally-friendly when in actual fact their policies or products are flawed.

Sustainability is huge right now and certain businesses know how to manipulate consumers by using buzzwords and jargon in their marketing campaigns.

It is easy to fall victim but this article will tell you how to spot and avoid greenwashing.

## How to spot fake eco-friendly products

In general, a truly sustainable company will be motivated by the following principles:

- **Transparency:** A truly authentic company is an open book. They will provide heaps of information about their products and manufacturing process via their website, blog and any social media channels.
- **Earth-friendly:** The whole package is as low waste as possible from the production of the product itself to the packaging it's shipped in.
- **Ethical business methods:** Seek a brand who put the products over profit, quality over quantity. You want to know that they're delivering fair wages to everyone in their supply chain. At the same time, workers should be treated fairly and not working relentless hours in order to sell more products.
- **Fair pricing:** An ethically-minded business will not inflate their costs to consumers. If a brand frequently lists deals, they've probably over-produced, overpriced, and now they're trying to incentivise consumers to make impulse purchases.

Let's go over these in more detail.

## Look for a brand story

If you want to spot the telltale sign of a greener than grass company, then take a close look at their background. Sustainable and eco-friendly companies are proud of their heritage and they love to share the tale behind their conception.

Scout around their website for specific details about where the products are sourced from. A genuine company will want to share

the journey of the product with you. That might be information about how they are tested and footage of the products being created.

## Plastic-free packaging

Authentic eco-friendly product companies see the whole picture and ensure that the whole journey of a product is kept green. Before you make an order, check that the company will dispatch their products in eco-friendly, plastic-free packaging that is recyclable or biodegradable. If they do use any materials that are neither, then a responsible company will highlight these on their website.

When your package arrives, make sure you do your bit and recycle or the packaging as directed. If there is no information made available about the packaging and how to dispose of it then contact the company to ask and provide feedback that they are responsible for providing this information.

It's a red flag if this isn't made crystal clear on the website and if the company is unable to provide a detailed response to your enquiry.

## Carbon-neutral shipping

Most eco-friendly brands do actually offer global shipping because they want to give everyone the opportunity to be more sustainable. But, there are methods that reduce the impact this has on the environment.

Carbon-neutral methods as offered by the likes of DHL and UPS and longer delivery terms are a good sign.

If a company pushes its overnight delivery or guarantees a delivery timeframe that sounds too good to be true then it's likely that they are not using the greenest methods.

## Charity partners

A responsible and ethical eco-friendly business is motivated by doing good for the planet in as many ways they can. One way to spot a genuine company is to see if they are aligned with a charity who they distribute a percentage of their earnings to.

This might be an environment foundation or a fund who support developing communities. Donating a fraction of their profit is optional, so it's a positive sign!

## Certification

When you spot such buzzwords as 'natural' and 'organic' it is worth digging a little deeper. Anyone can use these terms, but a legitimate company should also have certification to back them up.

This varies based on the type of product the company creates. For example, products may be Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved and certified by the world's largest independent laboratory group, Standard Global Services (SGS).

One of the most common certifications available to edible, beauty and clothing products is FairTrade. Meanwhile, cleaning products may be branded by the Environmental Protection Agency's Safer Choice. Sustainable hotels may be certified by EarthCheck, LEED, or B Corp.

Look out any logo on the company's website and then run a Google search on that particular certification.

However, it is worth noting that even companies who are truly authentic might not have a certification. A smaller brand that is only just getting started may not have sought certification yet due to the high prices attached. If a company isn't certified, don't assume they aren't legit. Scour of their website and consider the other elements shared here on how to spot and avoid greenwashing. A warm, passionate and informative brand story will speak volumes!

## **Questions to ask**

If you're shopping with the above considerations in mind but have any doubts about the ethics of an eco-friendly products business or service provider then you can always email them.

These are the types of question you might want to ask an eco-friendly business before you commit to making an order:

- Where are your products made? Ask for the specific region, not just the country. Especially if it's a developing country.
- Where are your materials sourced from? Again, you want the name of the region.
- Who makes your products? If the company is advertising handcrafted products - they should be able to tell you.
- How does your brand ensure the safety, treatment and fair pay of everyone employed in your business?

- What certifications do your products have?

## In conclusion

We hope these tips are helpful and give you the confidence to shop sustainably and avoid greenwashing.

There are some incredible zero-waste businesses out there at the moment who are doing great things to save our planet which makes it all the more important that you know how to weed out those guilty of greenwashing.

Our final note to end on is, please don't forget to review any wonderful and legit brands you discover. It helps other eco-minded consumers when they hear testimonials from genuine customers.