

Extinction Rebellion target PR Week Awards with Creative Protest to Highlight the Support PR Firms give to Climate Destruction

6.30pm, 20 October 2021, London

Extinction Rebellion this evening targeted the 2021 PR Week Awards held at Park Lane's Marriot Grosvenor House hotel. The group were highlighting the ghastly greenwashing activities of PR companies who try to hide their work devising communication strategies for some of the world's worst polluters and their funders.

The group of activists, many in black tie, hosted their own red-carpet 'Charred Earth PR Awards' ceremony outside the venue, complete with their own baroque ensemble and glasses of 'crude oil' in champagne flutes, and awarded the "Charred Earth Enabler of the Year" award to holding company WPP for the sheer scale of their work for the worst polluters globally.

The campaigners also highlighted the ridiculous, disingenuous boasts of PR companies to be aiming for carbon neutrality in their own offices, while ignoring the enormous emissions of their clients, sales of whose filthy products they are trying to increase (see Notes to Editors).

The PR Week Awards celebrated greenwashing projects amongst their nominees such as 'Easyjet Charity Fundraising'ⁱ; 'Ford Protecting Cyclists'ⁱⁱ and 'Standard Chartered Net Zero'ⁱⁱⁱ, while making no mention of the massive contracts with oil majors, transport giants, investment banks and meat producers, which agencies try to hide, even from many of their own staff. This is in part because PR giant Edelman's own report in Sept 2021 found that up to 60% of staff would leave an 'unethical' firm^{iv}. Despite this finding, Edelman has billed more than a third of a billion dollars for its work on fossil fuels and continues this work to this day. These enormous contracts, delaying, obfuscating and confusing the narrative on the climate and ecological emergency (CEE), are generally hidden by the firms. As a result of the subterfuge, investigators needed techniques such as analysing website coding errors to determine the agencies responsible for the even dirtier work, such as Edelman's work with Exxon^v.

XR member Ian McDermott, a former PR and now science teacher, commented: "10 years ago in PR you would occasionally see a colleague poached for a massive salary to go and PR for the tobacco industry. PR contracts with fossil fuel companies, climate-destroying banks and the beef industry are today's unacceptable face of communications, and teams working on them are often put in silos within agencies to avoid demotivating colleagues working on less toxic brands. Agencies should be refusing this work altogether and putting their creative skills to work on the right side of history."

The protest was informed in part by a report last month by Clean Creatives^{vi}, a group of communication professionals wanting a safe climate future, who uncovered the vast scale of work that PR companies have done protecting the reputations of the fossil fuel, beef, fossil fuel financing and transport industries since 2008.

Notes to Editors

WPP: On Earth Day 2021, holding company giant WPP pledged to reach net zero across all of its operations. This extensive plan will account for reductions of 5.4 mt of carbon annually by 2025 across the entire group of agencies. WPP maintains a long list of fossil fuel aligned clients, most prominently BP in Ogilvy, Shell at WundermanThompson, and Exxon in both Hill + Knowlton and Burson Cohn and Wolfe. These fossil fuel majors account for 423 times the carbon impact of WPP's

operations. This gap in WPP's pledge means that generating sales increases of .2% across these clients would immediately wipe out the impact of WPP's net zero plan.

Interpublic: In June 2021, the holding company Interpublic released a Net Zero plan that included powering their work with 100% renewable energy by 2030, and reaching net zero emissions by 2040. This plan, which includes expanded reporting and disclosure on their operations, would account for reductions of 211 tonnes of CO2 equivalent annually. Just one IPG agency, Carmichael Lynch, bragged that their campaign for oil giant Conoco Phillips resulted in 40,000,000 gallons of gasoline sold, representing a carbon impact greater than the entire global holding company. Additionally, their extensive work for Exxon at both Weber-Shandwick and UM Media contributes directly to Exxon's longstanding - and confessed - strategy to obstruct climate action by governments, and extend their highly-polluting business model past the window of climate safety. In comparison with IPG's goal to use 100% renewable energy by 2030, their client Exxon plans to increase oil production by 52%, and gas production by 27% by 2030.

Omnicom: Holding company Omnicom has taken a piecemeal approach to sustainability within its business. Several agencies have joined initiatives like the UK Advertising Association's Ad Net Zero project, but none which would commit them to addressing the impact of their work for clients. Their current holding-company wide goals include only targets such as using 20% renewable energy by 2023. In 2020, Ketchum's client ExxonMobil invests less than 1% of their annual capital expenditures into developing renewable or carbon-capture programs.

Exxon/Edelmann: Exxon is one of the top spenders on climate issues on Facebook, sharing misleading statistics and encouraging users to "take action" to stop meaningful climate action on their website Exxon Exxchange. Edelmann PR worked on this project.

Shell: Shell disclosed to investors that "as of February 11, 2021, Shell's operating plans and budgets do not reflect Shell's Net-Zero Emissions target," even while widely marketing that target to the public and regulators^{vii}

Standard Chartered/Man Bites Dog: Man Bites Dog are nominated for a PR Week Award for their success in "positioning Standard Chartered as a thought leader by highlighting the critical role of finance in the greatest corporate challenge ever undertaken: decarbonisation". This campaign is despite the bank being accused of hypocrisy in the FT for taking part in a new \$400m loan to Indonesian coal company Adano and investing over \$31bn in fossil fuel financing since the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Contact: Ian McDermott – 07890 305344

ⁱ <https://www.prweekawards.com/finalists/easyjet-tackles-the-covid-19-crisis>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.prweekawards.com/finalists/emoji-jacket>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.prweekawards.com/finalists/zeronomics-financing-the-transition-to-a-net-zero-world-0>

^{iv} <https://www.edelman.com/trust/2021-trust-barometer/belief-driven-employee/new-employee-employer-compact>

^v Page 20

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f5aab4d184791593e07cd03/t/6149c87c2791b95b7b5c32a9/1632225409254/Clean+Creatives+Report+%28091721%29.pdf>

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<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f5aab4d184791593e07cd03/t/6149c87c2791b95b7b5c32a9/1632225409254/Clean+Creatives+Report+%28091721%29.pdf>

vii <https://www.shell.com/media/news-and-media-releases/2021/shell-accelerates-drive-for-net-zero-emissions-with-customer-first-strategy.html>