

Change the world.

Provokateur

Some see things and ask ‘why?’,  
others ask ‘why not?’...

**Provokateur is an ethical  
communications agency  
that asks ‘how?’**

How do we give apathy a kick up the ass?

How do we clean up politics?

How do we make saving the world feel good?

How do we mobilise a new generation?

How do we end hunger?

How do we get cars off the streets?

How do we save our forests?

How do we protect human rights?

How do we buy less – and live more?

How do we tackle climate change?

How do we change the world?

# Think again.

Over the last century we perfected the art of selling *stuff*, finding the emotional buttons to get us spending. With our finest creative and strategic minds we harnessed the tools of persuasion to the cause of consumption.

But shopping alone can't make the world go round. With the economy on its face and the environment on its knees, the old maxim, 'Everything's connected', is truer than ever. Solving these global challenges means joining the dots between people, environment, economy and values because today, we stand, or fall, together.

It's time for some re-thinking. The business sector, public sector and third sector face a new reality where sustainability, ethics and trust will become a powerful, even indispensable, currency.

The creative energy that shaped our consumer world must now help make a better world. But the emotional buttons will be different from those used to sell iPods and anti-wrinkle cream. The 'Because I'm Worth It' ethos won't work here and just as we need to take consumers into a new place, so we need to re-think how communications can make this happen.

This book is about the power of communication to do good things. It is for determined idealists and creative optimists who want to change our mental landscape for a better view of the world.

# What works?

The problem with communication, said one wise fellow, is the illusion it has occurred – and even that is no guarantee it's achieved anything.

Effective communication, on the other hand, should be a catalyst for action, influencing how we think and what we do. It's a chemistry of creativity, human insight, craft and strategic intelligence.

There's a whole spectrum of elements that makes this chemistry work – but there are eight in particular that will fuel the evolution of ethical communication. They're 'elements of change' and this book is about what they can do.



# QUESTION

Questions are good; they get us thinking... and re-thinking. While most communications are a one way street, and a pretty forgettable one at that, a question creates dialogue and makes us look closer. Whether stated or suggested, questions have a dynamic that can be provocative, engaging, surprising or subtle.

The best questions counter assumptions and challenge the status quo, because without this, we accept things as they are. Powerful ideas begin with simple questions and it's the same principle in communication; you question, you think; 'is this the right way?'... 'the best way?'... 'the only way?'.

## Daddy, what did YOU do?

A provocative invocation of the famous First World War propaganda poster equating the patriotic duty of national defence to the moral duty of climate defence. The campaign poster was later reprinted in The Ecologist.





**Economic Collapse**  
\$1 Trillion Bailout



**Climate Collapse**  
1 non-binding Treaty

Perhaps it's human nature that it takes catastrophe to arrive for us to act. Despite ample warnings of impending economic crisis, we lived in denial until the meltdown happened. And the price of delay? Businesses fail, unemployment soars and hundreds of billions are spent on an economic bailout. But this is a picnic compared to the full impact of climate change, where it will be lives and not jobs that are lost. The evidence couldn't be clearer and the stakes couldn't be higher, but there's precious little action. Waiting for catastrophe to arrive is not an option – the bailout must start now.

No environment = no economy

**enoughenough.org**

It's the environment, stupid.

### Economic Meltdown

Full page press ad for Enough's Enough juxtaposing the financial rescue of our broken economy with the vague intention to help our broken planet.

