



How to put an end to boring sustainability communications.

The heat is

rising.

Emotion fuels progress. So, at Anthesis, we are challenging this deluge of 'Dull Green'. For when the heat is rising, there is no better time to fight fire with fire.

The true cost of dull

The communications industry is well-disciplined in the value of emotions driving effectiveness.

It sits on a towering repository of studies, literature and best-practice knowledge that has proven this time and time again.

Most recently, Peter Field's 'The Cost of Dull' research goes as far as to prove the fact that dull ads are 6.1 times more ineffective at growing market share than interesting ones. Those that spike emotions and deliver fame.

In fact, to match the effectiveness of more interesting ads the industry has to pay an average of £9.2M extra in paid media each year.

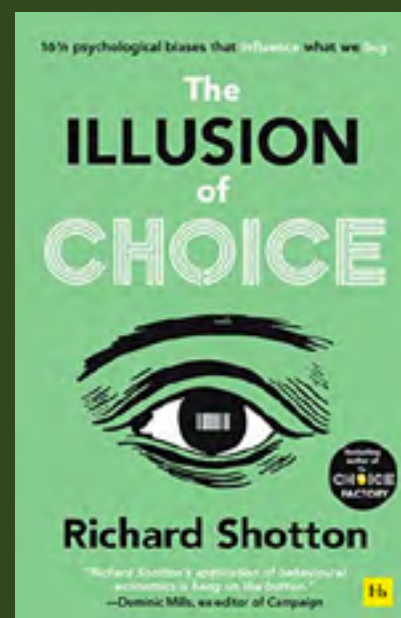
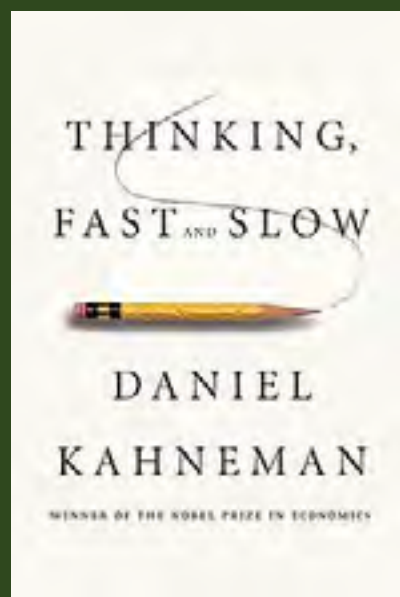
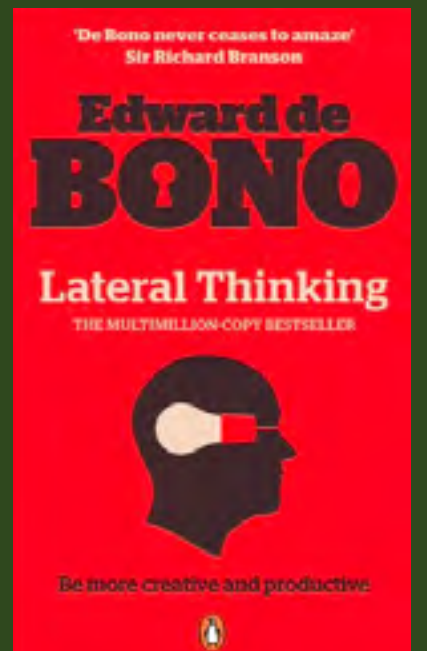
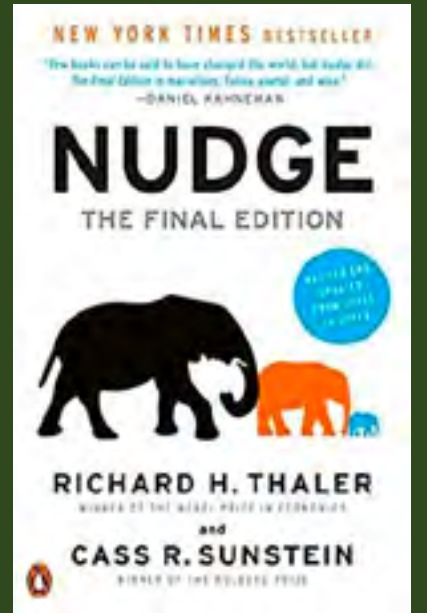
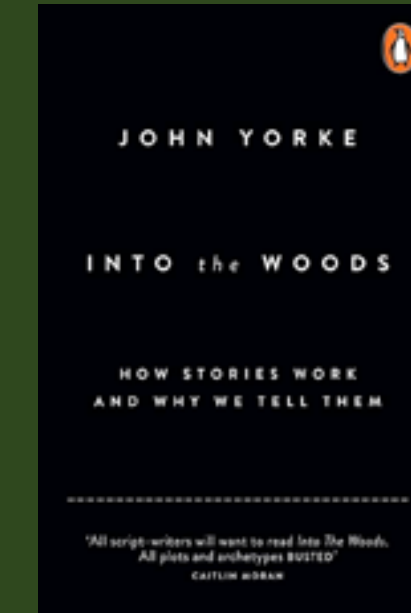
Switch your thinking to sustainability campaigns and the problem worsens. Firstly, budgets for such campaigns are usually pitiful, a tiny percentage of a brand's total marketing budget. There simply isn't the investment required to make dull campaigns effective through the additional paid media required.

Secondly, and far more worrying, is when you think beyond the financial costs to the true cost of ineffective climate change communications. The cost to our planet.

With this importance in mind, sustainability campaigns should be our industry's most emotionally rousing, most captivating and most celebrated work.

It should be vivid green.

This report shows it is not.



Source: Peter Field, The Cost of Dull, Challenger Project, Adam Morgan

What we did

The basis of this report is the analysis of the emotional strength of sustainability campaigns within the last 10 years, from big global corporations to established brands, start-ups, and NGOs.

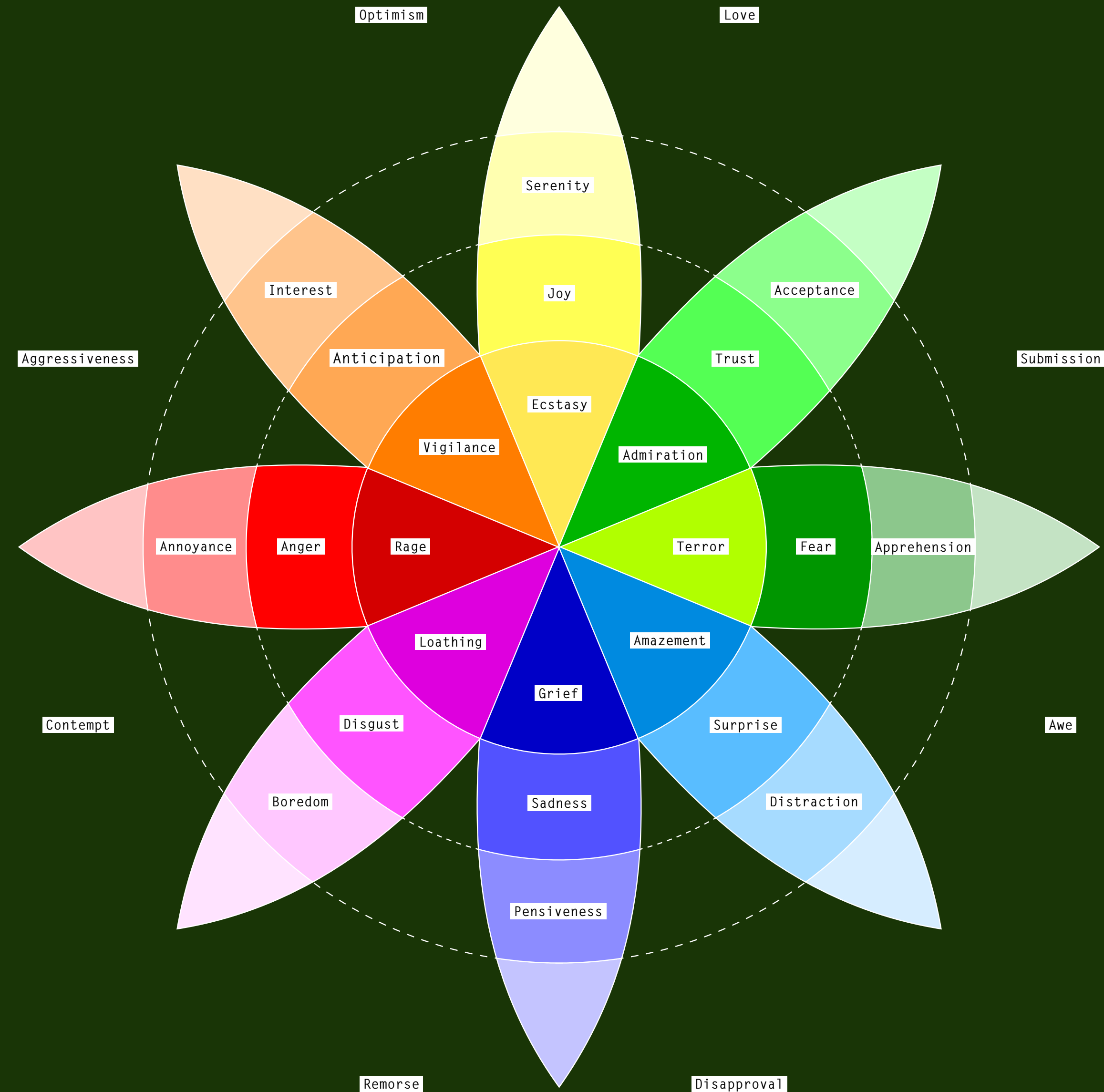
Each sourced from creative and strategic awards over the past 10 years (Cannes, IPA effectiveness, Effie's and APG).

Using the Plutchik Feelings Wheel, (an extension of Elkans Basic Emotion approach and the underpinning of System 1's methodology) each campaign was plotted against the type and relative strength of 8 core emotions - joy to sadness, anticipation to surprise, anger to fear and disgust to trust.

