



# Tilth Creative Collaborative + Green Dynamind's Ten Sequoia-Sized Myths of Green Marketing



1

## You should never, ever, ever use the word “green” in your name, tag line, PR or marketing materials.

There is nothing wrong with using the word “green”—*if you mean it*. Sure, it’s particularly ubiquitous these days and already attached to a multitude of businesses, products, ideas, publications, groups, etc., but it still connotes a space and position and way of thinking that resonates with the public. Co-op America changed its name to Green America, and it’s working out just fine for them. If you attend a Green Festival, you kind of know what to expect—and attendance, and spirits, are high. Don’t make your usage bandwagon-esque, tenuous, forced or misleading (let’s call this “fuzzy quasi-green”), resulting in reverse marketing that’ll bite you deservedly in the butt, whether you’re wearing green jeans or not.

2

## Don’t talk publicly about your own green victories, policies or practices—let someone else blow your horn of green goodness, lest you appear a pompous, self-righteous puffer.

If you believe this myth, you might be waiting a long time for notice to be taken—think about a brilliant new shoot sprouting in the forest and nobody around to hear or see it, comment on it, ring the bell, tell the neighbors, alert the media, etc. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with sharing your green goodness—*if it’s legitimate*. You think Starbucks and 3M are not going to talk about their latest green initiatives and the awe-inspiring (hopefully!) resultant qualitative and quantitative results?

3

## If you tout your greenness, you invite super-intensive scrutiny and withering calls of “Liar, liar! Get the greenwashers!”

Kind of related to myth #2 and equally fallacious. Scrutiny is good—*unless you’re not being open, transparent and honest*. And if that’s the case, well then, you *are* being a jellyfish-back-boned lying greenwasher. The examined life is the only life worth living, right? Figure out what you’re doing green, determine where you can improve practices and then share the results. Many companies fear sharing what they do that’s green because it doesn’t represent all their activities, and they’re going to get “found out” by drawing attention to themselves. So? Put a plan in place to improve those other practices—and *share that, too!*

4

## If you call something green, it is perceived as inferior—not to mention overpriced, inconvenient, overtly liberal, just for treehuggers and difficult to find.

Definitely a monolithic myth that needs some serious busting! Perceptions have shifted in this realm—thank the Green Goddess of Goodness!—as has the inferiority marketing complex along with it. *Why?* Enough green products, services and businesses are of very high quality, often of superior quality, and the populace, or at least an exponentially growing segment, gets this now—unless what you’re proffering is truly shoddy and shouldn’t be out there to begin with (a sorry page ripped right from the syllabus of *Bad Business Practices 101*). In that case, don’t give green a bad name—you’re gonna be called out and it ain’t gonna be pretty. As Joel Makower writes in *Strategies for the Green Economy*, “[T]here are encouraging signs that the consuming public is finally ready to vote with their pocketbooks, choosing greener products or products from companies perceived to be green leaders.” Spread the gospel of green goodness!

5

## Just marketing the green aspects of your product or service will turn enough heads to achieve major PAYDIRT!

Boy, if it were only so easy! Certainly while green is good, it shouldn’t be your first selling point (even when you’ve zeroed in on a viridian target market that lives sustainably in a compostable Emerald City—okay, well maybe in that case, or when going directly after the LOHAS savvy, you can make an exception). This isn’t residual bad chi from the sad legacy of myth #4 but, as Daniel Esty and Andrew Winston nail it in *Green to Gold*, “Selling a product on its environmental qualities alone is a recipe for trouble. If you have a new product that’s cleaner and greener, marketing these advantages can make sense. But be careful. Customers need other reasons to buy. Price, quality, and service will remain core concerns for most of them.” Nuff said here, I think.

5 more myths on next page >>





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### Green marketing efforts during times of economic turmoil fall on deaf ears.