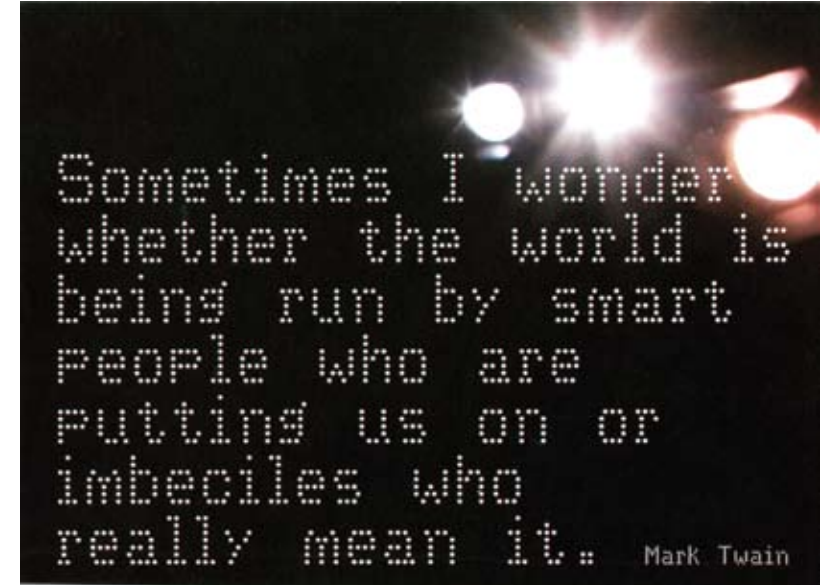


### Above: Charge or Release campaign

Campaign for civil rights organisation, Liberty, challenging the UK Government's proposals to extend the period of detention without trial.

### Right: Who's in Charge?

Against the unmistakeable silhouette of President George W Bush, Twain's observation has a piercing resonance in one of six postcards produced for Provokateur.





# DISRUPTION DISRUPTION

Opposing every force for change is the equal and opposite force of the status quo, with its comforting conventions, easy apathy and seductive distractions. But a bit of creative disruption can make us look up – and think sideways.

This isn't disruption in an angry way but something more playful and mischievous to help wake us from the sleepwalk of modern life. It's about using the unexpected, the surprising and the unusual to create communications that can't be ignored. Disruption is the art of second looks and mental hooks; it's the double espresso that gives us a perky prod to get us thinking.