Each on a scale of:

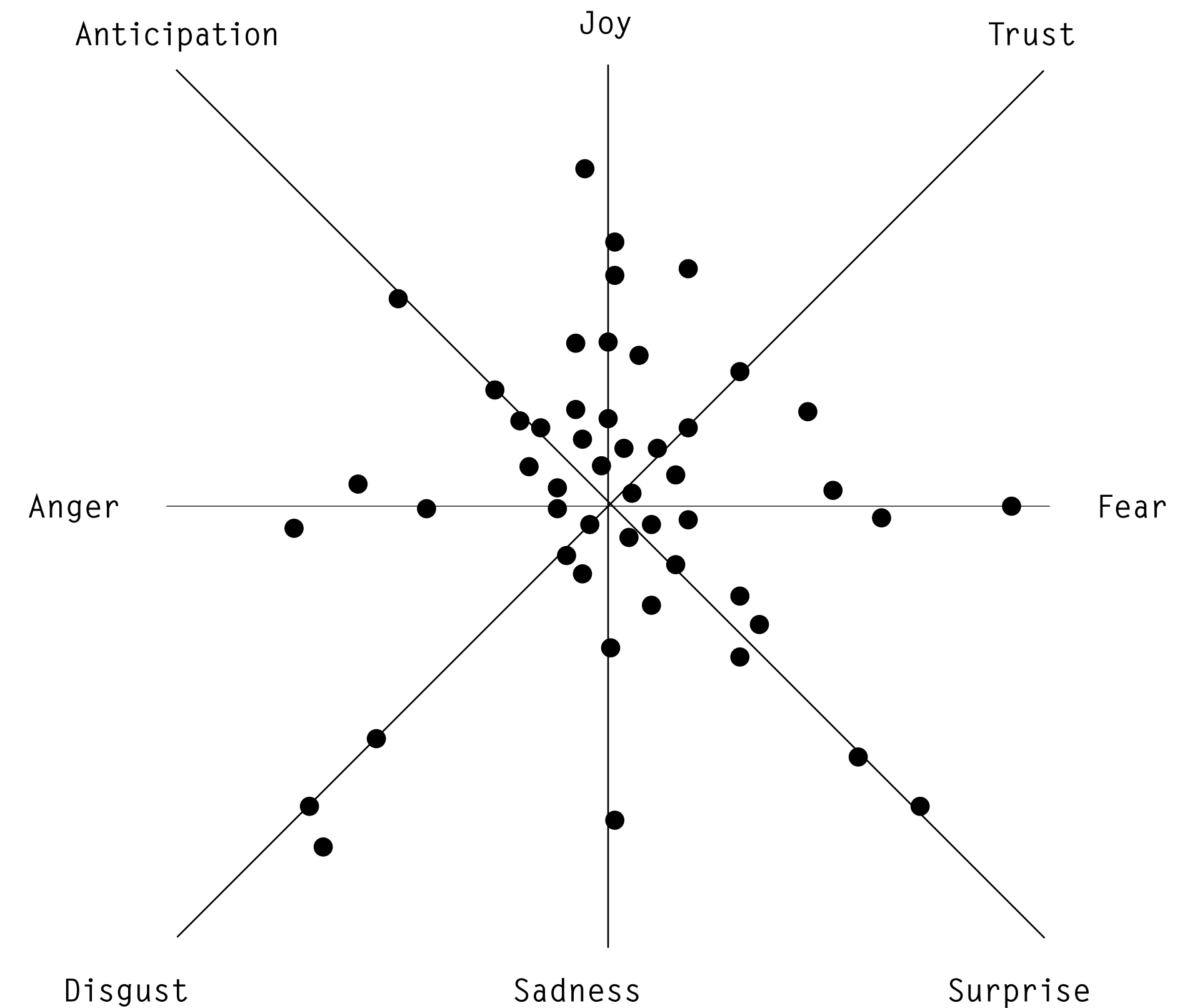
0 = no emotional reaction to 5 = intense emotional reaction

Plutchik Feelings Wheel



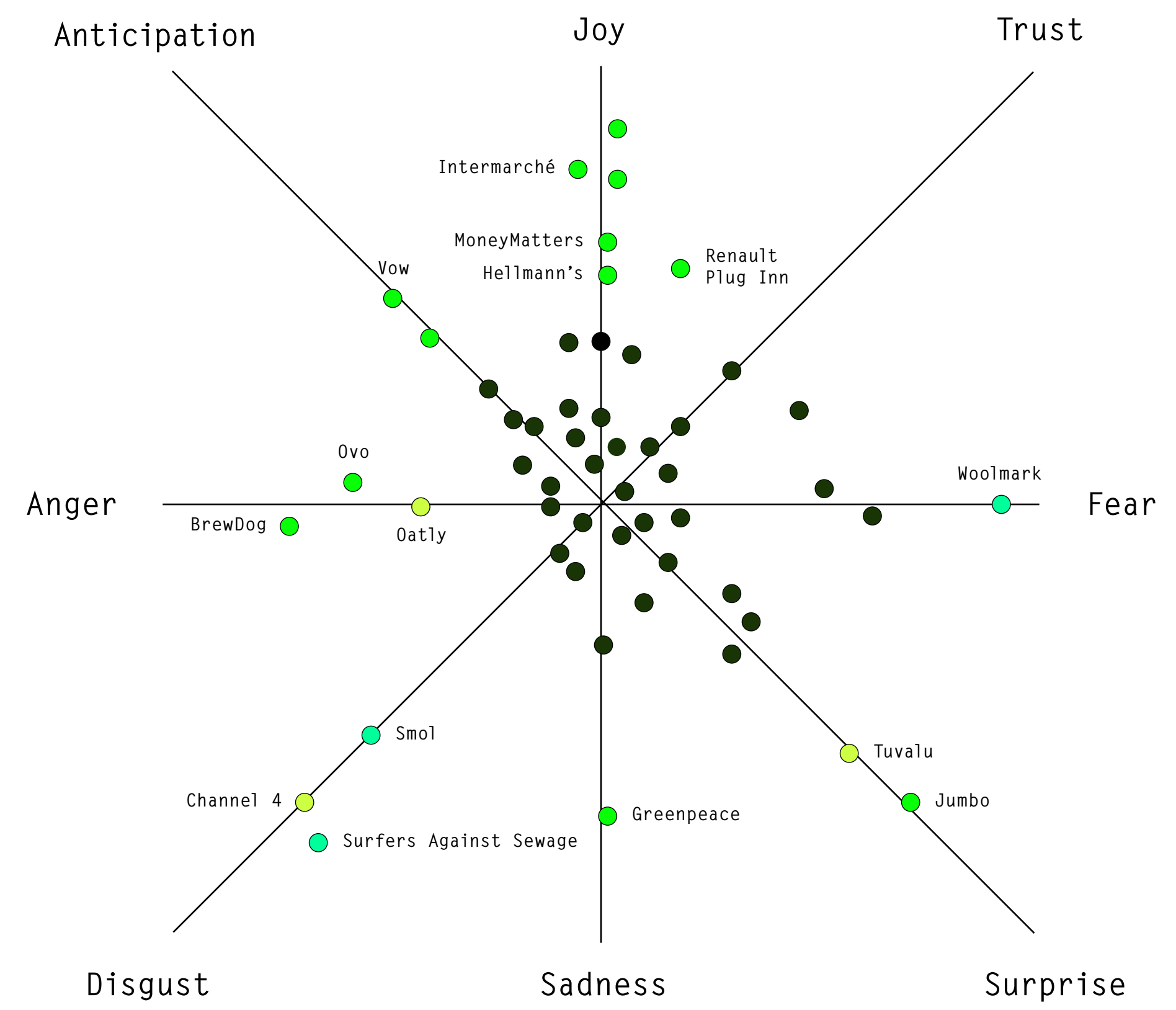
What we found

Whilst there are some really powerful campaigns out there, the majority of sustainability communications stick to a neutral middle ground - the emotion-less.



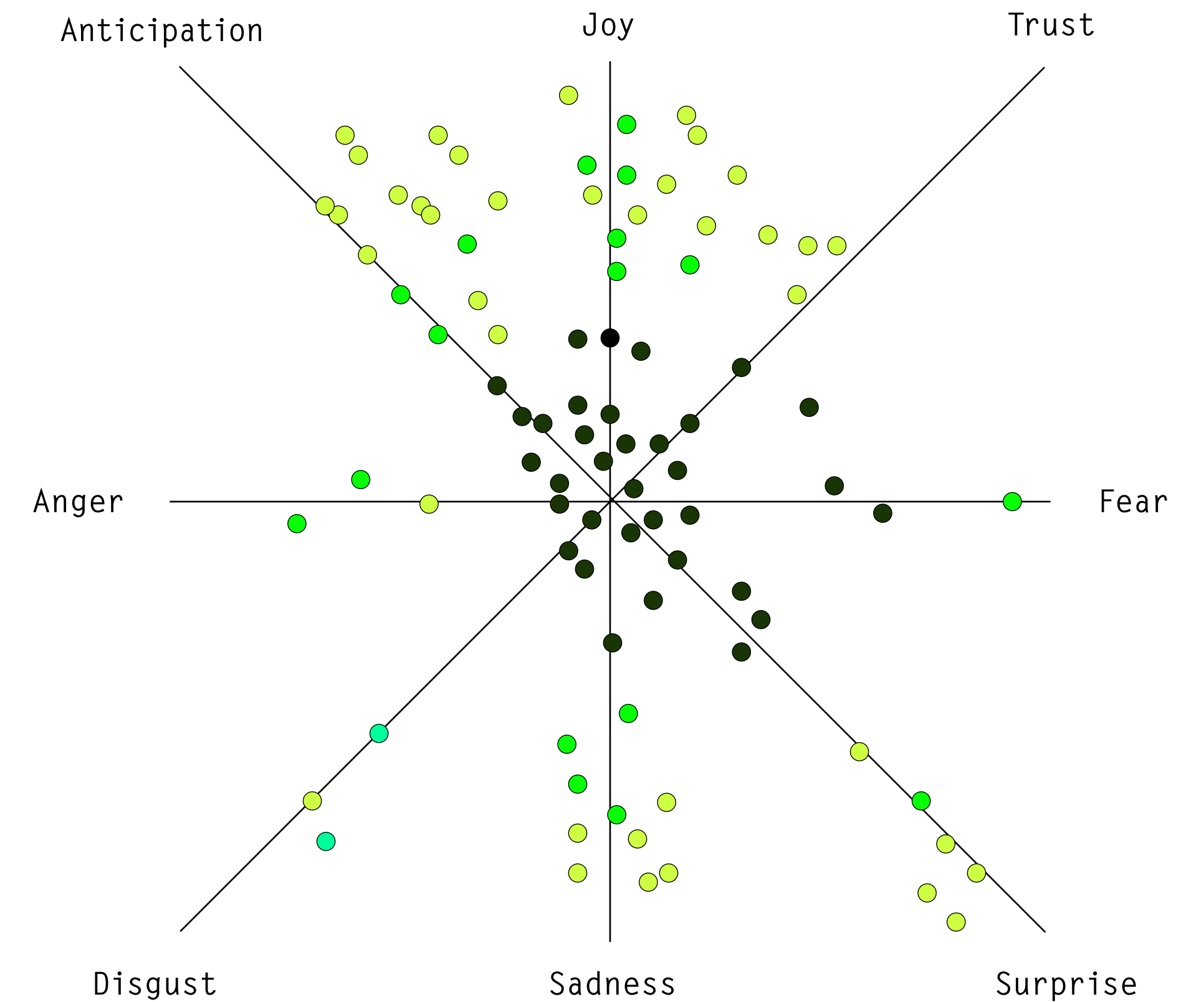
In other words, somewhat dull.

