

How to Spot and Avoid Greenwashing

As an advocate of eco-friendly products, we love that more people are making the switch to a zero-waste lifestyle. We are equally delighted that a rising number of modern consumers question where their products come from and 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 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, on closer inspection, their policies or products are flawed.

Sustainability is integral to modern businesses but certain brands 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:** An authentic company is an open book. They will provide a wealth of information about their products and manufacturing process via their website, blog, and social media platforms.
- **Earth-friendly:** The whole package is as low waste as possible from the production of the product to the packaging it's shipped in.
- **Ethical business methods:** Sustainable brands prioritise products over profit, quality over quantity. They will deliver fair wages to everyone in their supply chain. At the same time, workers are treated fairly and not expected to work 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 and discounts then their products are likely over-produced and overpriced. Regular price-cuts only incentivises 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 detailed information about how they are tested and footage of the products being created.

Plastic-free packaging

Authentic eco-friendly product companies consider the wider picture and ensure that the whole journey of a product is kept green.

Before you place an order from an online shop, check that the company will dispatch their products in plastic-free packaging that is recyclable or biodegradable. If they use any materials that are neither, then a responsible company will highlight these on their website for full transparency.

When your item arrives, remember to your bit and recycle 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. They are responsible for providing this information and it should be made public.

It may be a red flag if the company is unable to provide a detailed response to your enquiry.

Carbon-neutral shipping

Although it might sound at odds with the nature of being Earth-friendly, most eco-friendly brands do offer global shipping. This is because they want to grant worldwide access to sustainable

products. But there are methods that reduce the impact this has on the environment.

Carbon-neutral shipping options 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 probable 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 to whom they distribute a percentage of their earnings.

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 and suggestive of an ethical brand.

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 will also have credentials that 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 for any logos listed 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 small 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, do not assume they aren't legit. Scour of their website and consider the other elements shared here on how to spot and avoid greenwashing.

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? Again, you want the name of the specific region.
- Who makes your products? If the company is advertising hand-crafted products they should be able to provide you with the name of an individual, workshop, or organisation.
- How does your brand ensure the safety, treatment, and fair pay of everyone employed in your business? Do they visit the workshops and warehouses in person to ensure fair treatment?
- What certifications do your products have? Or, what certifications do you intend to seek in the future?

In conclusion

We hope these tips are helpful and give you the confidence to shop sustainably and ask questions.

Authentic zero-waste businesses are doing great things to preserve our planet. This 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 do not forget to review any inspirational and legitimate brands you discover. It helps other eco-minded consumers when they hear testimonials from genuine customers.