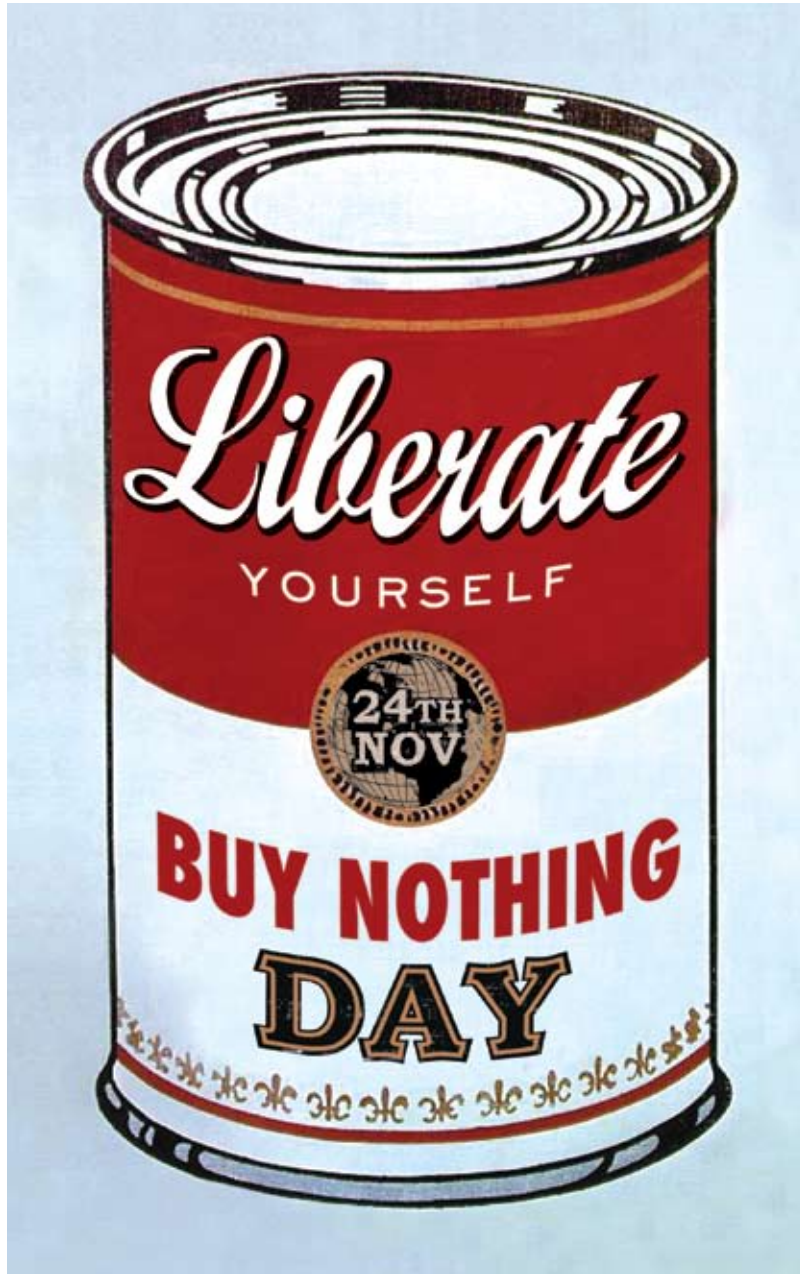


## Screw Global Warming – Let's Fly

Billboard for Enough's Enough groundbreaking SPURT campaign greeting travellers on the Heathrow Express. SPURT was a fictitious pro-aviation lobbying group whose uncompromising send-up of the

aviation industry appeared in the national press, viral marketing and billboards attracting international media coverage.

[www.spurt-aviation.com](http://www.spurt-aviation.com)



Above top: **TV Turnoff Week**  
Bin your telly is the message of this TV Turnoff Week poster for Adbusters's annual 'jam', now 'Mental Detox Week'.

Above bottom: **Outdoor Heaters**  
Campaign mischief targeting the archetypal symbol of a world so mad that it now even heats the great outdoors.

Left: **Buy Nothing Day**  
An inversion of Warhol's classic consumer icon to promote another Adbusters campaign, Buy Nothing Day. Re-printed in The Ecologist.



Above: **Conservative Party 'subvertising'**  
Viral initiative parodying the Conservative Party's controversial 'Are You Thinking What We're Thinking' campaign in 2005.

Left: **Cigarette warning stickers**  
Sold in packs of ten, these teasing anti-smoking stickers encouraged 'pack-jacking' of a friend's cigarette carton.



