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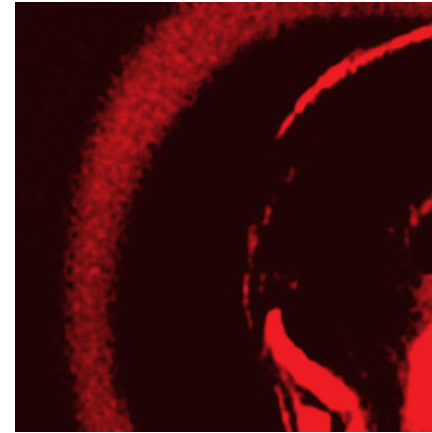
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CARBON

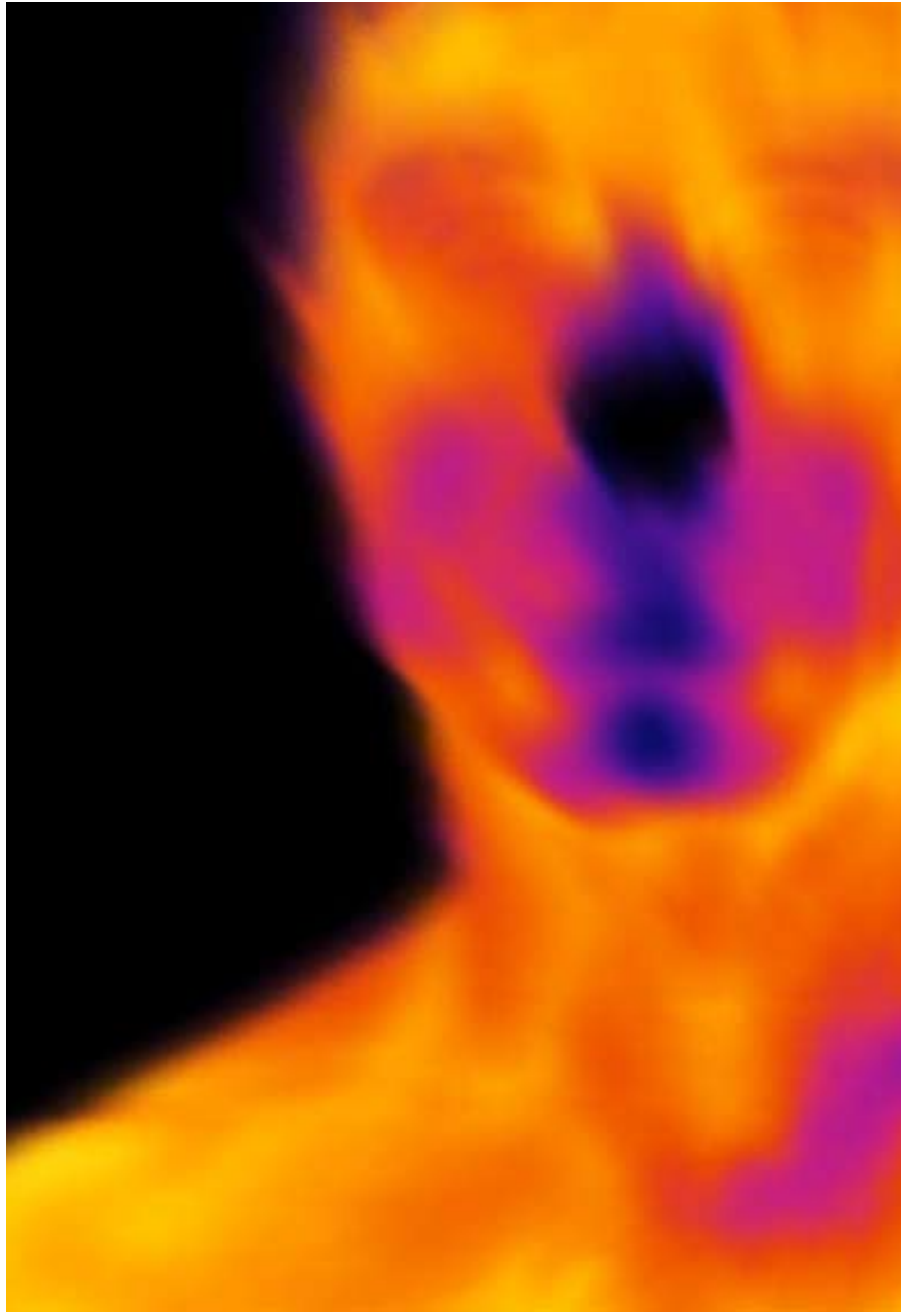
BASED

LIFEFORMS



Hands up all those trekkies that can recall Spock using that particular reference when talking about aliens, you know the line “Captain, the ships scanners are picking up a large number of carbon based life forms”.

These ‘lifefoms’ nearly always ended up looking a lot like us but just in an interesting shade of blue or in serious need of an all-over waxing. In the last year or so the word carbon has become an increasingly weighty element, and is being linked to every aspect of our modern lifestyles.



Slightly ironic that although the term carbon based refers to us and other living creatures at a molecular level, the carbon element has also become the element that most typifies our modern way of life.

If we consider just a snippet of our daily routine, from our electric alarm clock going off in the morning, switching on the bed side light, filling the kettle, popping a few slices of bread in the toaster, stepping into the shower, in this small journey we have used services which all contribute carbon, or more accurately, carbon in the form of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.

This first part is pretty much indisputable even to the few remaining nay Sayers who continue to flag up previous warming periods in the earths history as evidence that this current warming is consistent with the natural cycle of things.

The big story is obviously that this warming, carbon induced or otherwise, is going to have a major effect on the planet with rising sea levels, droughts, storms, flooding etc.

Kyoto was the first concerted effort to do something to stem the swelling flood of carbon that was following in the wake of a world that was becoming increasingly wealthier, consuming more and more thereby generating more carbon.

Now by this stage you're probably wondering what a bunch of designers are doing masquerading as environmentalists, apart from the stereotype that we're all a bunch of woolly jumper wearing beardies (distinguishable in that ours are generally black merino and theirs the itchy Arran style). This issue is not really about pushing the case for us to all turn luddite and go back to living in trees but to look at what impact this will have on the way we all do business. [□](#)



Designer Recognition Test