Those who push at the edges of emotional intensity, the more vivid greens tended to be NGOs, charities, start ups and companies that are ‘born good.’



Put in the wider context of non-sustainability campaigns (commercial or cause-related) and you will see the real problem. Outnumbered, and under-funded, sustainability campaigns need to pack a real emotional punch to compete with everything else out there. Yet arguably the most important communications out there are proving to be the most dull, the most ineffective.

All Industry Campaigns



Why do we fear the extremes and opt for the dull, middling 'meh'?

There are a number of reasons why companies may be failing to stir minds when it comes to sustainability communications:

- Law-breaking. There's the potential for greenwashing, where penalties for misleading information can be steep. The EU Parliament have recently endorsed a new 'Greenwashing Directive' to better enforce this issue by introducing specific rules on sustainability and environmental claims.
- Risk-taking. Known as 'greenhushing', an increasing number of companies are avoiding overt sustainability comms for fear of backlash. A recent study found that over 2/3rds of marketing and PR professionals have said the brands they represent are 'staying quiet' on their progress across complex issues such as the environment, society and governance.
- Over-explaining. As Adam Morgan explores in his podcast 'Let's Make This More Interesting', making any communications move people is hard enough. So when you ladder in sustainability communications, where information is often complex and scientific, the tendency is to explain vs excite.



From inside, to in extremis

Noun: in an extreme situation, lit. At the farthest reaches.
When the time calls for it, how might we push our work
further to deliver more impact?

9 ways to drive more impact through emotion

Deeper feelings

Tip 01

Steal from anything, but

Tip 02

Talk about anything, but

Tip 03

Don't talk at all, act

Gut feelings

Tip 01

Face the fear

Tip 02

Give lightness to the darkness

Tip 03

Get visceral

Unshakeable feelings

Tip 01

Drive impact with imagery

Tip 02

Cause trouble

Tip 03

Bring it home

Deeper feelings

Remember, sustainability in itself is not a feeling. Leaning into it can feel dry, technical and only appeal to surface level emotions.

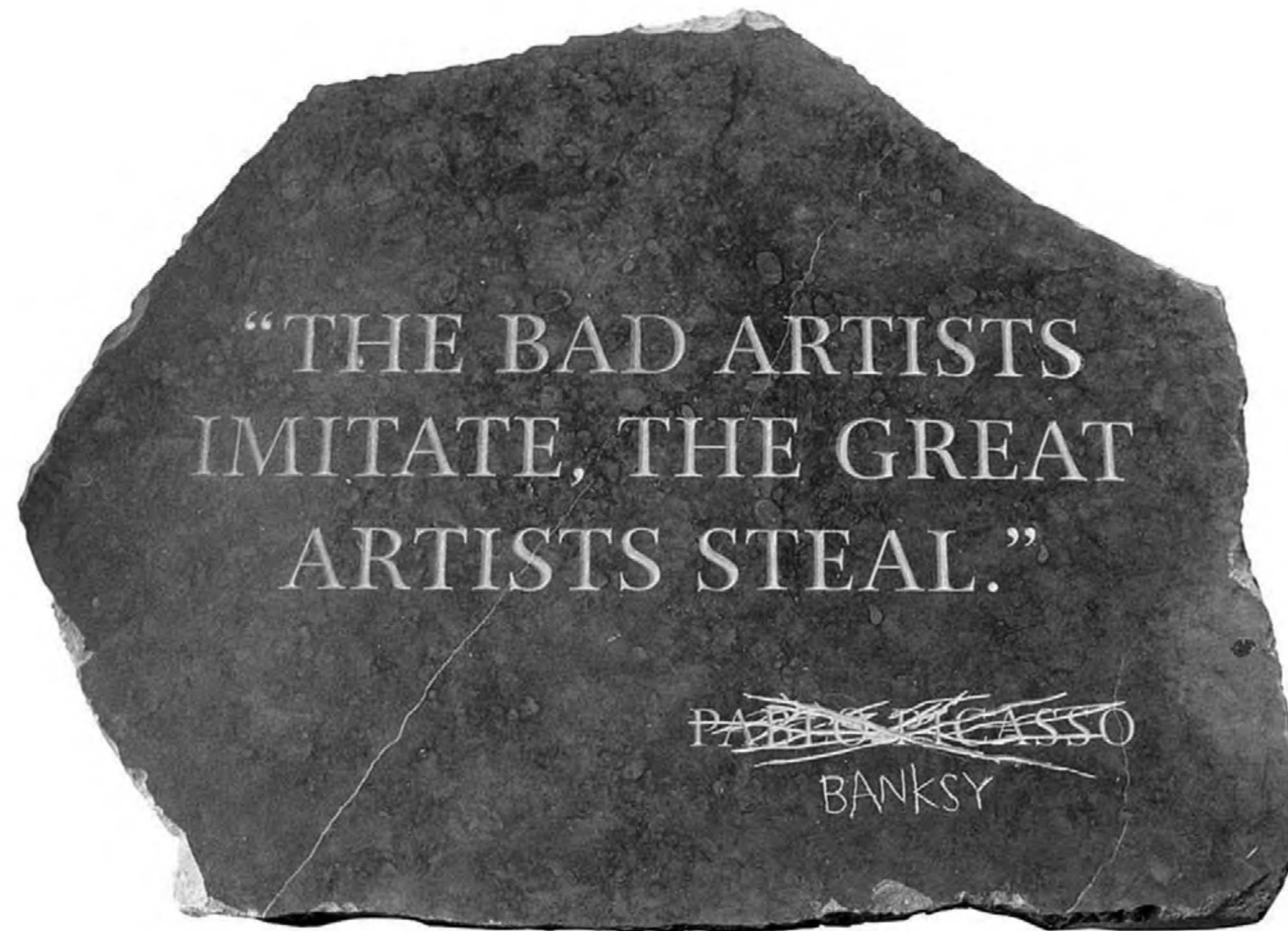
Let's go deeper.

Deeper feelings



Steal from anything, but





Talking about sustainability alone does not earn you the attention you demand. This means that we're not just competing against other sustainability campaigns, nor the rest of the industry; it's the emotions piqued from the whole of Netflix and beyond.

As the founder of Liquid Death said, "There's a difference between ad funny and real funny. Look at 96% of beer ads. They're always held up as this funny ad. And it's like, no, it's not funny. It's a funny ad, and I think that's an important distinction... Our goal is to make something that's flat-out funny.'

So don't steal from the best in the category or the best in your industry. Steal from the best and apply it to your sustainability communications to give them the best chance of driving impact.



Liquid Death Death to Plastic

Liquid Death has become infamous in marketing circles over the last few years, as well as growing a business worth \$700m. They didn't look to copy sustainability brand cues, they're arguably positioned more like an energy drink or a heavy metal band! They took their creative inspiration from the best - positioning themselves as a standout sustainable brand in their category.

100% STONE-COLD MOUNTAIN WATER
DEATH TO PLASTIC



Image: Liquid Death



Image: Philipp Comarella & Simon Griesser / Greenpeace

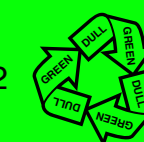
Greenpeace There's a Rang-tan in my bedroom

This Greenpeace story about the destruction of the world's rainforest was born from the seed of an idea for a children's book. Since the TV launch, it has been published as such and is part of a nationwide school resource pack. Starting further afield than the desks of an agency, it gave the campaign the chance to reach a lot further than the normal channels of a campaign, tapping into the next generation of fixers.



Deeper feelings

Talk about anything, but





Sustainability alone wasn't a **big enough** sell for Formula E, instead they had to show the benefit of electric on what people cared about most - the racing.

It is well reported that consumers say they want to purchase sustainable brands and will pay more for them, but equally well reported is the value action gap - where these statements often fail to materialise into action. A recent study showed only 15% of people actually sacrifice performance for sustainability.

Most people buy clothes because they like how they look or for status, cars because they paint a picture of their lives. Most aren't going to give these things up for the 'sustainable option'. We shouldn't, however, always aim for sustainability to take over as the key emotional driver in such contexts. Instead, how might it play a supportive and additive role?

