

flotilla

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GREEN FAQs:
CONFIDENT
CLIMATE COMMS

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Introduction

Talking about your organisation's climate commitments should be easy, but there's a **minefield of risks and challenges** to navigate in this noisy and often misleading landscape.

You may mean well by going public with your environmental responsibility initiatives, but **one false word could draw endless criticism**.

If our net zero journey so far has taught us one thing, it's that **fear of saying the wrong thing shouldn't hold you back from celebrating your carbon reduction progress**. This FAQ guide is here to bust the jargon and help you cut to the core of your climate action, every time you communicate it.

Read on to discover twenty of the most common questions the GOLD79 and Flotilla teams receive from clients who aren't sure how to communicate their climate action correctly.

Quick Glossary

Net zero	A science-based emissions reduction goal.
GHGs	Greenhouse gases.
tCO₂e	A measurement of emissions in tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.
Scopes 1, 2 and 3	The three types of carbon emissions measured on a net zero journey – these are direct, indirect, and originate in the value chain.
Greenwashing	Marketing that portrays a company or its products as more environmentally sustainable than they are.
Greenhushing	A deliberate decision made by companies to stay silent about their environmental policies or actions.
Greenlighting	A type of greenwashing that sees businesses emphasise the 'green' nature of a certain product to take attention away from other less sustainable aspects of their business.
Greenshifting	A practice that sees businesses shift environmental responsibility onto customers by giving them the option to choose a 'greener' product.
Greencrowding	A type of greenhushing that sees businesses avoid scrutiny for their climate policies by joining alliances that benefit their image.
Greenrinsing	A type of greenwashing that sees businesses alter their emissions goals to avoid admitting that they have not met them.

Carbon reduction explained

You've decided to make a conscious effort to reduce your business's carbon emissions. Now you just need to untangle all the rhetoric around this valuable but complex mission, which is easier said than done.

When you look at your first carbon report, you might be overwhelmed by all the new vocabulary, but it doesn't need to be that difficult. With the following questions answered, you'll be off to a great start.



1. WHAT DOES NET ZERO MEAN?

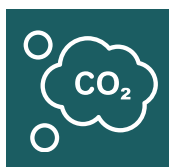
Net zero is a target set by businesses and nations to **bring their greenhouse gas emissions as close to zero as possible**. This scientifically informed greenhouse gas emissions reduction goal can be pursued by players big and small, but must be guided by the following principles:

- The organisation must **measure emissions across their entire value chain**.
- The organisation must focus on **rapid, deep emissions cuts** – ideally halving emissions by 2030.
- The organisation must remove remaining, unpreventable emissions from the atmosphere via **carbon removal solutions**.

Net zero commitments by private players help to contribute to the United Nations' goal of reducing global temperature rises to 1.5°C.

2. WHAT ARE GHGS?

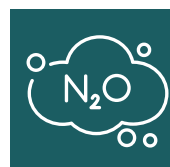
GHG stands for **greenhouse gas**. These are gases that rise into the Earth's atmosphere, where they trap heat from the sun inside the ozone layer, causing atmospheric temperatures to rise. There are seven main GHGs:



Carbon dioxide



Methane



Nitrous oxide



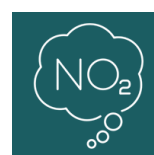
Hydrofluorocarbons



Perfluorocarbons



Sulphur hexafluoride



Nitrogen trifluoride

3. WHAT DOES tCO₂e MEAN?

tCO₂e is short for **tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent** and is a measurement that converts all greenhouse gases into their CO₂-equivalent impact for simple comparison and reporting purposes. As different business activities produce different amounts of different GHGs, tCO₂e helps businesses to compare and contrast each activity's impact against each other, and prioritise which they should address first.



For context, 150 tCO₂e is the equivalent of driving around the world 21 times in an average-sized petrol car or 43 return flights between the UK and Hong Kong.

4. WHAT ARE SCOPES 1, 2 AND 3?

To meaningfully reduce emissions, we need to understand and measure where they are sourced from in the first place.

Carbon footprint measurements are commonly categorised into three scopes, making them easier to quantify and address.