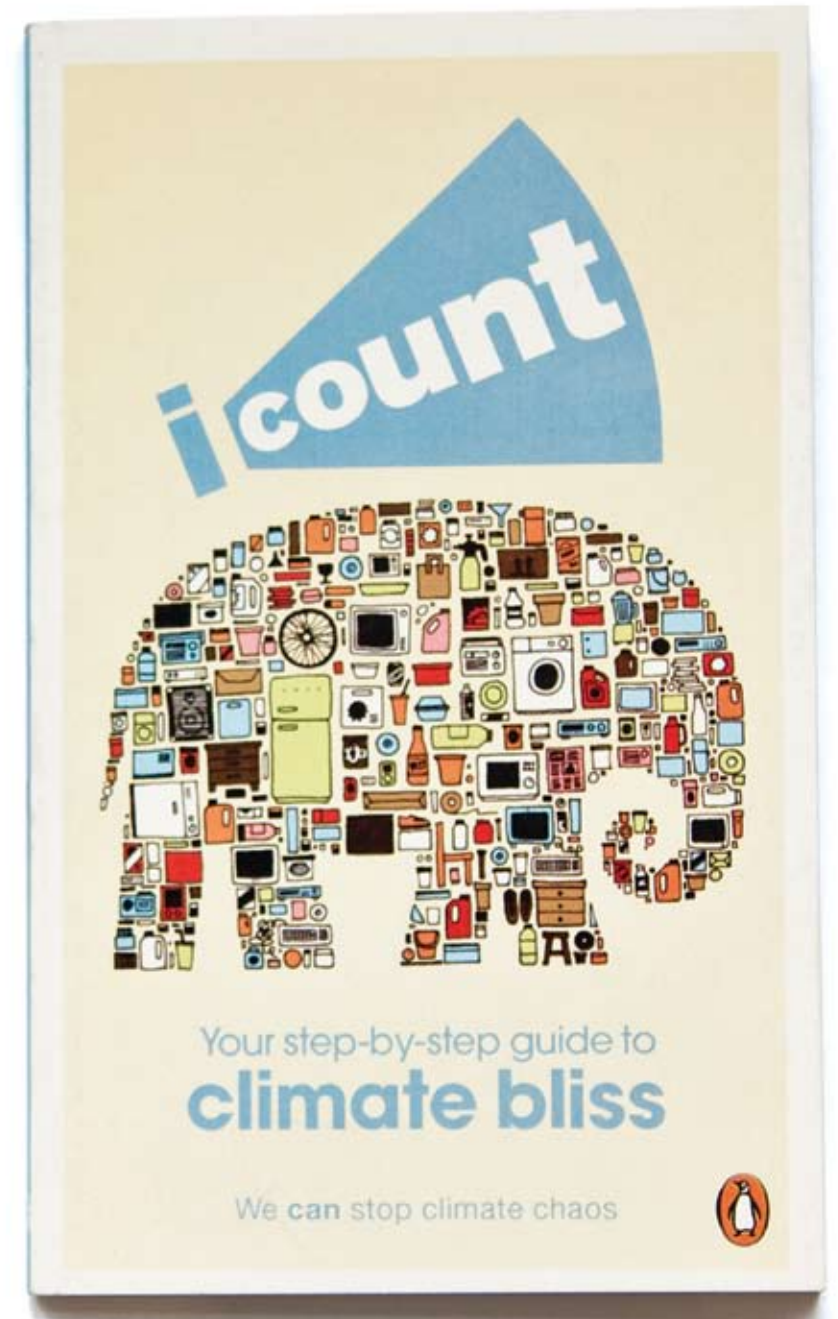
# Seduction

One thing the ad people know well is the power of seduction. They recognised long ago that the way to the head is via the heart, and use every device of charm, delight and aesthetic allure to get there.

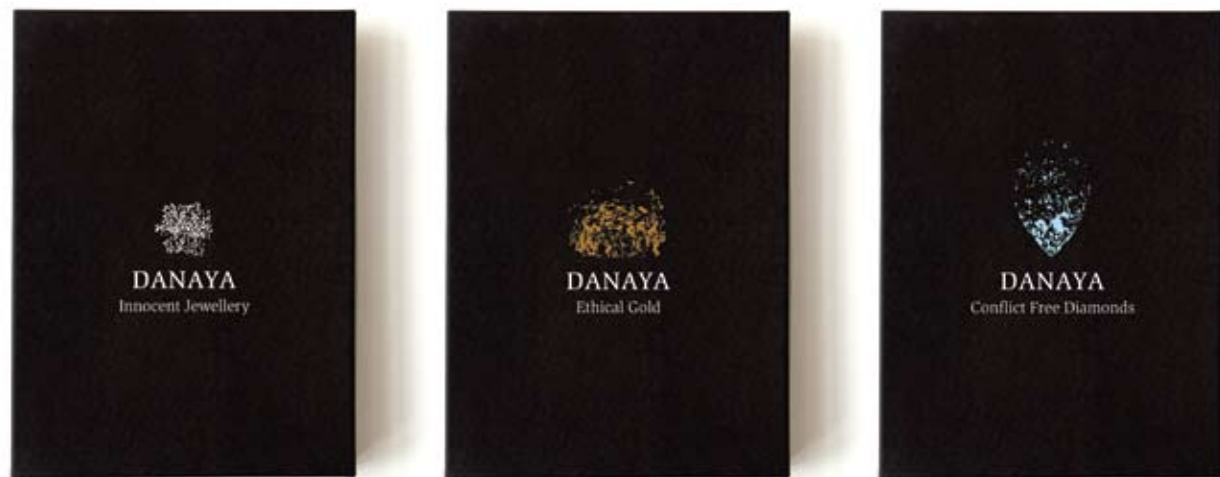
Ethical communications need the same force of attraction. They must craft beauty, create desire and inspire dreams. But unlike the ad world, our seduction must have integrity; it must aspire to be irresistible but not superficial, leaving people feeling good, not cheated.