We need to think about how we connect sustainability to what people want most in our category or the role sustainability can play in showcasing your beliefs and building status. Sustainability can act to reinforce a promise of provenance or performance, luxury or 'down to earth values'.



Tesla Insane mode

Not all communications are about adverts; they can be about your product experience, too. Think what you like about Tesla's owner - the car company changed the game of electric cars. Not by peddling the sustainable narrative but by creating cars that appeal to key category drivers. The insane button is a perfect example; they could have called it 'sport' like everyone else but chose to appeal to people's sense of adventure.



Image: My Tesla Adventure / Youtube

Moncler Born to protect

The pieces of Moncler's "Born to Protect" capsule that are the most sustainable, are also the most premium.

By marketing 'sustainable' as high end, they have flipped the 'compromise' narrative on its head. Instead, desire for sustainable products have been created through their peak luxury positioning because, well, the more expensive the bigger the boast.



Image: Moncler



Deeper feelings

Don't talk at all, act



Image: Max Winkler / Unsplash

“A well done is better than a well said.”

Benjamin Franklin



It's a hard ask to deliver emotional storytelling when you don't actually have anything to say.

Co:Collective ran a study looking at what they call ‘story doing’ companies vs storytelling companies. They define story doing companies as those who are taking tangible action based on a higher purpose, aligning this as much to the product experience they create as more societal and sustainability initiatives and actions they’re focused on.

But what they found can be applied to the world of sustainability communications too - where we can see the power of taking action to earn media.

Co:Collective found that storydoing companies resonate more. They generate a substantially greater number of mentions in social media and those mentions are more positive - and are growing faster than their storytelling counterparts in revenue.

The point here being, if you have existing sustainability actions to communicate, great. But if you feel you don't - what actions could you take that align to your brand's purpose or product offer that become your communication in their own right?



Lays Biochar Project

Traditional burning used crop fields, Lay's helped famers in India find less polluting ways to prepare their fields for their next crop. The Biochar Project uses a large clay and brick kiln that farmers can use to burn leftover stubble from their fields. These reduce the amount of smoke created, while also more steadily regulating any smoke that is released. What's more, the oven turns the stubble into a carbon-rich fertiliser, known as biochar.

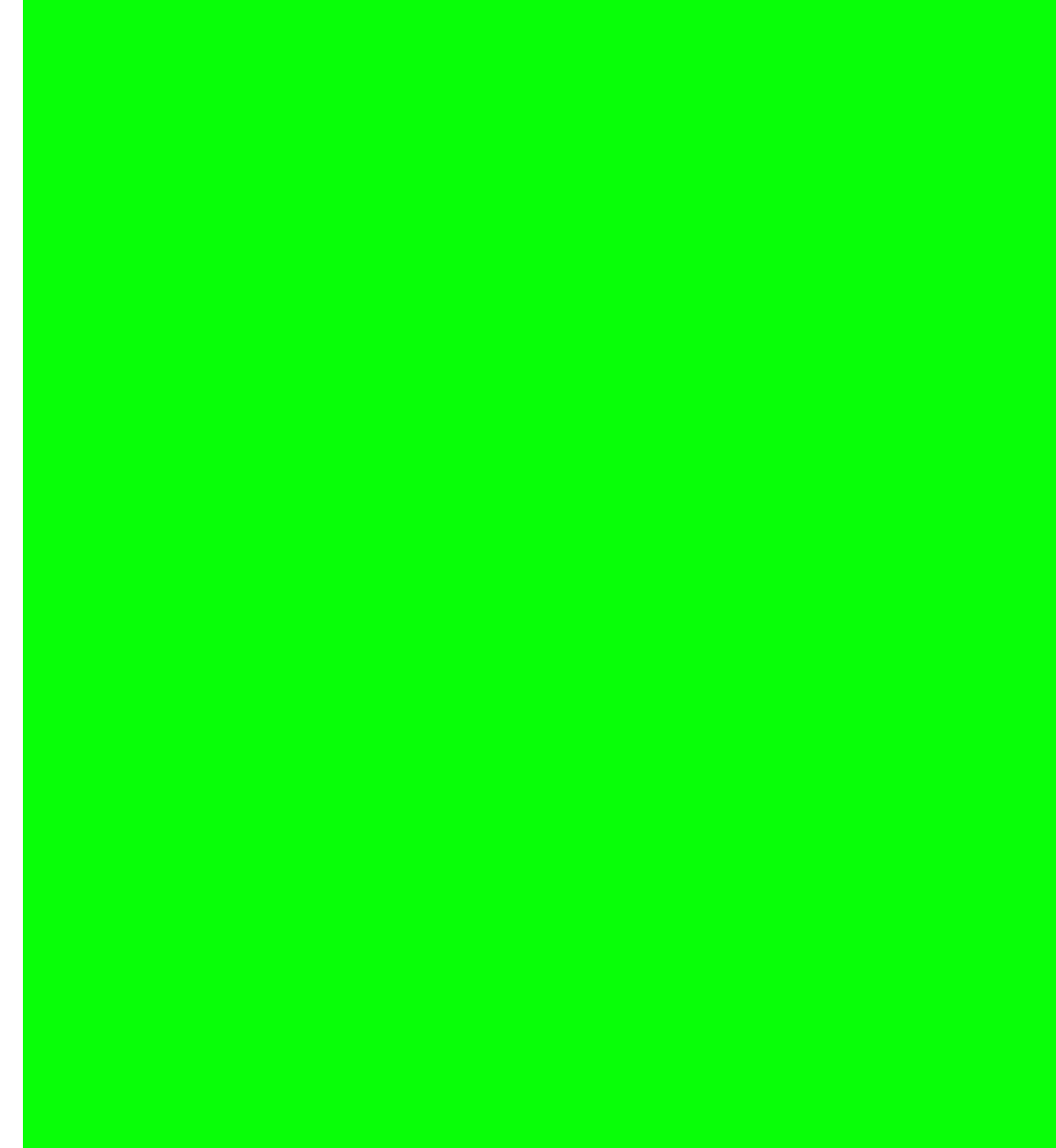


Image: PepsiCo, Lays

A Budweiser advertisement for the Energy Collective. The top half has a red background with the Budweiser logo and the text "INTRODUCING THE BUDWEISER ENERGY COLLECTIVE." Below this, it says "Ensuring the places you love are powered with 100% renewable electricity." The bottom half shows a man in a white shirt drinking a Budweiser beer, with a woman dancing in the background. The Budweiser logo is in the bottom right corner.

Budweiser
[100%] THE ENERGY COLLECTIVE

INTRODUCING THE BUDWEISER ENERGY COLLECTIVE.

Ensuring the places you love are powered with 100% renewable electricity.

A WORLD RENEWED IS YOURS *TO TAKE* **Budweiser**

Image: Revolt London / Anheuser-Busch

Budweiser Energy Collectives

Budweiser had already communicated its own 100% Renewable Energy mission and accomplishment - so now they wanted to go further. To do so, they looked beyond their own business to the pubs and bars that sold their beer, setting a new mission to support their transition to renewable energy and creating Budweiser Energy Collective to do so. It is an energy company where the brand bought renewable energy at such a scale that it could pass it onto pubs and bars at a discounted rate.





Gut feelings

Give people a sucker punch. Those feelings that hit you instantly, getting the blood pumping and adrenaline going.

Go for the gut.

Gut feelings

Face the fear

A black and white portrait of Judy Blume, an older woman with short, curly, light-colored hair. She is wearing a dark turtleneck sweater and looking slightly to her left with a gentle expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall with a dark-framed picture partially visible on the right.

“How we handle our fears will determine where we go with the rest of our lives. To experience adventure, or be limited by the fear of it.”

Judy Blume

Humans have survived - and thrived - off fear since the dawn of time.

But when it comes to sustainability, fear has got a bad rep - with many industry critics claiming the negative emotions it incites lead to inaction.

Fear paralyses and is no good. But is that always true? What if we were able to harness fear to instil fight over flight?

Scratch a little deeper than today's perceived wisdom,
and you'll find evidence that tells a different story.

Studies show that when presented with fear, individuals will base their reaction on several factors: the nature of the threat, how personally they believe themselves to be affected, the intensity of the fear evoked whether a solution is proposed, how accessible that solution is to achieve.

Many campaigns of the past have fallen into the trap of learning fear but forgetting the crucial need to provide a solution that feels easy and accessible. Get this combination right, and fear can be a powerful motivator for action.

Get it wrong, and it will be ignored.

Woolmark

Wear wool, not fossil fuel

To demonstrate wool as the ethical clothing decision, Woolmark took inspiration from the fact, 'every 25 minutes, an Olympic-sized pool of oil is used to make synthetic clothing', but didn't just land this fact - used it to create a dark and unnerving story. The simple solution, buy wool over synthetics.