SCOPE 1

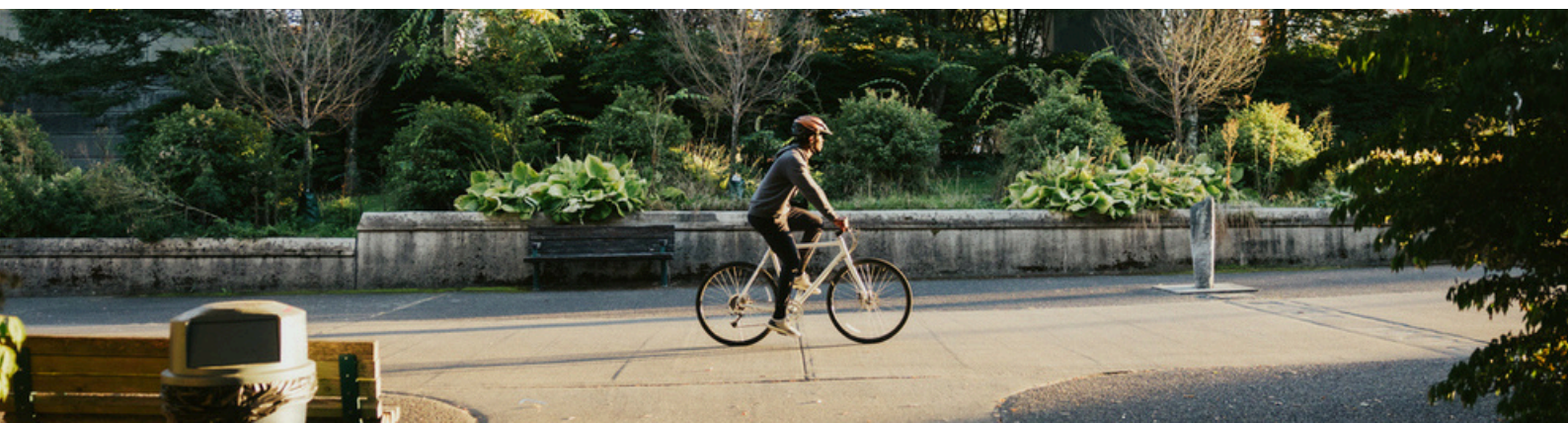
describes direct emissions from sources that are owned or controlled by a company. Example: Company cars, if they are not electrically powered.

SCOPE 2

refers to indirect emissions that a company causes, because of its operations. Example: energy purchased from the national grid which is used in work premises.

SCOPE 3

encompasses emissions that are not produced by the company itself, but they are responsible for up and down its value chain. These often account for most an organisation's carbon emissions thanks to their broad range. Examples: office supplies and staff travel.



Understanding and preventing greenwashing

Your journey to lower emissions is an exciting opportunity to present your business in the best light – but it's important **not to run before you can walk**.

Some businesses fall into the trap of rushing to talk about their climate action before they've produced tangible results, or before they understand the meaning of their claims. This can result in greenwashing.

The first step to avoiding this risky practice is to understand it.

5. WHAT IS GREENWASHING?

Greenwashing is a term that describes **misleading or deceptive marketing portraying a company, or its products and services as more environmentally sustainable than they are**.

This can be committed either deliberately or with good intentions and can take many forms.

Companies that greenwash with a full understanding that they are not being fully transparent often aim to **capitalise on the growing demand for eco-conscious products and services**, without doing the due diligence to back up their claims.

Greenwashing can also occur unintentionally, when a company is pursuing **genuine emissions reduction efforts, but hasn't adequately educated their marketing, PR and comms team** about the correct language to use and the appropriate claims to make.



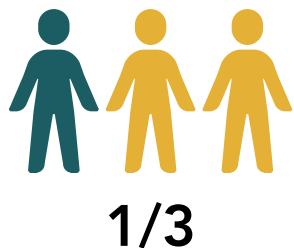
6. WHY DO BRANDS ENGAGE IN GREENWASHING?

Many brands engage in greenwashing **to appeal to environmentally conscious consumers**. While there's no harm in this at face value, it can catch out those who don't do their due diligence to prove their claims.

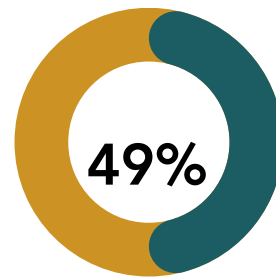
Other brands may inadvertently engage in greenwashing because they want to showcase the real environmental efforts they're taking before they have sufficient evidence to show their impacts.

7. DO CONSUMERS CARE ABOUT GREENWASHING?

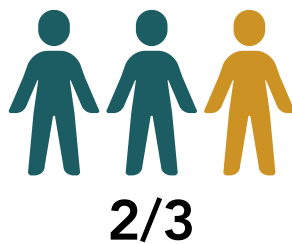
According to our search data, **collected from Google Trends, greenwashing searches have increased by 518% between 2019 and 2024**, suggesting public curiosity is growing.



of global consumers now willing to pay 25% more for sustainability



Only 49% of consumers trust brands claiming sustainability and ethics.