## I Count climate change book

Produced for the I Count climate campaign and Penguin Books, the I Count Guide to Climate Bliss was quirky, humorous and engaging. Its unique illustrative style and playful copywriting won a Green Award in 2007 and was distributed in The Times.

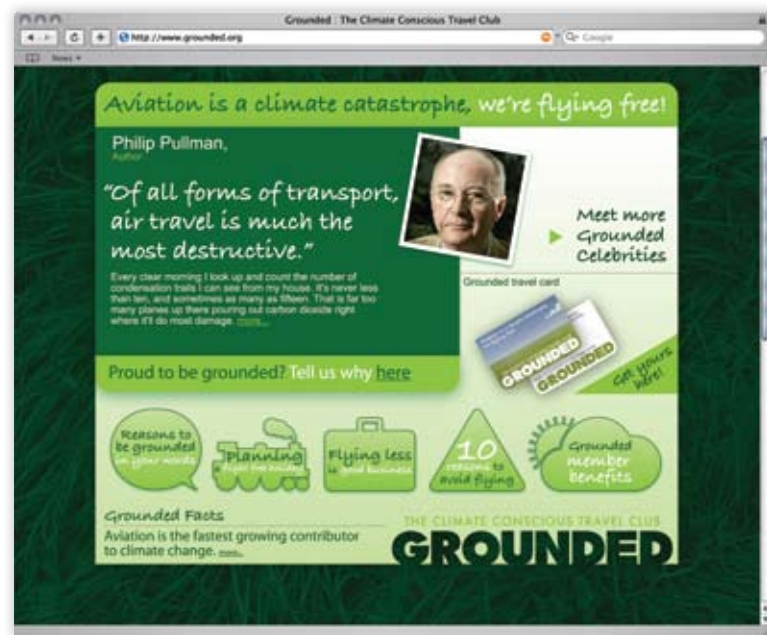






Above: **Danaya Innocent Jewellery**  
Guaranteed 'conflict free' and paying fair wages to its workers, Danaya combines ethics, luxury and allure.

Right: **Grounded flightless travel club**  
Campaign branding and materials for an alternative 'rewards' club championing flight-free travel.



Right: **Fair Finance 'goody bag'**  
Promotion for ethical lenders, Fair Finance, helping its customers in financial literacy with a budget planner, calculator and money tips.

Bottom left: **Light Bulb giveaway**  
Packaging for a giveaway of low energy lightbulbs championed by the unlikely green saviour, Major Savings.

Bottom right: **Nice bathroom tissue**  
Bright, friendly and unusual design for this ethical toilet tissue that supports water sanitation projects in Africa.



# ACTION

Communication is often mistaken for action; something's been said and we imagine it's done, or that saying it is enough. What we need – cue music – is a little less conversation, a little more action. Our role isn't simply to communicate, but to energise and activate. We must create the spark for action; inviting, electrifying and dynamising.

It's a small matter of expressing energy and momentum, moving from a static message to a dynamic engagement. It takes vim and zip, passion and purpose – but most importantly, it takes an infectious resolve and determined optimism to get busy.

# END HUNGER

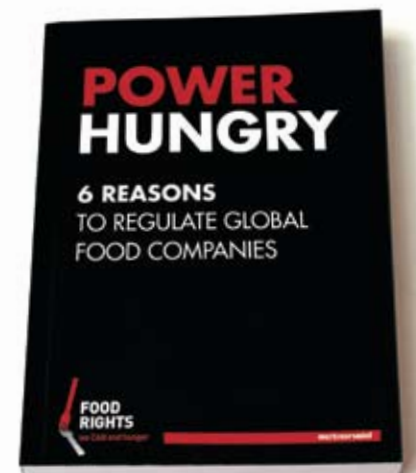


#### FOOD IS LIFE

850 million people go hungry each day and yet we have enough food to feed the world. When you can't eat, you can't learn, the body is weak and life is a precarious daily struggle. No person that is hungry can ever escape poverty. This is an injustice that must end. We have the ability to end hunger, all it needs is the will.



**Action Aid Food Rights campaign**  
A new narrative for Action Aid's hunger campaign that re-frames the issue into one of 'food rights' and its impact on women, agriculture, justice and politics. This was a decisive break from the Live Aid language of victimhood towards something empowering, active and determined.