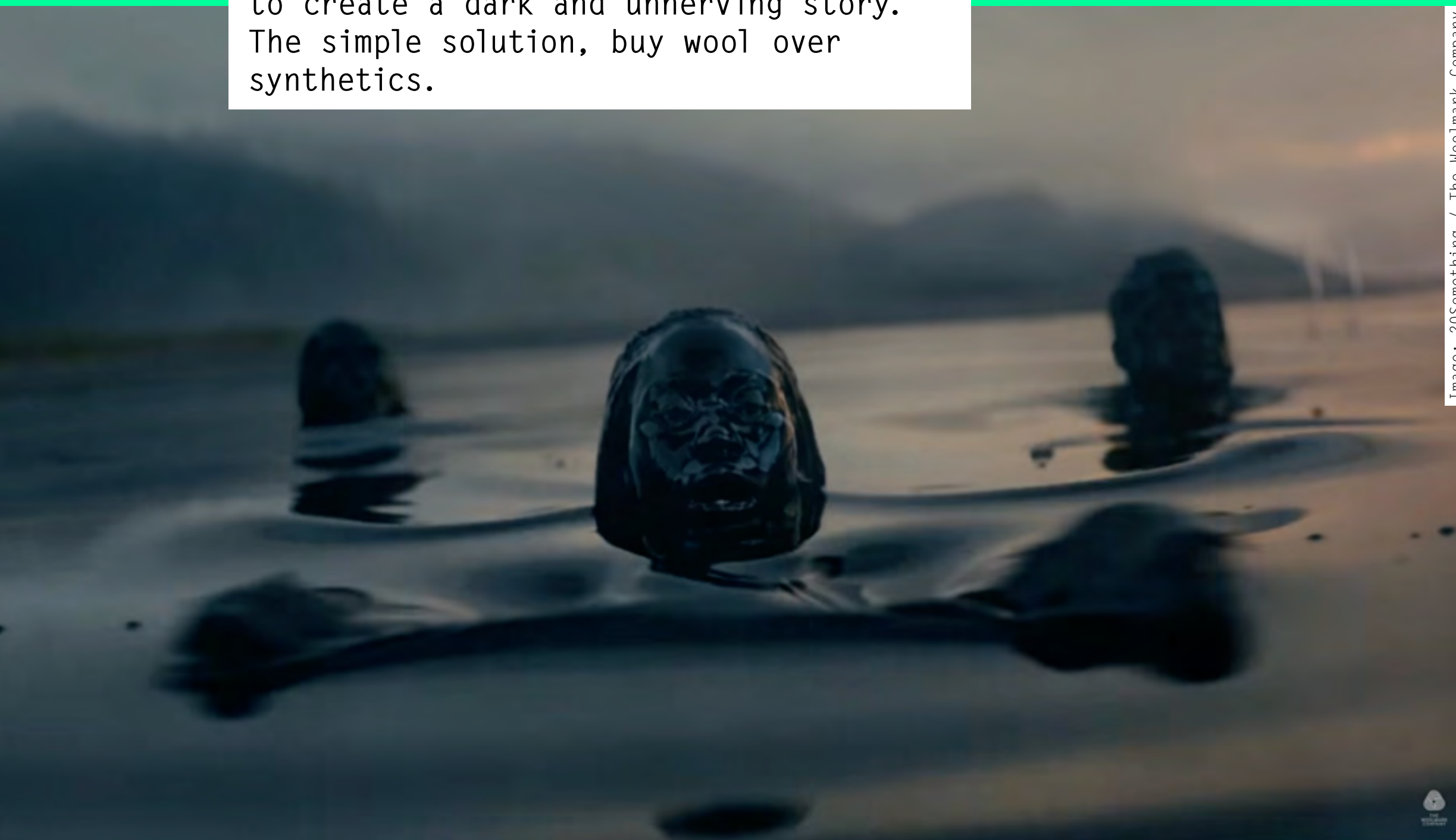


Image: 20Something / The Woolmark Company

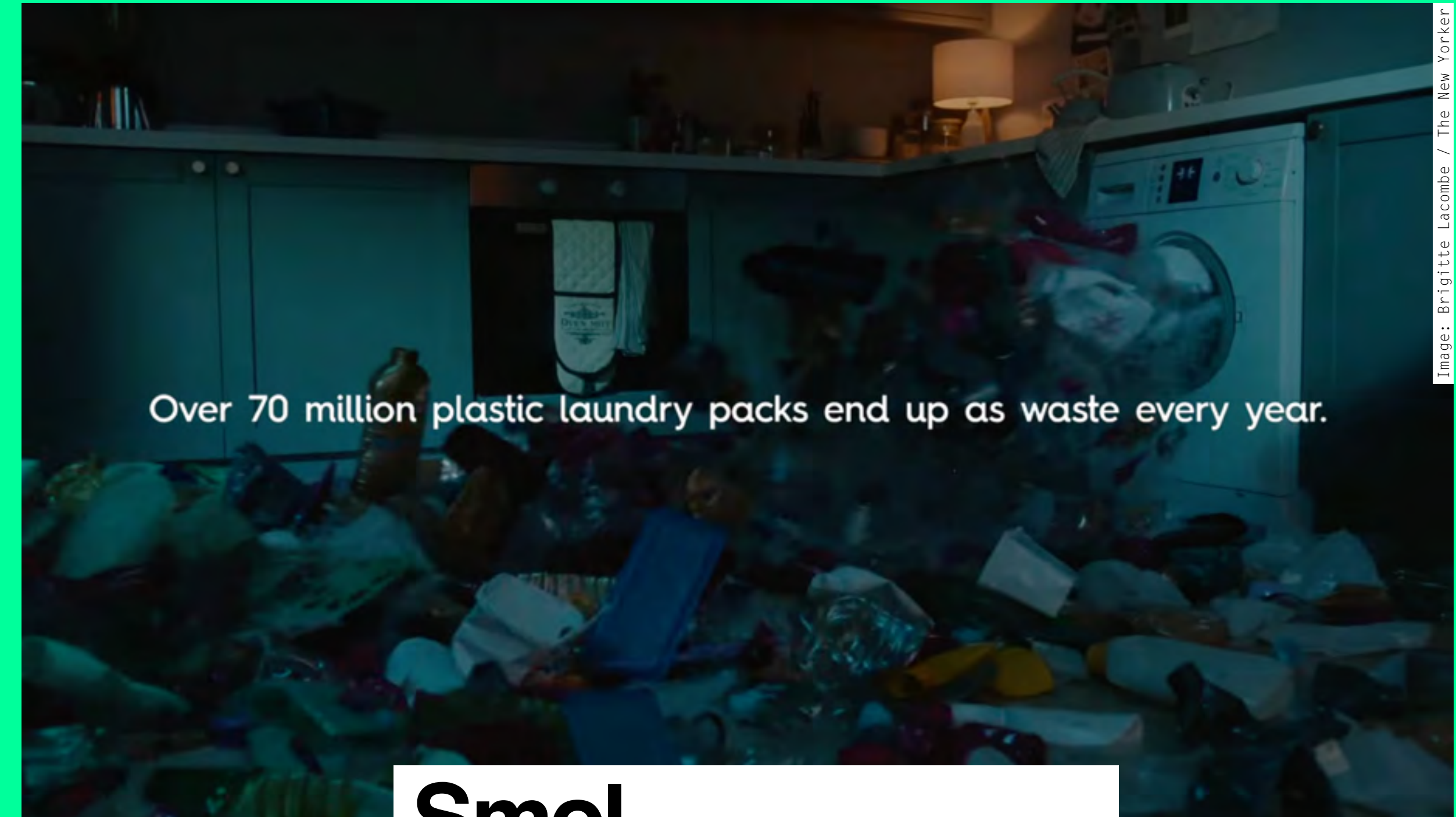


Image: Brigitte Lacombe / The New Yorker

Over 70 million plastic laundry packs end up as waste every year.

Smol

Sick of plastic

Smol based their creative on the fact that over 70 million plastic laundry packs end up as waste every year - but to land that fact in a foreboding way they used a washing machine, vomiting up plastic. The simple solution, switch to plastic free Smol.



Gut feelings

Give lightness to the darkness



**“We have to
entertain in order
to educate; the
other way round
doesn’t work.”**

Walt Disney

If you are a fun, witty or joyful brand, why the need to turn so serious when it comes to sustainability?

Recent research into humour in climate communication concluded there is documented evidence of the positive effects of humour in raising awareness, changing perceptions, increasing learning, and behaviour changes. This is because humour lets us perceive messages in a positive way.

It is no surprise then, that Cannes have announced that 'humour' will be a new category this year, as a way to push for 'real creative courage'.

However, the way humour is applied of course needs to be considered to ensure it enhances rather than detracts from the central information.

So, lean into your tone, and don't be afraid to bring a bit of lightness (or dark humour) to the conversations.



Money Matters Oblivion

Many of us don't know whether our pension providers continue to invest in the fossil fuel industry. Money Matters wanted to raise awareness of this, driving people to demand that their providers move their money into greener investments. They did so through dark humour in a film that centred on Olivia Coleman, or Oblivia Coalmine.

