Avoiding Greenwashing

The general advice is to be transparent, ensure you do not mislead or make exaggerated claims and do not omit facts in your claims.

Greenwashing

It is clear that any accusation of greenwashing is likely to severely damage an organisation's reputation. In order to avoid that it is crucial to be honest and transparent in any environmental claims made.

Claims

Any environmental claims must be clear and unambiguous, taking in to account the knowledgeability of the specific audience. Unqualified claims are deemed likely to mislead. Any standard referenced should be explained.

Claims made that cover only a section of an organisation's operations must not mislead the audience into believing the claim applies to the business' wider environmental impacts.

"Environmental claims which relate narrowly to specific products should make this clear, to ensure that they are not understood as being representative of the entire business."

Phrases such as 'sustainable' or 'environmentally friendly' must be supported by a high level of substantiation so are perhaps best avoided, as are vague aspirational claims.

Carbon neutral and net zero are not the same thing

Carbon neutral is a term used to describe the state of an entity (such as a company, service, product or event), where the carbon emissions caused by them have been balanced out by funding an equivalent amount of carbon savings elsewhere in the world

Carbon neutral It is often used interchangeably with net zero despite them being different – net zero means to reduce emissions to zero (for an organisation, country, city etc) following a trajectory over time. Carbon neutrality usually relies on offsets to make a claim now or in the near future.

- Net Zero – A long-term reduction in GHG emissions
- Carbon Neutrality - A state of balance between the CO_2 emitted into the atmosphere and the CO_2e removed from the atmosphere and stored

Action-led Not Marketing-led

Claims should be based on current activities, current emissions and data lead reduction pathways. Evidence and transparency is key, making it clear what is not included in the three scopes of emissions.

Aligning with Reputable Frameworks ensures you can be confident in the basis for any claims and it is recommended that all carbon emission calculations should be carried out according to the Greenhouse Gas Protocol Guidance and all Net Zero plans comply with the Science Based Targets Initiative guidance.

Evidence

- Produce your carbon footprint report with transparency of what is included and what is excluded. Publicise any plans to include further emission categories and by when that will be achieved.
- Any Net Zero target should be backed up with how you are going to achieve this and by what date. It should also be committed to by the organisation leadership and publicised.
- Is it aligned with the long-term science based methodology?
- Publish evidence of any carbon reduction claims made and detail how much and how it was achieved.
- Provide evidence that sustainability is embedded right through the business and is driven by the leadership.
- Communicate any challenges and issues you experience on the journey

