

Advertising can lead the charge on climate change. Here's how

By [Andrew MacKenzie](#)

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The climate crisis has been a dark cloud on the horizon for some time now, but 2019 is the year the world's political and business leaders at Davos officially put the issue at the top of their "worry list". And Prince William recently asked Sir David Attenborough the ultimate question: "Why has it taken so long for those in key positions of leadership... to act on environmental challenges?"



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The evidence of a climate crisis is all around us. And Prince William is right to point out that it's leaders who have a role to play. So, let's turn the question on ourselves: why are leaders in advertising taking so long to help brands resolve the climate crisis? We have immense potential to go beyond lip service and make a real difference. So why isn't advertising's stepping up to the plate?

People are wising up to greenwashing

Just look at the impact campaigns that have fought against stereotypes have made. As marketers and advertisers, we use culturally relevant insights daily and use them to create campaigns that make a difference, that moves people. That make headlines. If we apply the same skillset and passion to the climate crisis, we could replicate the impact the stereotype-fighting campaigns have.

Of course, many brands and agencies should be applauded for already trying to tackle the thorny issue of climate change. And many of us are taking steps to reduce our personal impact on the environment.

But people are wising up to greenwashing and often feel cynical when a brand starts shouting about its environmental creds. There's also a misconception that doing your bit means jumping on the environmental bandwagon or that brands investing in eco-campaigns are all talk and no action. And it's true, for every legitimate brand initiative, there's an empty one.



Guarding against greenwashing

31 May 2019



So we need to do more. But how?

Responsible advertising

Environmental economist Pavan Sukhdev in his book *Corporation 2020*, makes a compelling case for "responsible advertising": a traffic-light system that highlights how long a product will last, where its materials come from and whether it can be recycled.

Such an approach enables consumers to easily make purchasing decisions based on a brand's ethical creds, meaning market forces would push advertisers into cleaning up their supply chains and operations. That would create much more impact than using marketing to merely start or support a debate.

And for an industry that's so obsessed with reaching the fabled millennials and Gen Z, responsible advertising taps into their demand for brands with purpose. And if you need any more proof that the climate crisis is top of mind for younger generations, look no further than 16-year-old Greta Thunberg.



No age limit on inspiration. Celebrating the promise of our young leaders

Michael Hathorn, Ginkgo Agency 10 Jun 2019



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