Over two-thirds of Gen Z ready to pay 10% extra for sustainability.

8. WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON GREENWASHING CLAIMS?

Greenwashing claims can vary, but some of the most common use vague terminology like **'green', 'natural', and 'eco-friendly'**, along with green or neutral colour schemes to create an illusion of sustainability without making substantial changes to their practices.

Once you know the common language choices of brands that are not making a real difference, greenwashing becomes easy to spot.

9. WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF GREENWASHING?

Greenwashing carries many business risks. With consumers becoming increasingly educated about green issues, and the meanings behind environmental claims, the dangers are well publicised.

Reputational damage

In a world dominated by digital discourse, negative news spreads much faster than positive news, especially when it comes to social media and online press outlets. In addition to the speed of dissemination, this content has a much longer lifespan than, for example, print or broadcast media. The interactive nature of online accusations of greenwashing also means the information often achieves a much higher level of reach and engagement, transforming it from an isolated incident into a brand crisis in a matter of hours.

Business losses

A decline in consumer trust is a knock-on effect of reputational damage and can result in decreased sales, loss of market share, and long-term damage to your business's bottom line. When stakeholders and investors learn that you're greenwashing, they may also look to take their loyalty elsewhere, losing you contracts, clients and capital.

The multiplication of mistrust

Greenwashing by a single brand can undermine the genuine efforts of others as it can increase consumer mistrust in their entire industry. Many consumers are already sceptical of 'green' claims after witnessing high-profile cases of greenwashing in the headlines and no longer take brands' words at face value. In fact, [seven out of 10](#) British consumers don't consider environmental claims by businesses to be credible. This can cause them to abandon their own commitments to choosing environmentally friendly products, diluting the impact of real eco-friendly business practices. In consumers' eyes, if a brand can mislead about its environmental commitments, it could be misleading about other factors such as product quality, supply chain ethics, and pricing.

Legal and regulatory consequences

As incidents of greenwashing become more common, national and international policymakers are responding to calls for regulation and monitoring. While there is currently no legal definition for greenwashing in the UK, the [Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 \(CPRs\)](#) governs environmental claims made to consumers. The [Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008 \(BPRs\)](#) is also in place to direct business-to-business (B2B) communications. Depending on where you are operating and the mistakes you make, operating against regulation can result in steep fines and legal prosecution. View the [Green Claims Code](#) and [ASA guidance](#) for sound advice on how to speak legitimately about your business's green policies and actions

10. WHICH INDUSTRIES ARE WORST FOR GREENWASHING

While there is no definitive data on the extent of greenwashing across all industries, according to data collected by [Kantar](#) on consumer perceptions of greenwashing, the worst industries are:

Greenwashing Top 5	%	Greenwashing Bottom 5	%
Social media	60%	In-home entertainment	48%
Meat or meat products	58%	Coffee, tea	47%
Clothing, footwear	57%	Beer, wine, alcoholic beverages	46%
Motor vehicles	57%	Baby hygiene products	46%
Super/hypermarkets	56%	Pet food	42%

11. HOW COMMON IS GREENWASHING?

Unfortunately, greenwashing is becoming increasingly common.

According to a report by [RepRisk](#), **54% of companies in Asia, Europe and North America greenwashed their records on greenhouse gas emissions, global pollution and other climate change-related issues between 2022 and 2023.**

A report by [NAVEX Global](#) also found that **only 17% of businesses were completely confident that those they partner with or outsource to operate ethically and sustainably.**



Understanding and avoiding greenhushing

While greenwashing has seen a steady rise in precedence over the past few years, many brands are now becoming increasingly wary of the risks an accusation can create for their business.

Enter: greenhushing – an equally risky move that sees brands hiding their environmental efforts (or lack of) for fear of scrutiny.



12. WHAT IS GREENHUSHING?

Greenhushing describes a phenomenon that sees companies hide their sustainability status. It involves **intentionally not talking about any initiatives or credentials the business has received with regards to climate responsibility**, and not going public with any progress to improve emissions.

Greenhushing is usually motivated by a **fear of being accused of greenwashing**, and a lack of confidence and understanding around climate claims. 35% of marketers surveyed by [Kantar](#) in 2023 cited a lack of allocated internal resources as a challenge in marketing sustainability claims, with the same number citing a knowledge and skills gap on sustainability as a concern. Some brands get around these concerns by not talking about their sustainability goals at all.

