

AT A GLANCE:

Green vs. Greenwashed: A Reference For the Parking Industry

With the rise of consumer demand for environmentally (and socially conscious) products and services, companies promote the perception that an organization's products, goals, or policies are environmentally friendly. This may occur without a true commitment to environmentally sustainable practices.

"Green marketing" or "greenwashing" is defined as the practice of a company misleading consumers regarding its environmental practices or the environmental benefits of a product or service. It's what happens when a company or organization spends resources claiming to be "green" through advertising and marketing, as opposed to actually implementing business practices that minimize environmental impact.

Greenwashing happens in every market sector and the parking industry is no exception. Fortunately, many organizations in the industry are making a concerted and meaningful effort to green their practices. Here is a short guide to how to discern green from greenwashed.

Consumer Green Certifications: A Snapshot

Many certifications exist in the consumer sector to guide our decision-making. These are a few well-known brands that serve as a guidelines for purchases:

- ENERGY STAR
- GREENGUARD
- UL Environment
- EcoLogo



The Challenge of Greenwashing

There are plenty of good companies doing good work helping the environment and the triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit, but there are many that simply claim to be green in an effort to boost revenue and sales.

In a world of Web 2.0 and the Internet of Things, everyone has the ability to share and manipulate information online and help

shape public opinion. Customers have the ability to have a disruptive effect on businesses through user collaboration and global public forums. Social media and wiki-based platforms have provided a vehicle for the public to evaluate "green screens" and rate and comment in detail on the social and environmental practices of companies.

Thanks to the sheer amount of information available, it is a simple matter of research to obtain information on a business's true environmental impacts and commitment to sustainable practices, and many resources exist to help the public (and parking professionals) do just that.



"Sales of environmentally friendly products in the U.S. exceeded \$40 billion last year, according to data from various market tracking services and *Advertising Age* estimates. This includes \$29.2 billion for organic food; more than \$10 billion for hybrid, electric and clean-diesel vehicles; more than \$2 billion on energy-efficient light bulbs; and \$640 million on green cleaning products."

Read more: [Greenwashing](#)

"The tools used in greenwashing can include press releases about green projects or task forces put into place, energy reduction or pollution reduction efforts, and rebranding of consumer products and advertising materials. In actuality, the company or group may be operating in damaging ways or may simply be unwilling to make a meaningful commitment to green initiatives."

Read more: [Greenwashing Definition](#) | [Investopedia](#)

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Tools and Resources for the Parking Professional

As sustainability and green practices become more mainstream and consumers become more informed contributors in internet marketing, companies need to make sure that they are truly 'meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

Parking and transportation solutions must consider the balance between economic feasibility, public health and welfare, and environmental impacts. Here are a few of the programs and resources to assist parking professionals and increase sustainability awareness:

- The IPI Sustainability Framework, a conceptual document that outlines the organization's approach to sustainability for our industry as well as our primary goals and programs.
- Parksmart, a third-party sustainability rating system for parking structures administered by GBCI, the the United States Green Building Council's certification arm.
- Green Star Exhibitor, IPI's program to showcase companies in the parking industry that have made a commitment to sustainability.
- LEEP (Lighting Energy Efficiency in Parking), a recognition and guidance program for facility owners and managers to take advantage of savings opportunities from high efficiency lighting solutions in parking facilities.

Tips and Considerations

- 1. Find resources.** Addressing sustainability as a whole at the organizational level can be a daunting. Connect with internal sustainability resources (if available), specifically any relevant department or sustainability professionals. Use the industry-specific tools and resources listed above as a foundation for decision-making.
- 2. Claim a seat at the table.** Ask to be involved in sustainability planning and outreach activities. Find relevant ways to include your operation and staff in meaningful ways that relate to your work and areas of expertise. The best way to avoid greenwashing in your organization is to be educated about decisions that affect sustainability and have a say in those decisions.
- 3. Plan Ahead.** Include sustainability objectives and benchmarks in your procurement and planning processes. By building these into your strategic and capital planning, they will stay top of mind.
- 4. But make decisions one step at a time, one buying decision at a time.** When planning an improvement or selecting a contractor or supplier, determine how to involve sustainability goals and performance indicators into that decision or contract. Review your procurement process and requests for information and proposals to ensure that your long-term goals are reflected and that products and services will be evaluated across the board according to objective standards.
- 5. Ask for referrals.** When embarking on any major purchase, ask to speak with current clients to get the real deal. Get on the phone and get specific with your questions, and don't assume a testimonial is enough.
- 6. Get by with a little help from your parking and transportation friends.** The IPI network is a powerful tool at your disposal. Connect with the IPI community through our LinkedIn group, the CAPP community, and IPI staff. Call on that community to share what they know about products and services, from customer service to performance goals to sustainability.



"The drive behind sustainability is evident at many top private firms.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management, in their Sustainability Initiative, has measured sustainability innovation by interviewing global executives for the past three years. Their most recent study, released in 2011, found that:

- 68% of respondents say their organizations increased their commitment to sustainability in the past year.
- 67% say that sustainability strategies are necessary to be competitive.
- Sustainability is increasingly important to top management, survey respondents say: 28% believe it's a permanent and core strategic consideration, and 42% say that although it's not a core consideration, it is nonetheless on the agenda to stay."

[Read more](#)

For more information, in IPI's online Resource Center at parking.org.