

CONNECT

Innocent Is Found GUILTY

2095 EA

What on earth were they thinking when they made this advertisement?

1 Innocent Drinks recently had an advertisement banned. The Advertising Standards Authority banned the ad because it claimed that to drink Innocent drinks – bought in plastic bottles – was good for the planet.

2 So, what did Innocent have to say for themselves? Why did they believe they lived up to their name? What were they *thinking* when they made this advertisement?

3 Innocent told the Advertising Standards Authority [ASA], the UK's advertising watchdog about their green credentials as part of their attempt to defend their advertisement. The ASA didn't swallow this defence. Instead, it ordered Innocent not to show the ad again.

As explained by The Guardian in [Innocent TV ad banned for claiming its drinks help environment](#), the ASA's view was that the advertisement could be interpreted as saying that buying Innocent's products has a positive environmental impact.

This seems a reasonable conclusion by the ASA, given that *IS* what the ad's storyline - terrible though that storyline was – said. I'll come back to that later.

So, what ARE Innocent's green credentials? They run factories on renewable energy - that's great. The company has reduced its water usage by 75% - that's also great. Playing devil's advocate, might I suggest - given that the company is mainly owned by Coca-Cola – that it is reasonably *expected* to operate to high ecological standards?

It can afford to - and it has the opportunity to set a great example. It also enjoys the benefits of a *green* image.

Innocent's green claims didn't convince the ASA, however. To be able to advertise their drinks as having a net-positive environmental impact, the ASA told them that they needed to prove that the *drinks* are green. Green, that is, not just in colour but in the environmental sense - and green in terms of their full product life-cycle. From the *berry* to the *burying* of the bottles the drinks are sold in, in other words. Innocent couldn't provide such proof. Selling drinks in bottles that include non-recycled plastic couldn't have helped. The ASA concluded that the drinks' impact on the environment was negative.

4 Other arguments by Innocent didn't work too well, either, with the ASA. One was that their ad was "a call to action" to its customers not to harm the planet. A call to action, by a company that uses non-recyclable plastic in its bottles – have I mentioned this? Despite this, Innocent clearly think people would like to be told – by them – that they – ordinary people, that is – need to save the planet. As well as this looking a lot like *greenwashing*, a small flaw in this particular argument was spotted by the eagle-eyed ASA. It was - Innocent's call to action just *happened* to be advertising their products at the same time. Busted!

5 Perhaps it was being faced with the need to change their brand name to Guilty that made Innocent throw in a further argument – one that sounds a tad *coercive*.

It went like this - if the ASA banned their ad, it could have the effect of discouraging companies from taking action on, and communicating about, positive environmental action.

Ooh, Innocent - or could this idea have come from Coca Cola? – isn't that a bit *strong-arm*? Is it just me, or does this sound like a threat?

Along the lines of –

unless we're allowed to advertise without proving our claim that buying our drinks saves the planet, we'll stop trying to improve the environment?

6 The ASA ruled that the ad, as they reported in [ASA Ruling on Innocent Ltd t/a Innocent](#), drew a strong association between Innocent Drinks and a positive impact on the environment.

As I said, this is a reasonable conclusion, given that is what the ad said. Now, I can understand why the ad - a mercifully short animated film, in which people sing about messing up the planet until an otter leads the way with a new song about "fixing up the planet" – struck the ASA as being *in bad taste*. It's because it was – in every sense.

I have to say that, although the ASA can be fierce - even in the face of Coca Cola - it is not infallible. It's more the case that when it is wrong, it is not clear to whom - if anyone – the ASA is accountable, being run and funded as it is by the advertising industry.

And get things wrong it does, for it appears that the ASA has not noticed that Innocent still say on their [own website](#) that their drinks are good for the planet?

To be accurate, this statement appears in search results for its website rather than on its website. Even so, it does look as if the ASA has erred - and this is not the first time.

There are a few examples of times when the ASA has made absurd, unfair or

just plain wrong rulings. See the list at the end, under **Further Reading**.

- 7 To be clear, the ASA's judgement was not made based on the Innocent Drinks advertisement's artistic quality. It was made on the basis that Innocent did not have a clear basis for their planet-saving claims and were unable to substantiate those claims.

I said I would return to that ad in terms of its quality – or lack thereof. First, can anyone answer some questions?

What were Innocent trying to say in their advertisement?

That the world has a pollution problem - and a problem with access to real food that keeps us healthy? Do they think we don't know that already? What's wrong with just "Buy our drinks – they're yummy!"

Does Innocent need to change its company name?

It isn't just that Innocent has been found guilty. I'm more concerned that the company's future advertisements could also fall foul of the ASA – because the company name is not Innocent but innocent. And the drinks are not innocent – the ASA has ruled on that.

Finally - should Innocent have a stiff word with their marketing team?

Because, even without being found GUILTY judgement, they should be embarrassed about being associated with an advertisement such as this. Not because of any false claims, greenwashing, or misleading messaging. Because, rather, it is an insult to a great British tradition – the tradition of entertaining and memorable advertisements.

Many of these ads have been for drinks, including coffee – instant though it was - and certain intoxicating drinks. One such memorable advertisement, from the Land of Ago, as Stephen King calls the past in his time-travel novel "11.22.63" - 1971, to be precise - featured a song called "[I'd like to teach the world to sing.](#)"

The product being advertised was none other than Coca Cola - the signature drink from the company that is now a major owner of Innocent. The ad had a theme of global unity - according to Wikipedia, the South African government asked for a version without the black actors.

I am delighted to read that Coca-Cola refused that request.

I have no words to express the contrast between these two ads, fifty years apart – one for Coca Cola and the other for Innocent Drinks - except to say that the Innocent ad is poor.

We used to have *standards* in our adverts – it's time to bring those standards back.

Innocent is guilty of breaching those standards – not only by their ad being woke, but by it being terrible.

What were they thinking?

CONNECT'S Maxim and Oath

Connect is only interested in finding and sharing the TRUTH.

In search of that TRUTH, we only pose questions – we have no answers.

By: Helen King

Source: Tetbury CONNECT: [Magazine](#)

3 [LINK:](#) The Guardian: Innocent TV ad banned for claiming its drinks help environment

6 [LINK:](#) Advertising Standards Authority: ASA Ruling on Innocent Ltd t/a Innocent

6 [LINK:](#) Innocent Drinks' website

7 [LINK:](#) I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing – Coca Cola commercial, 1971 [2020 restoration]

7 [LINK:](#) I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing [In Perfect Harmony] – Wikipedia article

FURTHER READING

6 [LINK:](#) Advertising Standards Authority: Ruling - Dyson Ltd

6 [LINK:](#) Advertising Standards Authority: Ruling - HJ Heinz Foods UK Ltd

6 [LINK:](#) BBC: Tottenham warned over Champions League stadium advertisement

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