

# Advertising Ecosystem

Environmental campaigns offer an actionable model for cause marketing By Joe Mandese





Madison Ave. has been called upon to launch new products, resuscitate ailing brands, turn corporations around, and even help elect our nation's leaders. Now the ad industry is being tapped to help with what might well be the most daunting task ever: saving Planet Earth. The plea began earlier this year, when former Vice President Al Gore used the American Association of Advertising Agencies' Media Conference and Trade Show to kick off a major media blitz and public service effort supporting his global warming initiative.

"It is the most serious challenge that our civilization will experience," Gore told a roomful of media and advertising executives during his conference keynote in March. The executives also received a 10-minute preview of Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth," which, with a companion book, is part of a multiyear push designed to educate citizens and rally media support in hopes of changing behavior before it's too late.

"Mother Nature is knocking on our door," Gore pleaded, calling upon attendees to support his crusade. How they might help wasn't exactly clear. He alluded to a massive campaign spearheaded by the Advertising Council on behalf of a collective of environmental and faith-based organizations to combat the environmental threat, and beseeched the executives to match it "dollar for dollar" with pro bono contributions. Gore committed to contributing the profits from his movie and book to the effort, including a "large ad buy" he said would break in mid-April.

PHOTO: PAUL HARDY/CORBIS

## Green Media

Madison Ave.'s role in environmental causes isn't new. It goes back to the green media movement in the 1960s that spawned Earth Day, and public service announcements like the Ad Council's anti-littering spot featuring a Native American crying at the sight of heaps of roadside garbage.

MadAve later dabbled in so-called "green marketing" initiatives during the early 1990s, when major advertisers sought to embrace environmentally friendly marketing strategies in hopes they would both preserve the earth's ecology as well as corporate profits.

"We have to get this complicated information out to the American people. The news media simply does not work the way it used to," Gore said.

Exactly how the media industry should do that remains up for grabs. "An Inconvenient Truth" is certainly part of the solution, raising awareness among consumers and the media. In late March, Ogilvy & Mather broke a new public service campaign for Environmental Defense. The TV, radio, and Internet campaign, coordinated by the Ad Council, has a simple call to action: By taking even small steps, like switching from using incandescent light bulbs to energy-saving ones, individual households can help reduce global warming.

"It's clear that most people think global warming is real, so our mission was and is to get people to act," says Josh Tavlin, group creative director and a senior partner in charge of the campaign at O&M. "With so many messages appearing in the media about global warming, we needed a different way in. We need to jolt people a bit. To think that a child today will have to bear the consequences of our apathy in years to come should be

## "Al Gore has probably done the best going. He's using the media to create

shameful and scary. If this doesn't hit everyone right where it hurts, nothing will."

### Making Change

The big question is whether the same kind of public service ads that have reshaped consumer attitudes and behavior toward things like wearing seat belts, stopping friends from driving while drunk, or helping to prevent forest fires can do the job on a global scale.

An equally important question is whether big media will donate the time and space to get the message out broadly enough to influence attitudes and behavior. It's an old question for the public service sector, which relies on media handouts to promote thousands of causes ranging from the war on drugs to education and literacy.

But Gore's high-profile appeal appears to have inspired a groundswell of grass-roots initiatives within the media industry, including plans that would create long-term, sustainable business models that are based not simply on MadAve's penchant for public service, but on making environmentalism a commercially viable proposition.

"Al Gore has probably done the best job of anybody in a long time of getting the public interest going. He's using the media to create a general level of awareness to

But if Gore is right, we're losing the battle. Industrial practices, especially those that release greenhouse gases, are straining the biosphere and pushing the planet to the brink of ecological havoc. Glaciers are melting and waters are rising as quickly as ocean temperatures, threatening cataclysmic changes to the environment.

The problem, Gore said, is that much like the general public, the news media are in denial, and it's up to advertising professionals to take up the charge and do what they do best — inform, educate, persuade, and ultimately sell the idea that consumer behavior and public policies must change.

generate a societal change,” marvels Jason Heller, managing director of Horizon Interactive, the digital arm of media buying agency Horizon Media. Heller should know. He’s worked to develop a commercial marketplace around environmental issues in the hope that free enterprise can pick up where pro bono leaves off.

An avid environmentalist and underwater wildlife photography buff, Heller spends his free time — when he’s not pioneering in the world of digital media — chronicling changes in marine biology caused by commercialized fishing and local industrial practices in small island nations. Get him going on the subject and Heller will wax on about the devastation to sea turtles caused by poachers, or on the impact overfishing has had on various species of fish that are crucial to healthy marine environments.