Above: **One Hundred Months**

A simple one page website counting down the time we have left to act on climate change before human impact is irreversible.

Right: **Missing People Runaway Helpline**

Awareness raising for Missing People's Runaway Helpline service uses an eye-catching 'We Are Here' sign that is high visibility, bold and active.

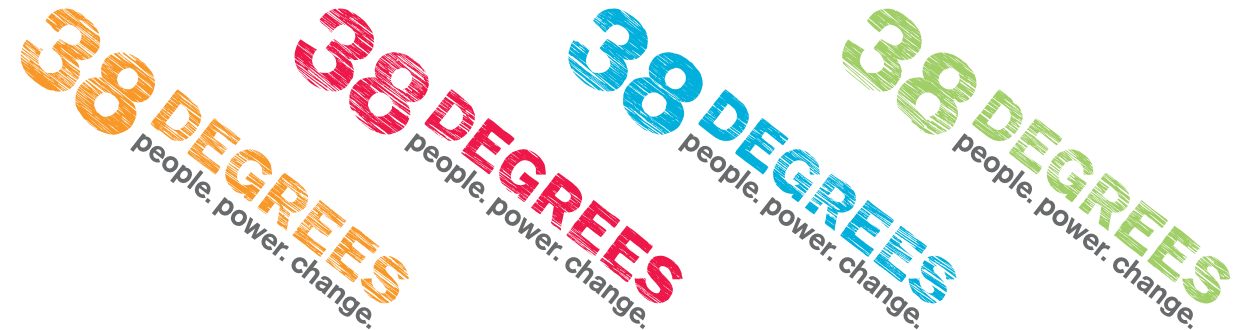


Left: **G8 Campaign ad**

Above a submerged Manhattan, the telegram message warns the G8 of the need for urgent action on climate change. Published in The Times by Enough's Enough.

Below: **38 Degrees**

Campaign branding for the pioneering grassroots activist group, 38 Degrees, itself modelled on America's Move On. The name '38 Degrees' relates to the 'angle of repose' most likely to cause a landscape shift.





#### Tap brand

People don't buy water, they buy brands – Evian, Volvic, Fiji and hundreds more. So, if it's brands people want, why not turn tap water into a brand? This playful visual identity is simple in concept, consumer friendly and endlessly adaptable.



## The Unlikely Story of One Campaign's Mission to Bring Down the Bottled Water Industry

Tap is an unusual combination of campaigning, enterprise and ethics.

The difficulty with promoting sustainability and environmental awareness is that most people see this as a by-word for sack cloth and self sacrifice. We like our cheap flights and disposable lifestyles and don't want to lose them. But bottled water is one consumer product that bears little scrutiny. It consumes precious resources, produces mountains of rubbish, costs a fortune – and all the while the stuff comes out of our taps for free. It's the triumph of marketing over common sense.

Provokateur funded, created and launched Tap to give the bottled water industry a run for its money. Its objective was to get people to re-think their drink by creating a brand for tap water, promoted through a stylish, seductive campaign that would reveal the truth about bottled water and bust the myths about tap. To change people's behaviour, the campaign produced Tap products, such as its reusable water bottle and Do-It-Yourself Bottled Water Kit. Profits from sales went towards water projects in the developing world. It caught the imagination, won awards, attracted heaps of press attention and got people talking. The next stage is to re-vamp the Tap bottle to create a product of superlative quality and design to take the campaign onto the next level.

To find out more, visit [www.wewanttap.com](http://www.wewanttap.com)

**Right: Tap reusable water bottle**

The first incarnation of the Tap bottle turned drinking tap water into a fashion statement. The bottle was functional and durable, with a design that caught the public imagination.

**Opposite page: Tap animation**

A cheeful viral animation took Tap to the next stage by personifying the campaign in a sassy Tap dancing girl with the risqué message, 'Turn Me On.'





Right: **Tap Challenge download**

In blind taste tests, many can't tell tap water from bottled. This free download helped people conduct their own water tasting.