Many businesses are making genuine positive steps forward with their climate action, but refusing to disclose information about it to their customers, employees and stakeholders for fear of criticism. This means **the brand value of their net zero journey** is incredibly limited. Others are using greenhushing as a means to conceal the fact that they aren't taking environmental responsibility at all.

13. WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF GREENHUSHING?

Like greenwashing, greenhushing comes with a whole host of business risks.

These include:

FAILURE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT

According to 2023 data collected by our net zero partner, Flotilla, 72% of employees want to work for an organisation that focuses on reducing its carbon footprint. Businesses that don't put their progress towards sustainability front and centre risk missing out on the best the talent pool has to offer.

FALLING BEHIND ON METRICS

Sharing ambitions externally can be a key driver in ensuring they're made a reality. Businesses that hold back this information run the risk of falling behind on their carbon reduction metrics. Staying quiet can make it harder to reach your climate goals.

LOSING OUT TO COMPETITORS

Companies that put robust plans in place today and communicate them clearly are likely to gain a competitive edge. Customers are becoming increasingly climate-conscious – some are willing to pay a 12% premium for sustainable products. If you're not vocal about your net zero journey today, customers may leave you for your more transparent competitor tomorrow.

FAILING TO FUTUREPROOF YOUR INDUSTRY

Sharing our organisations' environmental plans and ambitions helps entire industries to benchmark, share best practices, and inspire others. Those who don't participate will pay the price of failing to future-proof their business.

14. HOW COMMON IS GREENHUSHING?

A recent study found that **over two-thirds of marketing and PR professionals have said the brands they represent are staying quiet about their sustainability progress.** Over half (58%) of companies are intentionally decreasing their climate communications.

According to search data, **greenhushing searches increased by 100% in the past quarter.** This suggests that while greenwashing has already become a widely understood and discussed issue, greenhushing is only just making its way into the consumer consciousness.

15. DO CONSUMERS CARE ABOUT GREENHUSHING?

Greenhushing is on consumers' radars. As well as the previously mentioned spike in searches, secondary data shows that 86% of UK adults want to see more transparency from businesses on their environmental impacts, initiatives and targets.

Greenhushing makes making climate-positive purchasing decisions just as difficult as greenwashing, creating a confusing landscape for consumers to navigate.



Talking about your net zero journey

Now you know what not to do, you're ready to start talking about your business' climate action in a way that is meaningful, genuine, and scientifically informed.

16. HOW CAN I AVOID GREENWASHING AND GREENHUSHING?

One of the most frequently asked questions surrounds where to start. Here are GOLD79's six simple steps to keep your climate communications clear and confident.

1. KNOW YOUR VALUE DRIVER(S) / PURPOSE



2. INVOLVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE



3. UNDERSTAND START POINT & GOAL



4. PLAN YOUR JOURNEY



5. TRACK & REPORT PROGRESS: TIME SPECIFIC KPIS



6. SHARE DON'T TELL



1. KNOW YOUR VALUE DRIVER(S) / PURPOSE



Your journey should always start with a clear view of who you want to influence - your primary audience(s) - and why? Pinpoint the benefits to them, and your business, of your sustainability programme. Explore the differences between what they want to hear and what you have to say to find a happy medium.

2. INVOLVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE

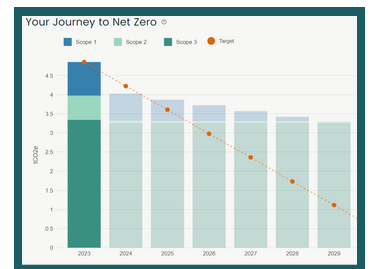


Not involving the right people is a common mistake, and whilst expert advice is essential, your climate mission should never be the domain of siloed specialists. Collaboration is key. Across all departments and especially at board level. Ensuring everyone has the intel, vocabulary, and confidence to talk authentically about your journey.

3. UNDERSTAND START POINT & GOAL



Work with experts to produce a Year One Carbon Accounting Report. Having this from day one gives you a clear starting point and specific metrics for improvement. It also allows you to set realistic carbon reduction goals through scientific data analysis, using technology like Flotilla's, seen here.



4. PLAN YOUR JOURNEY



Build a data-led plan with specific actions, owners and timeframes. Align steps to stakeholder values and what matters to them. Always be aware of what legislation affects your business and give thought as to the foundations on which your plan is built. For many businesses there are four:

- People-driven.
- Tech-fuelled and tracked.
- Commercially aligned and achievable.
- Brand-true, transparent behaviour.