## CARBON ALCHEMY

Carbon has become a major buzz word, creating new terms like carbon footprint, carbon trading, carbon dollars, carbon economy and carbon offsetting. The concepts of carbon trading, carbon tax and carbon dollars may still seem a long way off but its here today and is already creating shockwaves throughout government and business. The idea that economies may be based on a substance that we actually create more of each day and doesn't look like ever becoming scarce, is in itself an oddity, as previously we have always based it on finite elements such as gold or more recently oil. Switching to a carbon economy has numerous implications and its probably easier to think of it in terms of an energy economy, where the important ratio is that of energy generated to amount of carbon created. This efficiency ratio will have a direct cost comparison, firstly in terms of the cost of energy and secondly in that the carbon will also cost. This carrot and stick system is what is being largely endorsed by most first world economies.


The issues with this kind of policy for Australia (and also the US) are that our ratio is not good. The cost of energy here is at least 50% less than paid in Europe and this has had a major impact in shaping the business landscape in Australia.

Large energy users and heavy polluters now have to face the prospect of a very heavy double whammy as energy costs spiral upwards and carbon taxes look set to hit them south of the belt by potentially taxing them on a number of fronts. Firstly they will be charged on the energy they consume, as this is largely from coal fired Power Stations, and then also on the other input and outputs that generate their own carbon footprints.

There are a whole host of negative effects that I could highlight but personally I like a dash of optimism in my poisoned chalice, so some good news, there is hope and there are opportunities. We as designers (AKA beardy jumper wearers) have added the idea of sustainability to our briefing documents, and for us

sustainability also has a dollar value, as we're often spending your money. The basic premise for us is that in designing a new store, a new barbecue, a new bottle or a new anything we know that there is a bottom line that needs to be considered. The ability to use design to help sell a product or encourage people into a store is not divorced from looking at the costs of how we achieve this, so to us the idea of carbon costing is not a difficult concept. The standard response of "yeah, I'd love it to be greener but its more expensive" is now no longer true.

