

OPINION

Ooh Media and the anti-renewables billboard: A lesson in greenwashing

Last week, Ooh Media appeared to bolster its green credentials by removing an anti-renewables billboard - only for it to be revealed that the campaign had already run its course. TrinityP3's founder and global CEO Darren Woolley explains why this is a cautionary tale for advertisers.

February 17, 2025 9:56
by **DARREN WOOLLEY**



See Ooh Media's response to the billboard blowup here.

Across the advertising industry, from marketers to media owners, there is a growing focus on more sustainable practices. The real challenge arises when industry players fail to live up to their promises.

Or worse, go further and dig themselves a giant billboard hole...



Last week Ooh was called to account on LinkedIn. Despite being a founding member of Ad Net Zero, Ooh Media chose to run a billboard that declared: 'Renewables cost the Earth - Dollars and Destruction'. The billboard was a paid political message by Advance Australia, a conservative political lobby group funded by businesses, including the mining and fossil fuel industries.

The billboard first came to industry attention on LinkedIn last Tuesday, when Mike Spirkovski, managing partner and co-founder of the creative communications and sustainability company Rethink Everything, **shared the photograph along with the details of the billboard**, including its location in the Hunter Valley (a key seat in the upcoming Federal Election).



Mike Spirkovski · 2nd Managing Partner & Co-Founder Rethink Everything / Gues...
6d · Edited · 🌐

+ Follow ...

To say I was taken aback when I saw this billboard is an understatement.

As someone working in communications and sustainability, it certainly caught my attention.

This billboard, which criticises the environmental impact of renewables, stands in the middle of a massive construction site spanning floodplains and farmlands in Tarro, NSW, near the old Oak factory at Hexham. This is part of the M1 freeway extension, a project that has required extensive land clearing. The irony is hard to miss.

Adding to that irony, this site is not far from the Hunter Valley, one of NSW's major coal mining regions. Large-scale open-cut coal mining in places like Singleton, Muswellbrook, and the Upper Hunter has significantly impacted farmland and local ecosystems.

For full context, and after some research in tracking down the campaign, this billboard appears to be part of a broader campaign questioning the perceived economic and environmental costs of renewable energy, likely targeting the proposed Newcastle offshore wind project. I've linked a video in the comments and will be watching it to better understand the perspectives behind this message.

More to come on this, I'm sure of it!

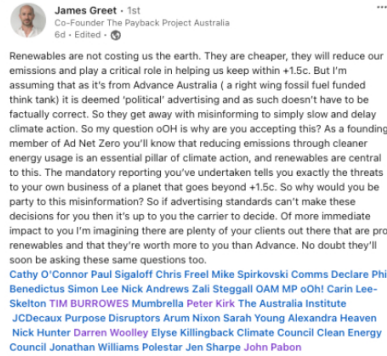


Denise Shrivell and 88 others

34 comments · 5 reposts



That same day, James Greet, co-founder of The Payback Project Australia, shared Mike's post, tagging Ooh Media's CEO Cathy O'Connor, group sales director Chris Freel, and other industry stakeholders (full disclosure: I was one of those tagged).



The swift response the next day by Ooh reinforced their commitment to an open media platform supporting free speech that complies with content standards, political advertising rules and broader advertising guidelines, but following an "internal review" and given their "strong commitment to sustainability and reducing our operational impact on the planet", Ooh removed the advertisement.

It looked to the outside world like Ooh was taking a moral stand – one that aligned with their values and previous public statements. And their response was met with broad industry support with comments supporting the action and praising Ooh's move to remove the billboard, in line with their public position on sustainability within their own organisation.

Let's unpack the response from Ooh regarding their right to run the billboard.

The new [AANA Environmental Claims Code](#) released late last year, states: "Advertisers have an obligation to be truthful in their claims and must not mislead or deceive consumers about the environmental benefits of their products and services."