### Doing Good With Media

Dubbed “Profit The Earth,” the business is separate from Heller’s role as a Horizon Media executive, but the business principles are the same: to tap the power of

**Deeper Love:** Jason Heller, managing director of Horizon Interactive, works to develop a commercial marketplace around environmental issues; a clown fish (below).



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commercial media to influence consumer behavior. In the case of PTE, Heller is influencing behavior that will protect the environment, especially local marine environments surrounding impoverished island nations.

“It’s a simple proposition,” explains Heller. “Nothing happens in this world unless somebody is making money from it. The idea is to use media to generate profits by doing things that benefit the earth.”

The idea isn’t unique. A number of commercial enterprises have emerged to generate profits from sustainable business models that directly preserve the earth. The ecotourism industry is booming, and profits from trips to the rain forests and other endangered ecologies are reinvested in preserving them. Eco-marketers like outdoor apparel maker Patagonia make buttons from shells harvested from rain forest trees and recycle disposable plastic bottles to create fiber for synthetic fleece garments.

Heller’s group plans to tap into local media opportunities to help sustain or replenish important marine habitats. That’s the goal of PTE’s pilot project, which would use conventional MadAve methods like sponsorship, signage, and media exposure to restore an artificial reef that has become a breeding ground for important marine species.

The reef, which was created when U.S. battleship USS





**If I Had a Hammer:**

*A pair of hammerhead sharks.*

Liberty was sunk off the coast of Bali, Indonesia, has become an important part of the marine environment, making it a popular diving destination and a key source of tourism revenues. But the wreck, now more than 50 years old, is decaying and is about to fall apart. Heller's solution is to procure a new vessel, tow it into the area, sink it, and make the whole process a media and sponsorship event.

"It's a small project," says Heller, pegging the cost of the sponsorship at about \$275,000. If successful, it would demonstrate a commercial model for sponsoring environmental initiatives. To justify its value, Heller says he doesn't simply want to rely on goodwill and social consciousness, but on the same measures used to establish ROI for conventional media buys.

"To make this sustainable, it has to have a positive, measurable ROI," says Heller, estimating that the \$275,000 sponsorship investment will generate at least \$1 million in media value from publicity surrounding the event alone.

If successful, the project would do more than simply preserve a popular diving attraction. It would help the world's fish population by creating a protected habitat where small fish could grow until they are big enough to swim in open waters. It would also sustain an important source of income for nearby Bali in a way that would encourage conservation. "When small island communities have their backs up against the wall, their only recourse is to exploit their environment, because it's the easiest way for them to make money," Heller explains.

## Tactical Media

Other groups are employing MadAve tactics, but at the local, grass-roots level, where they can have the most impact on threatened environments. Heller is working with a group called Rare Conservation to see if the commercial media approach can be applied to what has thus far been a pro bono effort. Backed by wealthy private donors, corporate underwriters, and contributions from local media, Rare Conservation establishes media programs in local communities to educate residents about endangered habitats or species and communicates concrete steps they can take to protect them.

Many of the campaigns borrow from trademark MadAve efforts, such as the Advertising Council's memorable Smokey Bear campaign. Instead of bears, Rare Conservation turns endangered species into spokes-critters, making them local celebrities and getting the community to rally for their support in programs dubbed "Rare Pride."

Rare's media buys are far more grass-roots than MadAve's slick approach, relying on buttons, posters, and guest appearances by a species' spokes-character — usually a person dressed up in an animal costume — in classrooms or at public events. But the branding and communications strategies are every bit as sophisticated as those used by the biggest agencies. In fact, Rare has begun working with Havas' Arnold Worldwide unit to accelerate the process, which could evolve into a new kind of environmental global "ad corps," says Rare Conservation President-CEO Brett Jenks.

"Media plays a key role in any social change effort, and it's a no-brainer to think about using media and advertising and marketing skills for causes that will help the planet be more healthy," says Jenks.

To date, Rare has implemented 80 different marketing campaigns in more than 40 countries. Efforts have successfully curtailed the elimination of rain forests and the use of dynamite fishing, and in one case have spurred the creation of a national park to help save endangered species.

"Just because they're grass-roots and they're targeting only a couple of hundred thousand people doesn't mean they're not meaningful," says Jenks. "In many ways, they can be more meaningful than mass advertising campaigns that reach a lot of people but don't necessarily change people's behavior."

Changing behavior, says Horizon's Heller, is what all these efforts have in common. "The important thing isn't who's doing them or how they work. The important thing is that they work," he says. "There's a big difference between what an Al Gore can do and what a Jason Heller can do, but we can all do our part." **M**