## 2 FEET 1 PRINT

Consumers are now far more aware of the concept of a carbon footprint as they now have one and this footprint is effected by their buying decisions. 



Hurricane - grey water product and Omo small and mighty, logistically green.



KYOTO SpinMatic - washes everything greener!




This has long been the case in the white goods industry, where the on-going water restrictions have reinforced the connection between product efficiency and environmental sustainability as well as often having the parallel consumer friendly benefit of being quieter in operation.

This particular market has also spawned, new laundry products, such as Hurricane from Colgate-Palmolive, which is a fairly recent entry into this quite crowded market. Hurricane's key USP is that the chemicals used in the product are safe and biologically degradable enough for the waste water to be used on your garden. Having a USP of this nature also shows that the product has some green credentials meaning that the packaging ideally should be sympathetic to this and be made from recycled materials and/or be easy to recycle or in some cases even be compostable. The other innovative product in this category is the Unilever OMO 'small & mighty' laundry detergent. This pack initially created by Unilever in the US, was highlighted by Walmart as being the epitome of packaging design for their new scoring system, which looks at the products impact and cost throughout the supply chain.

The small & mighty design was a brave decision by Unilever as the typical brief for detergents is based on area blocking for brand dominance and size impression, both of which are hard asks of a product that's a third of the size of its competitor pack. The success of this product also highlighted the real need to educate consumers and also to put in place recognised standards.

### NEW ECO - WASHES GREENER!

The gap between government and industry certification has made it all too easy for some companies to freeloader on the eco-friendly bandwagon, by merely playing with appropriate imagery and terminology.

Greenwashing is where a company intentionally misleads consumers by manipulating some of the facts, ignoring others and generally giving the product(s) a bit of a spin in the Greenwasher, so they come out as green and natural as freshly cut grass. This approach, although negative in that it confuses consumers and can lead to cynicism, is also a sign that a trend is being established and that with proper certification, the freeloaders will soon have to put up or shut up to stay on board. 

It's worthwhile saying that Unilever's decision to make such a radical change in direction, is quite unusual amongst the global players where risk has only negative connotations and where innovation is, in the words of John Locke "...always suspected, and usually opposed, without any reason but because they are not already common.". The normal arrangement is that large companies who rely on consumer trends to influence their developments will follow behind the instigators of the trends. The innovators and trendsetters will typically have been driven by a far more personal viewpoint and so tend to have a sharper focus and proposition, basically because the edges haven't been chipped off to make it safe and sanitised.

The delivery of truly green products needs just two things, firstly the drive to be green and secondly the knowledge of what is green. The drive part is for some the easy part as the knowledge can be bought. There are numerous consultancies being created to offer just this very service. The term 'Life Cycle Analysis' (LCA) is becoming a fairly ubiquitous term in the current green jargon, but what it means is that all of a product's energy input and carbon outputs will be measured, in

much the same way that we measure the financial inputs and outputs of a product to understand the real cost and margin of profitability. The LCA calculations are fairly complex but are becoming simpler as the more and more of the related logistical elements, component parts, ingredients or any other necessary input is measured and given a figure.

### POINT SCORING

WalMart have created their own system, which is by no means perfect and by no means universal in application, but does give a good insight into the various levels of their business that they measured to develop their 'packaging scorecard'. The scorecard is sent out to suppliers, allowing them to score their products, see how they fare and work on the problem areas to improve their performance.

