

Not all companies are B-Corporations and sometimes companies adopt weak practices, such as **greenwashing** (see Key Term), so that they look more impressive to their stakeholders than they really are. Yet in a digital environment, as so many companies publish their strategies online, the reports are easy to access and analyse.

### KEY TERM GREENWASHING

Greenwashing is a strategy adopted by some companies in which researchers have classified as deceiving stakeholders actively or passively (Gatti et al., 2021). Active greenwashing is where false information is provided or deceptive practices are adopted to manipulate a given situation. Passive greenwashing is where the corporation selectively promotes specific activities to draw attention away from other important factors or impacts of the business.<sup>6</sup>

## ETHICAL INSIGHTS Greenwashing

Strategy can be negative as well as positive. For example, large corporations may commit to environmental and sustainability strategies, and set many objectives to demonstrate their green credentials. However, when their commitment is simply ticking a box, with no substance or support behind the objectives, it is known as greenwashing.

One sector that creates carbon emissions is the airline industry. The number of flights is nearly at pre-pandemic levels as people want to travel by air again, yet airlines are trying to appear to be greener.<sup>7</sup> One such example is KLM, an airline which was taken to court by the legal team ClientEarth (2023). KLM launched an advertising campaign 'telling customers to "Fly Responsibly"' (ClientEarth, 2023, p. 1). The campaign showed how KLM was using alternative fuels where possible and trying to make a difference. In the advert, customers were asked to consider not flying, or to take the train instead, or to pack light if they had to fly and to contribute towards carbon offsetting payments. ClientEarth believed this was greenwashing because it gave 'customers the false impression that they can reduce the impact of their flight by funding reforestation projects or the airline's costs when it buys small amounts of Biofuels' (ClientEarth, 2023, p. 1).

There are also arguments about the validity of paying to offset greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. We may feel good paying an airline to plant trees when we book a flight, but the offset actions can result in greater environmental damage (John et al., 2024). In addition, carbon offsetting does not reduce GHG emissions, it creates a compensation for the carbon created (John et al., 2024).

*(Continued)*

<sup>6</sup>This relates to SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

<sup>7</sup>This relates to SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), 15 (Life on Land) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

ClientEarth won this landmark case against greenwashing in Europe in March 2024, when the Court ruled that the adverts had been misleading (Igini, 2024). KLM stated that it was trying to be more open and transparent about its advertising (Igini, 2024), but stopped the Flying Responsibly campaign.

- KLM was trying to mitigate its carbon emissions, but did not succeed on this occasion. What's your take on this issue?
- How do you feel about carbon emissions? Why do you feel this way?
- How do we balance the desire from consumers to buy more things with the need to adopt earth-friendly marketing strategies?

### 10.2.3 IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC OPTIONS WITH THE TOWS MATRIX

When creating a strategy, it is useful to understand the options that are available. A strategy should be evidence based and built on the audit (see Chapter 9, 'Digital Marketing Audit'). Once the audit has identified the current state of play, it is easier to consider the future direction of the organisation.

The **TOWS matrix** is a tool that allows you to take the material captured in your audit, to plot it into the matrix and to extract your strategic marketing options. The framework provides 'a systematic analysis that facilitates matching the external threats and opportunities with the internal weaknesses and strengths of the organization' (Wehrich, 1982, p. 59). You might have noticed that TOWS is 'SWOT' spelt back to front (for a worked example of how it works, see Table 10.1). Let's explore the elements.<sup>8</sup>

#### SO: 'maxi-maxi' strategy

Strengths and Opportunities: This is a strong position and it's about using the organisation's strengths to maximise opportunities. Described as the aggressive strategy, it often involves expansion and diversification.

#### WO: 'mini-maxi' strategy

Weaknesses and Opportunities: Where weaknesses have been identified, they should be minimised by taking advantage of opportunities. It can be described as a competitive strategy.

#### ST: 'maxi-mini' strategy

Strengths and Threats: This strategy utilises the organisation's strengths to minimise threats. It is often seen as a conservative strategy.

<sup>8</sup> This relates to SDGs 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)