5. TRACK & REPORT PROGRESS: TIME SPECIFIC KPIS



Be honest and transparent when reporting on your progress. This means not just revealing your big wins, but being candid about the challenges you face, too. Setting specific time KPIs and making them publicly visible can be daunting, but it shows consumers and stakeholders that you are serious about making measurable progress.

6. SHARE DON'T TELL



Evidence shows that brands which at the outset make big announcements and claims, before being able to evidence specific reductions or change, often have a more difficult journey. An organic and constant narrative which shares progress along the way is where companies win. It also breeds confidence and belief for those involved. But whenever is deemed the right time, the way in which your story is told is key. Work with climate comms experts and be mindful of the following:

- Choose channels carefully and don't combine climate messaging with commercially driven content.
- If you don't have something meaningful to say – don't say it – even if it is World Environmental Day.
- Review your existing content for contradiction – don't retract but reframe. Be honest with any challenges.
- Choice of language is key. Balancing audience understanding versus cynicism is essential.



Keeping on top of new 'green' terms

The world of climate communications and marketing is constantly changing. As legislation is made and adapted to suit new challenges, and consumers become increasingly tuned in to climate issues, new terms are popping up to describe the evolving risks and responsibilities brands face.

Let's take a closer look at a few lesser-known 'green' terms that are making an appearance in the headlines.

17. WHAT IS GREENLIGHTING?

Greenlighting refers to a particular type of greenwashing that sees a brand **spotlight a particular 'green' feature of a product or area of its business operations** to draw attention away from other, potentially environmentally detrimental activities.

This has also been described as environmental cherry-picking – where a business chooses to **highlight the positive environmental aspects of a product or service while ignoring its overall negative impact**. For example, a fast-food chain might promote its use of biodegradable packaging while overlooking the larger issues of deforestation, unsustainable farming practices, and carbon emissions associated with its wider operations.

18. WHAT IS GREENSHIFTING?

Greenshifting is a term used to describe businesses **shifting environmental responsibility off themselves, and onto the consumer** or other stakeholders to dodge blame for questionable environmental practices.

Placing the onus on individuals to drive change **can lead consumers to scrutinise businesses less, and worry about their personal day-to-day choices more.** Strong examples of greenshifting can be found in the energy sector, such as when fossil fuel companies offer a small number of higher-priced renewable tariffs, and tell consumers it is their decision whether to go renewable or not.

19. WHAT IS GREENCROWDING?

Greencrowding is a type of greenhushing that sees businesses do the opposite of what marketing, comms and content usually aim to achieve – **stay hidden in the crowd.**

Tactics associated with greencrowding include **joining alliances or awareness-raising groups and using their logos on product packaging and other branded content to appear 'green'** despite membership not actually translating into action.

A certain alliance or industry group may boast impressive results when it comes to plastic recycling or carbon reduction, but this is often led by the contributions of a few proactive members. Others in the group can benefit from these stats but do very little to contribute. In this sense, they are **part of the 'green crowd', but not necessarily an environmentally responsible business.**



20. WHAT IS GREENRINSING?

Green rinsing is a softer version of greenwashing. This trend sees **businesses altering their environmental goals and KPIs to avoid admitting that they haven't met them.** As a result, they never have to be fully transparent about their journey, but instead appear to still be making positive progress all the time.



In a world fraught with risks and challenges surrounding climate communications, it's vital to embrace transparent and authentic messaging. While today's environmental landscape is cluttered with misleading information, brands that get it right stand to reap the benefit of becoming a leader in their industry.

By cutting through the jargon and fostering clear, meaningful dialogue about your climate action, you not only enhance your brand's credibility but also contribute to the collective effort of combatting climate change.

As you embark on your net zero journey, remember that fear of miscommunication should not overshadow the celebration of your carbon reduction progress. Stay committed, stay transparent, and let your actions speak volumes as you work towards a sustainable future.

Resources you can trust

Confident communication starts with having the stats and expertise to back yourself up. Refer to these trusted sources when crafting your climate comms.

- [United Nations Net Zero Coalition](#)
- [UK Government Net Zero Strategy](#)
- [World Resources Institute – Net Zero Emissions Q&A](#)
- [British Business Bank – A Net Zero Introduction For Small Businesses](#)
- [The Together For Our Planet Campaign](#)
- [Carbon Trust – A Guide to Net Zero For Businesses](#)
- [Flotilla's Intelligence Section](#)

To learn how to optimise your messaging and communicate your climate comms with confidence, speak with [GOLD79](#).

To support your transition to Net Zero, utilising intuitive technology and expert advice, please contact [Flotilla](#).