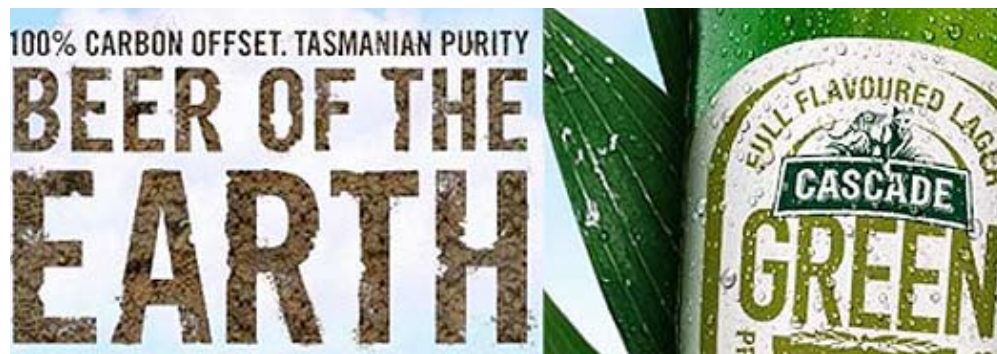
In theory, this partially symbiotic relationship gives value to both groups in financial and sustainable terms, allowing each to also claim much valued green cred from consumers.

However, it's not all positive, design by equation only has one outcome, uniformity. Shopping row upon row of brick



WalMart POS - pushing their - 'save money - live better' message.






shaped packs within a brick shaped and anonymous supermarket to then drag it out to the beige Volvo does tend to end with me waking up screaming. So be warned, unless you can really dress up a brick, like the Water Cube in Beijing or make it iconic with your brand i.e. Volvo, I'd suggest keeping shape as a weapon in your armoury for the foreseeable future.

### GREENING THE AMBER NECTAR

Recently in Australia there has been the launch of 2 new low carbon beers, 'Barefoot Radler' and Cascade 'Green', developed by Lion Nathan and the Cascade Brewery (owned by the Fosters Group). The beers have been created to offer an environmentally safe beer so that drinkers can enjoy their beer without any of that nasty finger wagging stuff from those smug hippy types in the corner, sipping their dolphin friendly real ale. The carbon neutral status of these beers has been certified by the Federal Government's Greenhouse Friendly scheme.

The neutral status was largely gained by offsetting the emissions by buying up carbon credits and the remainder through

improvements in the manufacturing process. These are both specific products and do not reflect the companies other beers, although one would imagine that any efficiencies would be made universal. Coopers, a family owned South Australian brewery has taken a broader and more challenging approach of 'greening' the whole company, without the use of carbon offsetting and without certification. It is therefore interesting to consider which of these beers would be considered 'greener' in the minds of consumers, as Coopers have no certification. Neither of these companies could accurately be accused of 'green-washing', but there are clearly major differences in their approach. 



As with all communication, the content, context and delivery all influence the meaning, so our perception of enforced and recognised standards means that most consumers would consider the Cascade and Lion Nathan products as being more green and perhaps by way of a halo the entire brand.

So, the perception is truth analogy still appears to hold true, and with the newly elected Government still undecided about which route to take on the carbon tax front, this analogy is equally applicable. They know the challenges we face and they also know that the cost of inaction will merely increase the impact, but to a public who have been battered by increased petrol and fuel costs, the issue closest to them is probably making the next mortgage repayment or managing their other

debt repayments while still enjoying the nicer things in life, such as eating.

### EVOLVING TO CARBON AGE MAN

Today's consumer is faced with a number of challenging decisions, finances are tight and the end of the world is nigh, so what are manufacturers and retailers going to do to make shopping less of an ecologically guilty pleasure? Firstly they need to be aware of how they are perceived, are they saints or sinners in consumers eyes, can they do better and are their consumers willing to pay more for the pleasure of salving their conscience? If the answer is no, it doesn't mean that the consumers don't care enough it just means that they'd like to care but they are unable to justify the additional expense. This scenario

has been encountered by many large brands, and they have reacted by looking internally for methods of cutting cost, or like Unilever's 'Small and Mighty', change the game so that they can reduce cost and promote this as a consumer benefit. For most companies success is only going to come from shaking off convention, re-evaluating themselves and their place in the market and being open to new thinking.

The last point I'd like to make is that although change is a scary word, change is already here with more on the way, and those that jump into it with eyes on a landing spot are going to do far better than those that are pushed blindly along by market forces and legislation. ▣

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Evolution or a typical queue at Coles/Woolies?