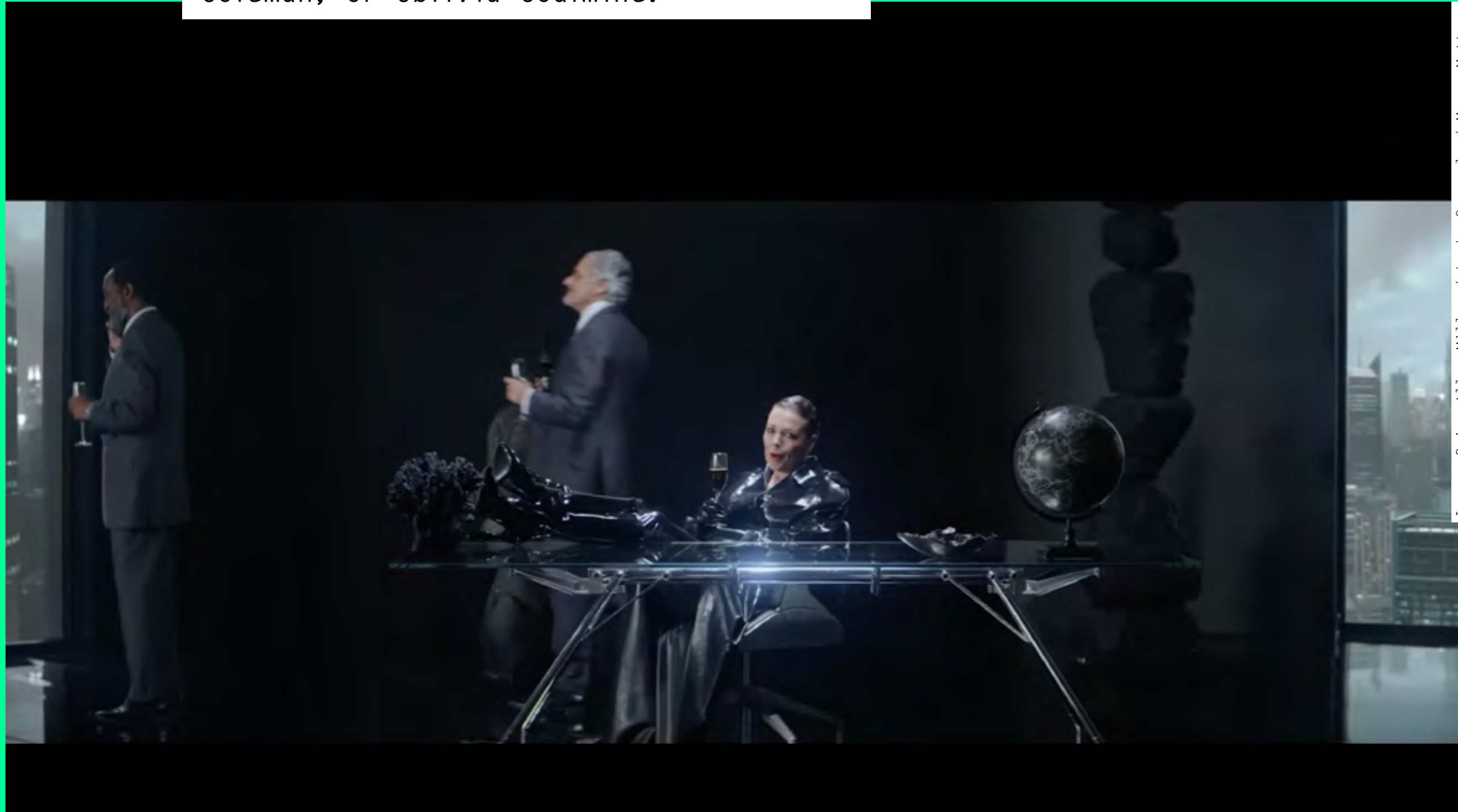


Image: Raine Allen Miller / Lucky Generals / Money Matters

Mars Healthy Planet

Following the recent publication of Mars Net Zero Roadmap, Mars 're-used' fan favourite ads for M&M's, Snickers, Twix and Ben's Original to inform people about its climate change action. Rather than cave into green-hushing, they came out with a fun and humorous ad that delivered hope and optimism on climate change.



Image: Revolt London / Mars



Gut feelings

Get visceral

“What makes a story is the visceral effect it has on the reader.”

Len Wein

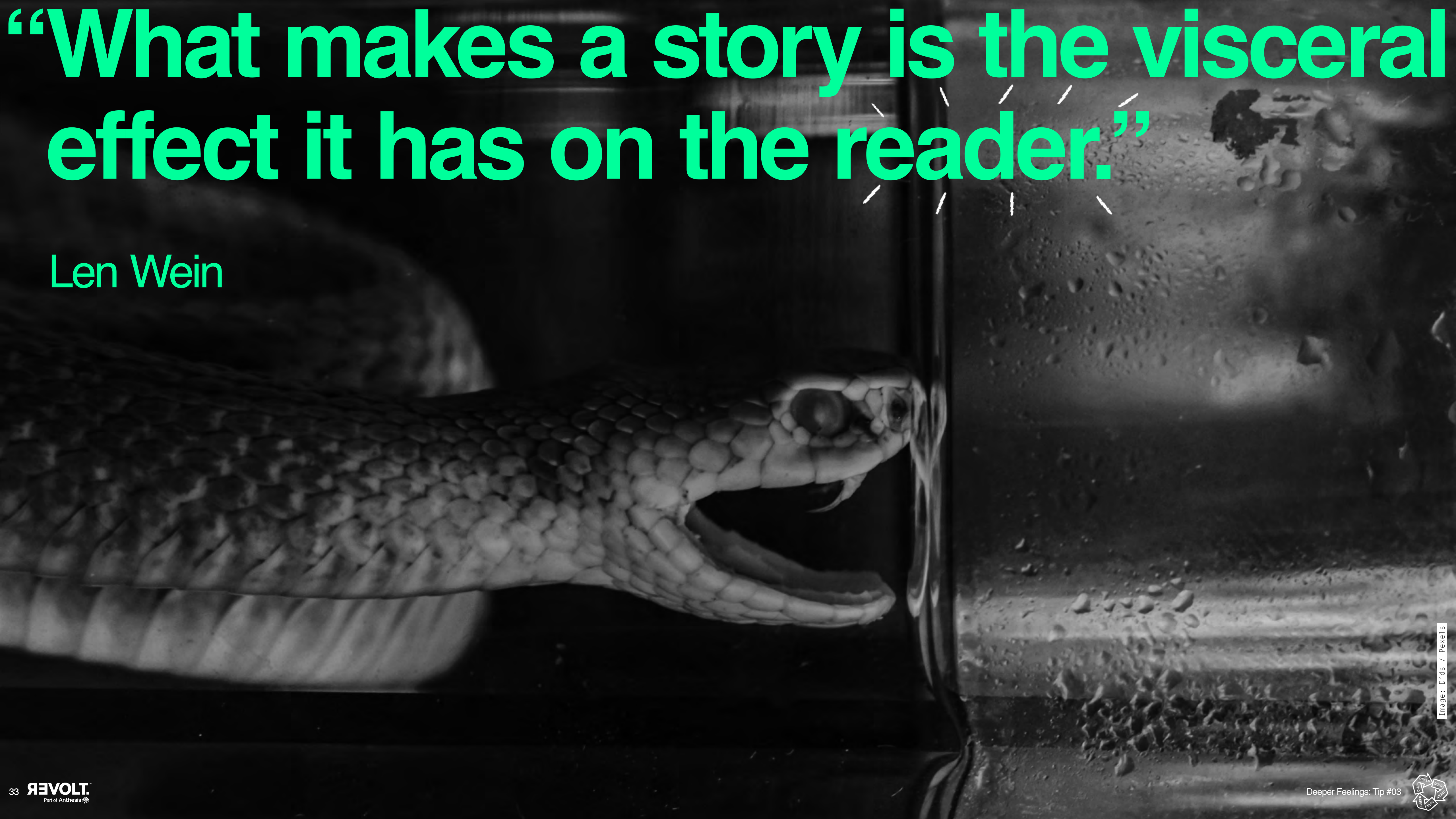


Image: Dids / Pexels

REVOLT

Part of Anthesis

33

Deeper Feelings: Tip #03

Repulsion and desire are deep, visceral feelings we've carried with us since our reptilian brains taught us how to survive. None more powerfully so than when they are linked to taste.

We are consumed by what we eat, even when the climate crisis is caused and threatened by damaging food systems. Evolution continues to trick us into needing certain food groups we know are unsustainable.

Disgust is equally sensory and a source of fascination. Though it signals harm, we're hard-wired to be enthralled by what disgusts us: from Horrible Histories to Dr Pimple Popper.

Both visceral emotions offer potent and unexpected ways to capture and retain attention.



Surfers Against Sewage: The Floaters

In 2022, water companies pumped 1.75 million hours of raw sewage into Britain’s rivers and seas. In a grim bid for attention, charity Surfers Against Sewage created ‘The Floater’: a surfboard made from raw sewage, collected from popular surfing spots on the Cornish Coast. The board was unveiled by surfing champion Ben Skinner, and accompanied Paddles Out Protests across the UK. The board has shock value which speaks of the disgusting truth: sea-goers are surfing and swimming in sewage every single day.



Image: Mr President / SAS



Image: Wunderman Thompson Benelux / VOW

Vow The mammoth meatball

Australia-based alternative protein company, Vow, took an unconventional approach to producing cultured meat, by creating a meatball made from mammoth cells. Chosen as a symbol of diversity loss and climate change, the mammoth meat was created by taking the DNA sequence for mammoth muscle protein, and filling in the gaps using elephant DNA (mammoth’s closest living replicate). Sparking a ‘juicy’ international conversation about food production, and what future alternatives can look and taste like.



Unshakeable feelings

Make feelings stick. Something that stays with you, imprinted on your heart and in your mind.

Get sticking.

Unshakeable feelings

Drive impact with imagery



“There is one thing the photograph must contain - the humanity of the moment.”

Robert Frank

When it comes to impact, pictures are worth a thousand words. Researchers at Michigan State University showed that images can strongly influence our actions. Because we process visual stimulation at lightning speed, images are likely to prompt strong emotions, which can lead to action.

We also tend to remember pictures more than words. The average person is likely to only remember 10% of a story three days after hearing it if it was told in words – irrespective of the medium. If the story is accompanied by a picture, however, you'll remember 65%. This phenomenon even has a name amongst psychologists - The Picture-Superiority Effect.

So, the images we use matter and can play a key role in landing our climate communications in a way that resonates and is remembered.



Earthrise

December 1968, William Anders

This delicate image of the Earth, floating lonely in space has been credited with kickstarting the modern environmental movement. Captured by astronaut William Anders on 24 December 1968 during the Apollo 8 voyage, it has since been described as “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken” due to its ability to land the fact that “we all live on this fragile planet and we need to take care of it, being the only home we have.”



Image: NASA / Unsplash



Image: The Guardian

Tuvalu Water levels

Tuvalu's foreign minister recorded a speech for the United Nations climate conference in Glasgow standing knee-deep in seawater to highlight rising sea levels and the impact on his country. His words might have resonated around the room but this image travelled around the world.



Unshakeable feelings

Cause trouble





**“Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and
get in good trouble, necessary trouble.”**

Rep. John Lewis (1940-2020)

There's no time to go softly on sustainability.

To make a point, sometimes it's good to ruffle some feathers. More attention, more PR, more eyes on the cause.

It's crucial to know your audience and the desired effect before wading into these waters. And it takes more planning, more crisis management and more guts. There is a reason that campaigns on the emotional edges are usually from NGOs, charities and challenger brands. Purposefully causing trouble and taking a strong stance pays back.

Causing trouble doesn't have to mean taking a side in a culture war, or being intentionally combative. You can cause good trouble that everyone can get on board with - it's about picking who you're creating trouble with or how.



