

Greenhushing & Greenwashing Guide

Communicate sustainability with credibility and measurable financial return



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In today's market, even the smallest businesses are under scrutiny. Sustainability is about staying profitable while reducing environmental impact, respecting people's rights, and running your business responsibly.

Two communication mistakes are costing businesses like yours significant revenue:

1) Greenwashing

- What it is : Making sustainability claims that are exaggerated, unclear, or unsubstantiated.
- Business impact: Can trigger legal penalties, damage brand trust, cause loss of contracts, and permanently harm reputation. Buyers increasingly reject suppliers who cannot verify claims.

2) Greenhushing

- What it is : Withholding or downplaying legitimate sustainability achievements.
- Business impact: Missed sales opportunities, reduced competitiveness and loss of visibility in markets where sustainability proof is a purchasing requirement.

Both issues reduce profit potential and market access. In regulated industries or global supply chains, they can also lead to exclusion from preferred supplier lists, **directly cutting off revenue streams**.

Quick Rules: Do/Avoid

General

- Speak honestly about your biggest impacts first, not just the easiest wins
 - Link every claim to measurable facts (numbers, dates, quantities)
 - Use wording backed by verifiable evidence
- Avoid vague terms like “eco-friendly” or “responsible” without proof
- Don’t highlight small improvements while ignoring major sustainability challenges

Environmental claims

- Identify your main footprint (energy, waste, materials, freight, water)
 - Show before-and-after results (“cut freight emissions by 40%”)
 - Name the source of your data or certification
- Don’t make comparisons without verifiable proof
- Don’t display eco-labels or certifications without authorisation

Social responsibility

- Be specific about wages, hours, safety, inclusion, training
 - Mention recognised standards (ILO, UN Guiding Principles) if you follow them
- Don’t claim “ethical” without showing how it’s measured and enforced

Governance

- Show how you track improvements and keep suppliers accountable
 - Publish key sustainability policies
- Don’t hide setbacks, instead explain what’s being done to improve them.

Real-World Examples with Business Gains

Pottery & Ceramics Studio (Sweden) – 2 Employees

Main risk: kiln energy use

Other impacts: glaze waste, packaging, water for cleaning

A small ceramic studio in a Swedish town sells locally and online. Kiln firing is highly energy-intensive, and their old electric kiln consumed excessive power.

Actions taken:

- Switched to a high-efficiency kiln
- Powered it with 100% certified renewable electricity
- Optimised firing schedules to achieve >85% kiln capacity per batch
- Publicly reported annual energy use and reduction targets
- Reclaimed over 90% of unfired clay scraps

Results:

- 18% annual electricity cost reduction → improved profit margin
- 6 additional production days/year through faster firing cycles
- Secured a new retail contract after meeting buyer sustainability criteria

Good claim:

“We fire all ceramics in an energy-efficient kiln powered by certified Swedish hydroelectricity, reclaim 90% of clay scraps, and keep kiln load efficiency above 85%.”

Bad claim:

“We’re a green pottery studio” - vague and unsupported.

Real-World Examples with Business Gains

Online Photography Courses (Canada) - 1 Employee

Main risk: data centre energy use for video hosting

Other impacts: device replacement, student-side energy consumption

A solo entrepreneur delivers global online photography courses. The high-definition videos required substantial hosting and streaming resources.

Actions taken:

- Migrated to a renewable-powered hosting provider
- Compressed all videos to reduce file size by 40% without quality loss
- Offered low-data versions for students in areas with slower internet
- Extended laptop replacement cycle from 3 years to 6 years

Results:

- Lower hosting costs thanks to lower storage volume and bandwidth use (with providers that charge per gigabyte and data transfer)
- 15% increase in enrolments from students in low-bandwidth areas
- €1,200 saved on delayed hardware replacement

Good claim:

“We cut the data footprint of our courses by 40% and host all content on renewable-powered servers.”

Bad claim:

“Our courses are zero-impact” - misleading without accounting for hosting emissions.

Real-World Examples with Business Gains

Organic Silk Workshop (Madagascar) – 5 Employees

Main risk: air freight + dye runoff

Other impacts: fuel use, packaging, and risks related to working conditions (insufficient wages, lack of safety measures, and inadequate protections)

A rural silk workshop exports garments to Europe and Japan. Air freight and traditional dyeing created a significant footprint.

Actions taken:

- Shifted 70% of exports from air to sea freight
- Installed natural dye wastewater filtration
- Began using plant-based dyes sourced locally
- Published transparent information on employee wages and working conditions, in order to meet the social requirements of international buyers

Results:

- 25% shipping cost reduction from sea freight
- Kept a major export order by showing proof of clean wastewater management to the buyer
- 20% increase in online sales from marketing natural dye process

Good claim:

“70% of our exports now travel by sea instead of air, and all dye water is filtered naturally before release.”

Bad claim:

“Eco-silk” - misleading unless supported by full process transparency.

Self-Check before you publish

- Have I clearly addressed my biggest impacts?
- Can I prove each claim with data?
- Can the evidence for my statements be traced and verified by a third party (such as Sahio Consulting, for example)?
- Am I omitting achievements that could strengthen my market position?

Why getting this right boosts your bottom line

- Increases sales by providing the proof buyers and consumers demand
- Protects contracts: compliant claims prevent supplier rejection
- Cuts costs by aligning sustainability with operational efficiency
- Saves time by reducing repeated proof requests
- Opens markets where sustainability compliance is mandatory

How Sahio Consulting Can Help

This guide provides the fundamentals. To fully protect and strengthen your brand communications, we offer two professional services that ensure your sustainability claims are both compliant and commercially effective.

1) Greenwashing Check - from €750 depending on business size and scope (VAT included)

What's included: [Click here for full information PDF](#)

2) Sustainability PR & Communications

Available only to clients who have:

- Completed a Greenwashing Check, and
- Done an Audit, Greenwashing Check, or consulting project, so all communication is based on verified information.

What's included:

- Creation of compliant, evidence-based sustainability messaging
- Strategies to increase buyer trust, improve conversion rates, and strengthen competitive positioning

Limited Availability

As a small company, we are dedicated to providing personalised service. Therefore, to maintain quality, each service (apart from our full guides and our pro bono work for animal shelters and rescue sanctuaries) will have less than five openings per month, on a first-come, first-served basis.

Contact us

Was this guide helpful, even a little?

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In the meantime, if you have any questions about our services or would like to discuss a potential partnership, don't hesitate to reach out at:

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We wish you a fantastic day or evening!

The Sahio Consulting Team

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