

# MEASURING THE IMPACT ON THE PLANET OF THE WORK WE DO FOR CLIENTS

Measuring the environmental impact of the creative work that agencies do for clients is an issue that the industry is just beginning to grapple with, including work on advertised emissions. In the meantime we have been exploring how to measure the income we generate from campaigns that are 'planet positive', as opposed to 'neutral' (a lot of our social impact campaigns fit into this definition) or part of the environmental problems we need to address as an industry.

Over the last few months we have been refining our methodology and beginning to apply it to our campaigns. What we have learnt and developed is by no means perfect – there are many nuances and conundrums still to be ironed out. But given the urgency of the situation and the pace and scale of change required we are hoping that we are at a 'good enough' starting point for us to set measurable and actionable targets for creating planet-positive behaviour change and putting the power of advertising behind the transition towards a planet-positive way of living.

We are publishing this thought piece because we are keen to share our findings with the sector, invite feedback, comments and builds on our progress so far and hope that others will join us in this journey.

## What makes a planet positive campaign?

We are looking at our campaigns through three lenses: Brand, Category and Product

1. Brand – is the brand/company contributing to a reduction in GHG emissions in line with the pathway that limits global warming to 1.5°C? If not, what degree of confidence do we have that the company will transition to this trajectory?  
Measures/evidence:
  - GHG emissions: Has the company set a 1.5°C aligned target with the SBTi? And are they reporting sufficient progress against that target? In the future we anticipate that this will evolve to include regenerative impacts
  - Other planetary impacts: We are currently focussing on climate metrics in our planet approach, but other issues that impact on planetary boundaries (eg. water usage/quality, biodiversity, plastic pollution, etc) are clearly also very important – we will build these into our approach over time, collaborating with others to incorporate best practice indicators as they evolve
2. Category – even if the overall client brand is not, is the category inherently planet-positive? If not, what degree of confidence do we have that the category has the ability to transition to become planet positive in accordance with the scientific consensus? An example of this would be a brand that operates across multiple

categories, where some categories in the branded portfolio may be more able to align with the SBTi than others. Measures/evidence:

- GHG emissions: Have other companies in the category set a 1.5°C aligned target with the SBTi? Are those companies reporting sufficient progress against that target? Does our client have similar targets and demonstrate similar progress in this category?
  - Other planetary impacts: As mentioned above, we hope to incorporate these over time
3. Product - For a campaign to be defined as Planet Positive it must be able to demonstrate a provable reduction of negative impacts vs the market or previous iterations of a product or service or way of usage.
- Product/Service: e.g. less plastic in packaging, reduced water usage, shift to electric (vs petrol), circular production techniques, lower impact ingredients (plant based food). NB: The enhanced environmental credentials of the product or service do not need to be the focus of the communication.
  - Behaviour: e.g. the campaigns promote behaviours which reduce the environmental impact of how we live (eg recycling, frequency of travel, mode of travel, water usage, plant based eating, use of renewables etc).

## **Scoring**

In our pilot we have been using our 'Product' measure above to determine whether a campaign is planet-positive.

## **Applying a revenue measure**

We are applying an activity-specific revenue figure against each qualifying campaign and measuring this figure as a proportion of our overall campaign revenue. For example, if a campaign included the consumption of alternative milk in 20% of the communication, but not in the other 80%, we would apportion 20% of revenue from that campaign as planet positive.

M&C Saatchi Group is a group of businesses that operate across the communications and advertising spectrum. As well as producing campaigns for clients, we undertake a range of other work including research, brand development and digital media placement. For now, we have taken the decision to apply this process and our revenue measure to campaigns only – both in terms of qualifying campaigns and overall campaign revenue.

## **Agency case study**

We have used our London Agency as an example of how this has worked in practice. Between 2021 and 2022 the percentage of revenue that our London Agency received from planet-positive campaigns versus campaigns that did not have a planet positive element more than doubled. These campaigns included overtly planet-related messaging, from

putting wind power at the front of the global clean energy agenda, to encouraging customers to adopt sustainable behaviours (e.g. the proportion of a brand campaign that included messaging around reusable cups, alternative milks, water efficiency, etc).

### **Related activities**

In order to refine our thinking on the above and understand how to better help our clients be part of the sustainability transition, we are also beginning to ask new clients for information on their environmental footprints. Our questions include:

- What are your main environmental impacts?
- What are you doing to reduce those impacts (please include data where possible)?
- Which products and services will need to be phased out to meet your climate goals, and when?
- Will this campaign help you reduce your GHG emissions or environmental impacts? If so, how?

In the future we would also like to explore how we should evaluate the level of advertising spend a brand invests in planet-positive campaigns to drive behaviour change - while avoiding straying into greenwashing territory.

### **Could we develop a similar approach to measure social impact?**

We believe we could - and would love to hear from others who have undertaken work in this area.

### **Advertised emissions**

Ad Net Zero is currently working on an initiative to understand and measure 'advertised emissions' and are developing a draft methodology. As a member of Ad Net Zero we are looking forward to further engagement in this area.