Oatly

Show us your numbers

Oatly took on the dairy industry as someone to cause trouble with. A clear enemy that people who are likely to buy from the brand can get on board with. Causing trouble whilst highlighting why they are the more positive choice.

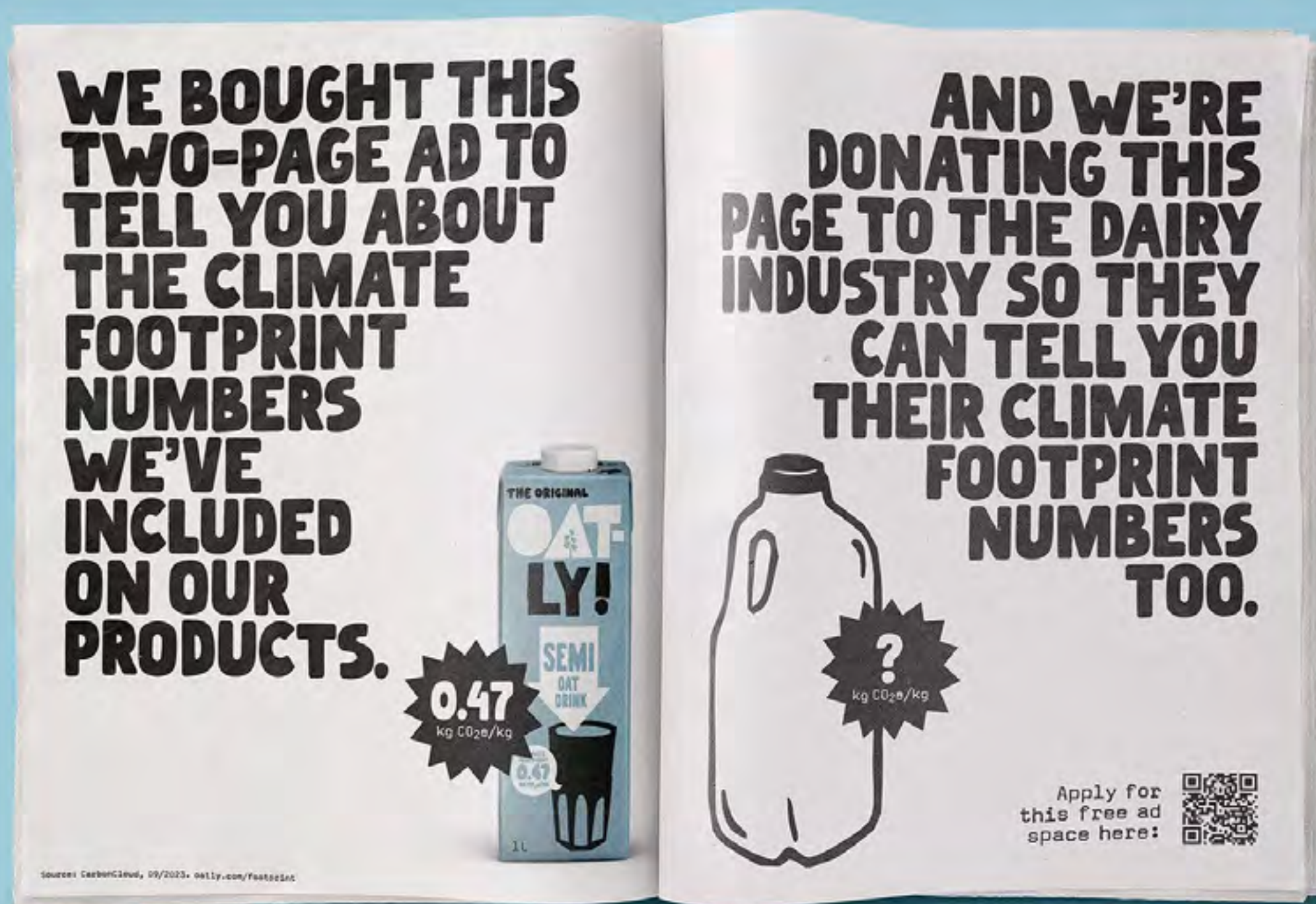


Image: Oatly

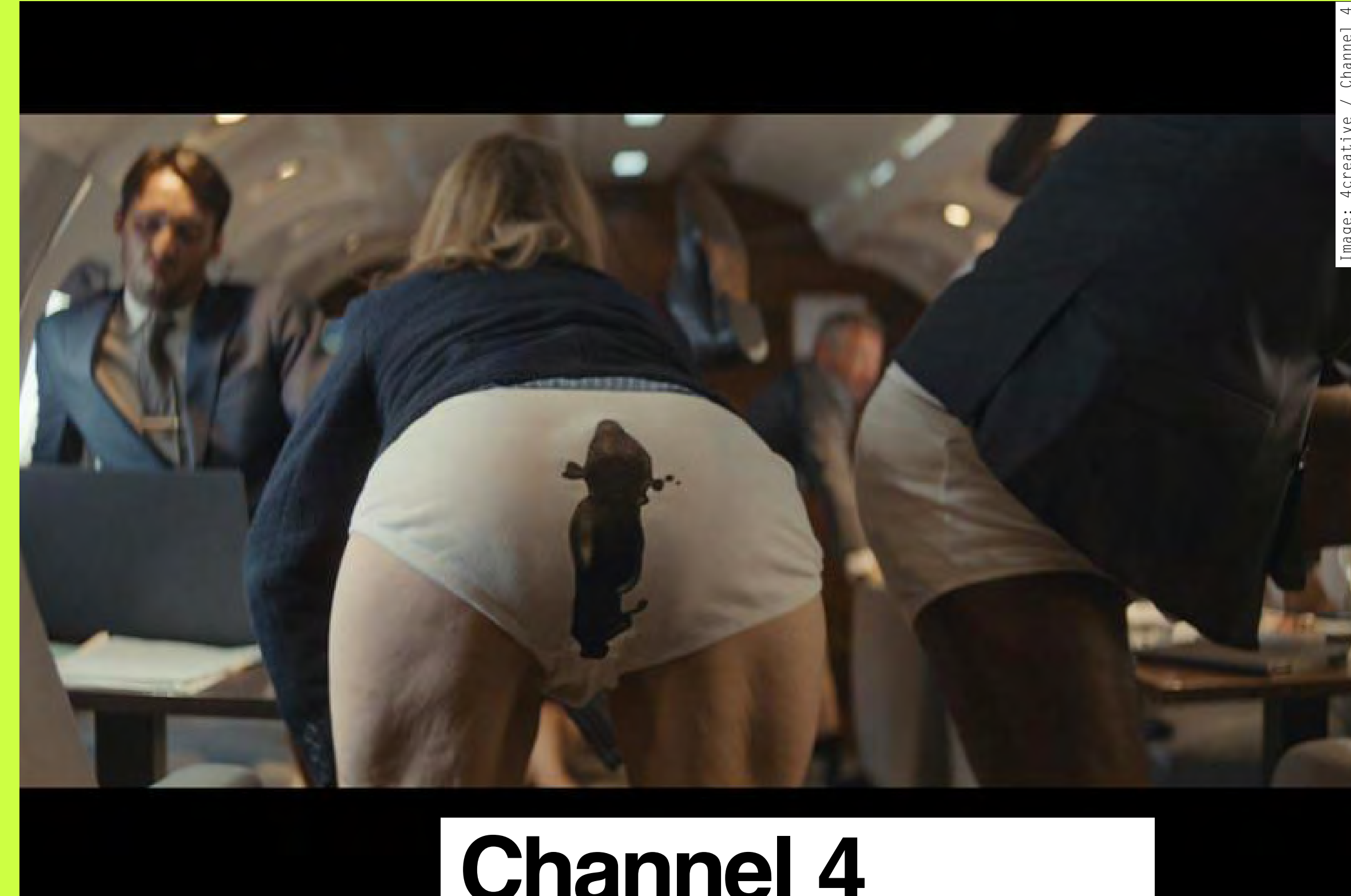


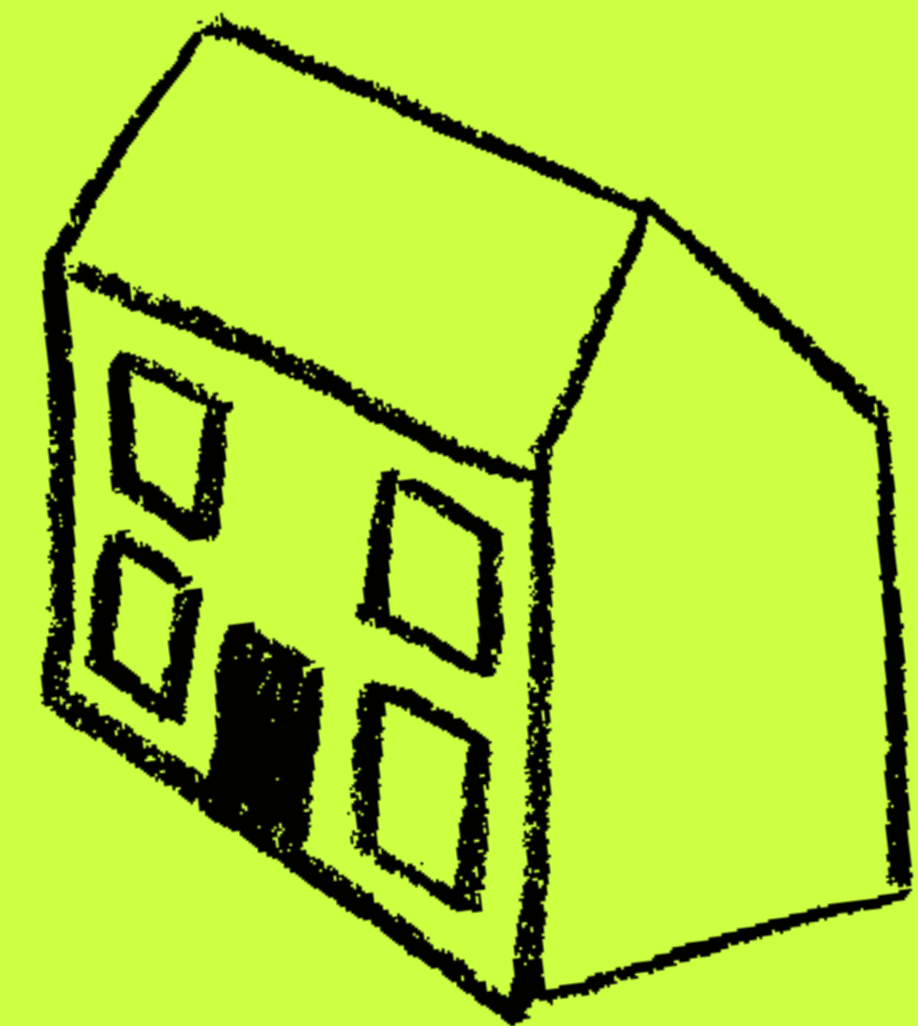
Image: 4creative / Channel 4

Channel 4 Carbon skid marks

Channel 4's advert to promote their climate week definitely evoked an emotion - whether humour or disgust. It went out there to cause trouble, knowing people would complain, but also importantly knowing it would get people talking.

