

# Green marketers should take cue from ten commandments

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Companies offering "green" products and services can improve sales by making simple shifts in marketing language, new research from The University of Texas at Austin and the University of South Carolina has demonstrated.

The key findings, to be published in a forthcoming issue of the [Journal of Marketing Research](#), hinge on an aspect of consumer decision-making which might seem trivial at first.

Suppose you were narrowing down a list of potential cars to buy. Would it matter whether you narrowed the choices down by eliminating alternatives that do not interest you, or by identifying alternatives that do interest you? Logically, it should make no difference how you go about the narrowing down process.

"We find that it makes a big difference, and we find this difference over and over, across different product categories," said Julie Irwin, associate professor of marketing at the McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin, who co-authored the work with Rebecca Naylor, assistant professor of marketing at the Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina.

For example, the researchers asked consumers to sort actual shampoo bottles, either by putting them into an "interested" bin or a "not interested" bin. When faced with a "not interested" task the consumers paid much more attention to whether the shampoo companies perform

animal testing or not. In the "interested" task consumers all but ignored this information.

"We show that exclusion is more compatible with moral reasoning than inclusion, even though logically they should not differ," Irwin said. "This is because we tend to think of morality in terms of 'don'ts,'" Irwin said, noting that many of the Ten Commandments are expressed negatively ("thou shalt not") as are many of our other moral rules such as "first, do no harm."

What does this research mean for consumers who want to act ethically? When faced with buying choices they should make the task one of exclusion: "Which choices do I not want?" Doing so will put you more naturally in a frame of mind to consider what really matters to you.

Similarly, marketers should encourage an exclusion frame of mind. Advertising can use phrases such as "say no to wasteful cars" and "no need to even consider buying clothes made using child labor." Consumer advocacy groups can provide lists of options not to consider: companies that are not green, companies that violate human rights, etc.

These simple shifts should, these researchers show, lead to substantially increased preference for green and other ethical products.

Source: University of Texas at Austin ([news](#) : [web](#))

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