However, as this is also a political advertisement (and note it had an authorisation statement on the billboard), it is exempt from the need to comply with the industry guidelines. It is also exempt from the need to comply with the Australian Consumer Law Act for misleading and deceptive representations. So, Ooh is correct in that they did not breach current legislation or industry guidelines in running the ad for their client, Advance Australia.

At first glance, it was good to see an organisation like Ooh walk the talk regarding sustainability and addressing the existential threat posed by the climate crisis. While 97 percent of actively published climate scientists agree that humans are causing global warming and climate change, polls show that the number of Australians who believe this has fallen to just 60 percent last year. This situation will only be addressed through education and factual information. It sounds like a job for the media, advertising, and the wider communications industry.

Then last Friday, four days after Spirkovski's LinkedIn post, [Guardian Australia's Weekly Beast](#) media column revealed that: "According to Advance Australia, which paid for the billboard, the billboard was only scheduled to run until 9 February, the day before Spirkovski posted about it on LinkedIn and two days before Ooh!! said it had removed it."

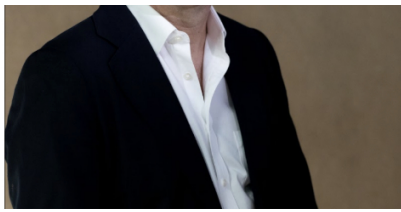
Yep you read that right. Advance Australia had the advertising they paid for run, Ooh got paid and then only, with the client's campaign completed and a backlash starting online, decided to earn the praise and adoration of those in the industry who genuinely care about sustainability.

And while it is easy to say that their response was spin, or putting a positive perspective on the situation, something we do every day in advertising, I cannot help feeling misled and deceived by their response. I am sure many others will feel similarly.

Media, advertising, and communications hold incredible power to shape public opinion and foster positive change. This is why we turn to the industry for leadership and vision. We champion initiatives like [Ad Net Zero and celebrate when they are supported by industry players](#) such as [Arnott's](#), [Dentsu](#), [Domain](#), [Foxtel Media](#), [Google](#), [GroupM](#), [IPG](#), [Mediabrand](#)s, [JCDecaux](#), [Lion](#), [Meta](#), [Nestlé](#), [News Corp Australia](#), [Nine](#), [Nova](#), [Omnicom Media Group](#), [Publicis Groupe](#), [QMS Media](#), [SBS](#), [Val Morgan Group](#), [Yahoo](#), and, of course, [Ooh Media](#).

All I can say is please, don't let us down and let's hope other members learn from Ooh's mistakes.





Darren Woolley

Editor's note: Mumbrella has changed the way it deals with company names. House style is now to use standard proper noun capitalisation on all names regardless of brand typography. Brand typography may be retained in direct quotes from releases.

RELATED CONTENT



Changes at Ooh Media as Neil Ackland steps away from chief marketer role
NEWS



QMS picks up nine Transport for NSW digital OOH assets
FYI

Keep up to date with the latest in media and marketing
your email ... SUBSCRIBE

GOT A TIP?

topics ADVANCE AUSTRALIA BILLBOARD DARREN WOOLLEY OOH MEDIA OOHIMEDIA OUT OF HOME RENEWABLES TRINITYP3

f Share | Tweet | in Share

Comments: 13 ADD COMMENT

PayMe Project 18 Feb 25
Noticed the loudest voices in the room are often those who commercialise topics such as sustainability, with "advisory" services.
6

Reply
User ID not verified.

John Cavanagh 17 Feb 25
Advance Australia represents those of us who wish Australia to reach its potential and its people have all of the benefits this great land has to offer. There is a class of Australians who do not understand what it is to work for a living. They produce nothing but verbage. They are not farmers, miners, fishermen (sorry—persons),builders, doctors (medical), nurses, truck drivers, A.D.F personnel, or anybody who contributes to our society. Instead they stand on the sidelines and get great satisfaction, denigrating those who feed them, cloth them, provide fuel, transport, heat and comfort. These hypocrits eagerly accept all of the benefits of a modern society but don't have a clue as to how it is achieved. The anti nuclear crowd wouldn't have a clue as to the construction and operation of a power station, much less a nuclear one, but they are against it. What arrogant stupidity.
Johncavddg38@gmail.com
6

Reply
User ID not verified.