Unshakeable feelings

Bring it home



Humans are fundamentally wired to seek comfort in familiarity.

We hunted in packs, foraged what we knew we could eat. Familiarity is a heuristic for safety and survival, deeply rooted in our evolutionary past and our core.

This is still true of how we interact with the world today. When the world feels unstable and uncertain, it's all too tempting to retreat rather than adapt.

It's especially true of the huge global problems that feel beyond our control.

So, instead of asking people to embark on vast, uncharted waters, or bamboozle them with clever statistics that don't relate to their own lived experiences - let's sail a little closer to home.

Connecting an issue to something people are familiar with and already care about, in a way that's familiar to how they normally receive and process information not only creates lasting empathy, it brings positive change more easily within reach.

BBK Bihar ‘Choose Tomorrow’

Basque-based banking foundation BBK created a hyper-real sculpture of a young girl’s face, submerged in a river, to force people to face the feeling of climate anxiety. Designed to submerge as the tides ebbed and flowed, ‘Bihar’ (‘tomorrow’ in Basque) was a metaphor for how society can sink our youth - as well as keep them afloat. Whilst visually arresting, the statue provided more than just shock value: it transported you to share this girl’s perspective whilst demonstrating the real consequences of our actions in our day-to-day lives.



Image: LLYC / BBK

Renault Plug Inn

Renault’s Plug Inn tackled EV range anxiety through the warm hospitality of rural France. An innovative app connected French drivers to homeowners with private charging points, making it easy to find and reserve a charger whilst the charging owners were financially incentivised to provide juice to fellow EV enthusiasts. Whilst travellers waited for their vehicles to recharge, they spent money at local shops, cafés and restaurants - turning complex infrastructure problems into an open-armed solution.

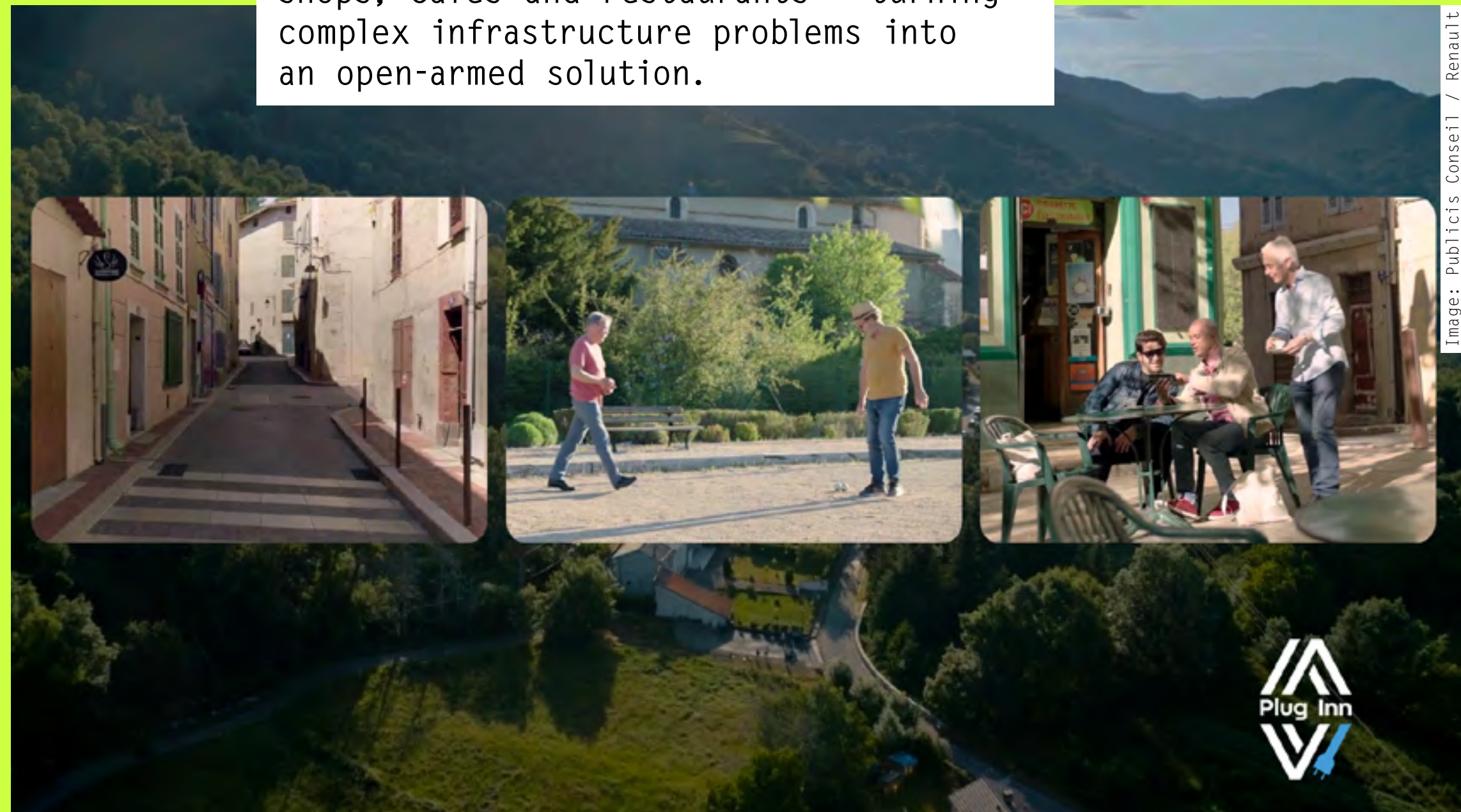


Image: Publicis Conseil / Renault



9 ways to drive more impact through emotion

Deeper feelings

Remember, sustainability in itself is not a feeling. Leaning into it can feel dry, technical and only appeal to surface level emotions.

Go deeper:

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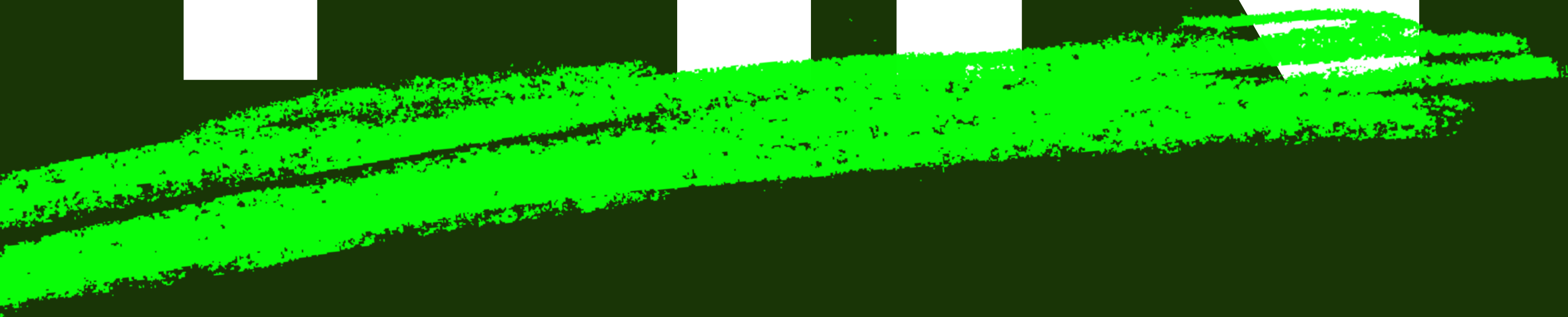
Get sticking:

Tip 01 Steal from anything, but	Tip 01 Face the fear	Tip 01 Drive impact with imagery
Tip 02 Talk about anything, but	Tip 02 Give lightness to the darkness	Tip 02 Cause trouble
Tip 03 Don't talk at all, act	Tip 03 Get visceral	Tip 03 Bring it home

A final word

Imagine a world where it wasn't the Superbowl or Christmas that stood as the tentpole for creative excellence, where communications vie for your attention through the heartstrings they pull or the belly laughs they offer. Imagine if it was COP29, Climate Week or the next UN Climate Change Conference. A moment where brands would line up to share the impact they had made, the sustainable innovation that would change behaviour forever or an ask from their Governments. Each in a way that reached in and touched every one of us. Stayed with us. Changed things.

FIN





Anthesis guides clients to sustainable performance. We are the world’s leading purpose driven, digitally enabled, science-based activator. Our solutions sit at the intersection of sustainability and creativity.

How we arrive at progress

Brand & Communications	Carbon Projects & Offsetting	Education & Engagement
Environmental Management	Environmental, Social, Governance	Innovation & Capital
Nature	Net Zero & Decarbonisation	Purpose Strategy
Reporting	Social Impact & Human Right	Circular Business Models, Sustainable Products, Packaging & Waste
Supply Chain Sustainability & Responsible Sourcing	Sustainable Finance & Transactions	

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