Complete and utter balderdash. Green marketing helps promote money- and resource-saving solutions; it pushes efficiency and calls for less waste—and often less consumption, which makes even more economic common sense when times are tough. If ROI is a little down the road after initial investment, spell it clearly out—again I’m advocating being completely open, transparent and honest. Gaining trust, after all, is a key to achieving success.

7

### Traditional marketing and green marketing are pretty much synonymous.

Far from it. While they share many best practices, including strategies, tactics and methodologies, green marketing is more attuned to environmental issues, as they’re usually built into the product, service or business it is supporting. And you better look more than twice at printing and packaging options, your supply chain, where products will end up and what your attuned-to-the-times audience is expecting when it comes to your messaging, placement and ultimate followthrough. Sure, all consumers (and other businesses, you B2Bers out there) are persnickety, but if you’re operating in a green sector, you better walk the walk as well as talk the talk. See myth #3 for additional props on this point.

8

### Adding an eco prefix or mentioning “sustainability” gives you an instant eco-advantage in the sustainability space.

Okay, okay, I said “green” was just fine when shattering myth #1, but here—*what?!?!—I’m striking down “eco-” and “sustainability”?* Buzz words put you on the bandwagon but that shouldn’t be equated with credibility. You might momentarily capture someone’s interest (or a trawling search engine)—at least until they dig deeper or are just plain tired of everything being *eco-this* and *sustainable that*. And what exactly does sustainability mean these days? Everyone seems to be claiming, and clamoring for, primary stewardship of the term. *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* defines sustainable as “1. capable of being maintained 2. a) designating, of, or characterized by a practice that sustains a given condition, as economic growth or a human population, without depleting or destroying natural resources, polluting the environment, etc. [*sustainable agriculture*] b) governed or maintained by, or produced as a result of, such practices [*sustainable growth*].” Use these terms sparingly *and* definitely don’t expect an instant eco-advantage, a congratulatory call from Robert Redford, a shout out from Kermit (see myth #9), a cuddly hug from the World Wildlife Fund panda, etc.

9

### It’s entirely fine to use the phrase “It’s not easy being green” in your marketing materials or whenever the spirit of dear ol’ Kermit strikes you.

Google, Bing or Yahoo! the phrase and you’ll instantly realize *ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!* After punching in the phrase, I received more than 92 million hits on Google. Sorry Kermit pal, this pop culture badinage has run its course and is now situated so deep in platitudinous Clichéville that it has very little to absolutely no meaning. It’s now more an indicator of laziness or non-engagement on the part of the user. Work on coining your own phrase or slogan, or perhaps adopting an original mascot (ideally other than a frog or polar bear)—impactful visuals are equally important when it comes to green marketing. I was recently struck by the originality of “Patriotic Polly,” the “trumpeter of truth” spokesperson adopted in Ralph Nader’s utopian novel, *Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us*—clever, memorable and entirely on-target.

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### Green marketing is simply business; it’s all about driving sales, not saving our world.

Well, to the jaded and wholly avaricious, this may be the case, but for the rest of us, this is just NOT TRUE. Green marketing has the task, no, the responsibility, to share the stories, the challenges, the opportunities, the solutions and the victories of the multifarious businesses it supports. “Green (and sustainable) products are not just responsible,” writes John Grant in *The Green Marketing Manifesto*; “They are better: more durable, cheaper, nicer, healthier, more thoughtful, offering extensions into social communities, belonging to something.” Green marketing, then, is a prime opportunity to educate, inform and empower, while working in an increasingly critical space focused on doing the right thing and achieving a greater good before it’s too late. Are we talking triple bottom line here? *ABSOLUTELY!* People, planet, profit; equity, ecology, economy—however you want to slice it. Green marketing, in its own small way, can help save the world—by enabling ecologically sound decisions through pertinent information and education, and by getting more and more people to vote with their wallets on the kind of products, services and businesses they want to see thrive. So get on, or polish up, that green marketing plan—now’s the time to start blowing your own green horn.