Tighten up the rules 17 Feb 25
We need independent media authorities. We need media owners held to account. Sadly the likes of Stokes and Murdoch et al appear to be fair too powerful to prosecute and our democracy is on a steep decline as a result it would seem. The recent debacle with the stunt by the Jewish lobby and Murdoch's Telegraph is sickening. Just imagine if a Guardian reporter tried that and got caught. There should be jail time for such an act.
4

Reply
User ID not verified.

me 17 Feb 25

As a believer of anthropogenic climate change, I find this righteous indignation problematic.

This billboard bears all the hallmarks of accepted practice in advertising – particularly the ‘catchy’ play on words. Its claims can be supported in some way – startup and transition costs likely carrying the weight of the argument. Bummer. But that’s how this comms industry thrives.

There is no ‘right’ to free speech here in Australia, but when you mute or deny expression of the opposing point of view, you end up with the cluster that is now taking place in the US as a reaction to your ‘good’ deeds.

If Ooh is genuinely repentant for their ‘mistake’, then I suggest they give equal time to the point of view as expressed by the above signatories.

Persuade instead of censor. Please.

 4

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Wrong target. 17 Feb 25

The irony is that oOh! have done more to decarbonise their company than pretty much any other media business.

 3

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Bill 17 Feb 25

What’s wrong with the billboard?

Minerals to build unreliaables are dug up just like they are dug up to build a coal fired power station.

Are the proponents of unreliaables implying that the likes of solar panels and wind turbines simply materialise, and no excavation, polluting or fossil fuel energy is used in, or, is a byproduct of their creation?

What a load of nonsense.

 2

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

The real issue 17 Feb 25

The truth in political advertising rules acting as a loophole to effectively legalise the spreading of purposeful misinformation is the real issue here I’d say

 10

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

James Greet 18 Feb 25

@Pay Me Project, since when did anyone working in this space be expected to do so for free? Interested in your rationale. More than happy to have this conversation, though perhaps remove the identity veil.

 1

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Mojo 18 Feb 25

Promoting falsehoods is never right. Unless it’s comedy “redbull gives you wings” “renewables cost more”.

 1

[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Anonymous 17 Feb 25

Get over yourselves. The commenters too.



[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Query 17 Feb 25

Are solar panels and wind turbines recycled at end of life? If not, what happens to them?



[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Gimpus McWillytits 17 Feb 25

You won't be here to see the fat potato in a hairy sack of wallowing goodness. Munch more socks on the daily syllabus. Cheerio pongo



[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

roger colman 17 Feb 25

This activist behaviour is why Donald Trump won the USA. Any body with a minimum of one brain cell knows that renewable energy costs a fortune. Just check your power bills. Everybody who studies science and economics knows that french nuclear power is the cheapest in Europe and the French often sell this clean electricrty to other idiot EU states like clouded Germany . That ad is correct, cannot be criticised , and the beat up reflects the disintigration of rational thought in western civislation.



[Reply](#)

User ID not verified.

Have your say

Continue with LinkedIn

or

Comment anonymously

Your comment will be marked as unverified

Name

Comment

[SUBMIT COMMENT](#)

LATEST



'Closed door consultation' over Youtube age exemption drives Meta, Tiktok wild



Good data: What everyone gets paid everywhere



Live Nation's creative and experiential agency rebrands



'No more speaking for free': Less Than 10% F*ck That and Clems team up on unpaid work



Nespresso's 'Happy Hour' events tap into early morning shift

Mumbrella

[FIND OUT MORE](#)

PUT YOUR BRAND
IN THE SPOTLIGHT

REACH OVER 50,000 MEDIA & MARKETING PROFESSIONALS