

## Full text of the article:

### ***Some uninvited visitors joined the cream of adland's creatives at Campaign's Big Awards in November.***

Those of you in attendance would not have missed the small group assembled outside Leicester Square's The Londoner and may, like me, have had a mocked-up £10 note – referring to “10 years to climate catastrophe” – thrust into their hands.

These protestors from the climate action group Extinction Rebellion had been expected. They had pulled the same stunt a few weeks earlier at the awards ceremony for Campaign's sister title PRWeek and had said that the Big Awards was next on their hit list.

I got my fake bill from a softly spoken man who muttered something unintelligible to me and I went in none the wiser about their particular beef but the next day a press release spelled it out in exacting terms.

The group was, it said: “Highlighting the ghastly greenwashing activities of advertising companies who sell fossil fuel companies as ‘green’ while often trying to hide their work devising marketing strategies for some of the world's worst polluters and their funders.”

The release stated WPP had “won” the “Charred Earth Enabler of the Year” for the “sheer scale of their work for the worst polluters globally”.

No punches were pulled and agencies were also called out for “ridiculous, disingenuous boasts” about making their offices carbon neutral while “ignoring the enormous emissions of their clients”. Asked for a response to its award from XR, WPP said it was “committed to supporting the transition to a low carbon future” and articulated a position commonly heard from adland leaders: “Energy companies have an important role to play in the transition, which is why our work for our clients increasingly supports them to embed sustainability into their marketing.”

It is simplistic to dismiss all campaigns that high-carbon brands do in the sustainability arena as greenwashing. However, if their environmental work represents just a fraction of their entire businesses, then charges of greenwashing have some grounds.

In the wake of COP26 and the feelings of disappointment and anger that the climate emergency was still not being treated as such by world leaders, I'm not sure how long the arguments about helping these brands make a change will hold water with consumers and agencies' own talent.

On the latter point, the 7stars founder Jenny Biggam recently revealed the agency had quietly turned down a brand that was judged to be guilty of “environmental harm” by her team. As the years go on and Gen Z – said to be the age group most concerned about climate change – becomes a bigger presence in the workforce, these demands are only going to increase.

There will also be new categories pulled into the “unacceptable” category to deal with; just recently Alex Bogusky, of Crispin Porter & Bogusky fame, teamed up with Greenpeace Denmark for a report condemning the meat industry and calling for it to be regulated like “tobacco, junk food and alcohol” because of its environmental impact.

Thankfully, adland appears to be taking this issue seriously; some 60% of agencies said that in the future they will walk away from new business if a client, media partner or production company is not doing enough to work in an environmentally-friendly way, according to a Campaign survey.

While the threat of Covid still stubbornly lingers on, this time now in the form of the new Omicron variant, the climate crisis remains the biggest disruption to life as we know it.

If you're in the business of making new year's resolutions, then straining every sinew to ensure your work and personal lives change to recognise this has to be top of the list for 2022.

Gemma Charles is deputy editor of Campaign