Bottom: **Do-It-Yourself Bottled Water Kit**

Containing 10 water labels, the Kit was a playful way to sabotage bottled water and turn an empty Evian into a reusable Tap bottle, each label good for 10 hydrating refills.

Below: **Tap restaurant stickers**

Encouraging the public to 'Tap their neighbourhood', these free stickers encouraged people to convert local restaurants to tap water.



Below: **We Want Tap website**

The online headquarters for the We Want Tap campaign provides visitors with downloads, information resources and online shopping for Tap's campaign products.





# SOLUTION

Perhaps the most exciting dimension of ethical communication is its place at the frontline of re-imagining how we live. The ethical space is a pioneer landscape of originality and invention, full of new ideas, new technologies and new perspectives.

But within a world confounded by problems, it is the communicator who ensures the ground is fertile for new ideas to flourish. When people can't see the problem and even less desire a solution, communication must create the bridges, connections and consciousness to show that there is both a different way, and a better way.

## Social Enterprise 'kitemark'

An iconic brand developed for Rise with support from Triodos Bank to promote social enterprises in the UK. The brand can be used by any organisation that qualifies under the assessment criteria as a bona fide social enterprise.



# 4R:PLANET

REDUCE REUSE RECYCLE RETHINK



Above: 4 R Planet

Fresh, engaging brand and communications for Adventure Ecology's climate education initiative for 8–14 year olds.



Left: Four 'solutions' brands...

Urban Village – groundbreaking venture by the housing charity, Crisis, to provide a lasting solution to homelessness.

People's Network – the online interface for English public libraries, including their exceptional 24-hour librarian service.

Gift Aid It – changing the face of charitable giving by promoting tax efficient donations

Action for Global Health – a global initiative to champion the UN's millennium Development Goals on health



Above: Power of Ten viral animation

One person can't make a difference – but what about ten? Power of Ten uses this philosophy to promote climate change solutions.

Right: Car Clubs

Brand and communications explain the Car Clubs concept of pay-as-you-go car ownership to consumers.

[www.carclubs.org.uk](http://www.carclubs.org.uk)



# INTEGRITY

Integrity is a unique currency – if it's the real thing it's priceless, but how often it's devalued by forgery and cheap imitation. For ethical communications, however, integrity isn't a glib assertion but a pervading ethos: it's what you trade with, not in.

The difference between ethical communications and corporate soap is this integrity of belief and values, honesty and transparency. In a cynical age, with great institutions tarnished by greed and dishonesty, ethical integrity has become a competitive advantage and USP. It's the nonnegotiable element of ethical communications and consequently its greatest strength.

## The Otesha Project

The brand and communications for this engaging youth activist project imported to the UK from Canada is all about action, passion and personal integrity.







**Fair Finance brand & marketing**

Offering affordable loans and financial advice to those excluded from the financial mainstream and preyed upon by predatory lenders. The 'fair' principle shapes the products, services and communications of Fair Finance by putting integrity at the heart of all it does.

[www.fairfinance.org.uk](http://www.fairfinance.org.uk)



**INVEST IN SHARED INTEREST  
AND YOUR MONEY SUPPORTS  
FAIR TRADE ENTERPRISES AGAIN  
AND AGAIN.**

AND AGAIN      AND AGAIN      AND AGAIN

We are Shared Interest, a co-operative lending society. We pool money from UK members and invest over £20 million annually in fair trade business. Our fair trade partnerships extend across 25 countries. Every day more than 1,500 people benefit directly from our investments and work and every pound you invest is used – and repaid – again and again.

**If you want to see your money invested to better use  
call us on (0)191 233 9100 or visit our website  
[www.shared-interest.co.uk](http://www.shared-interest.co.uk)**

**SHAREDINTEREST**  
INVESTING IN A FAIRER WORLD

**Shared Interest brand & marketing**

Investing in Fair Trade projects around the world, Shared Interest's brand shows how, why and where it makes a difference, putting its visionary ethos at the centre of its communications.





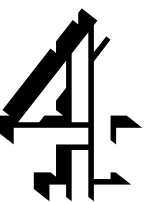
# WIT

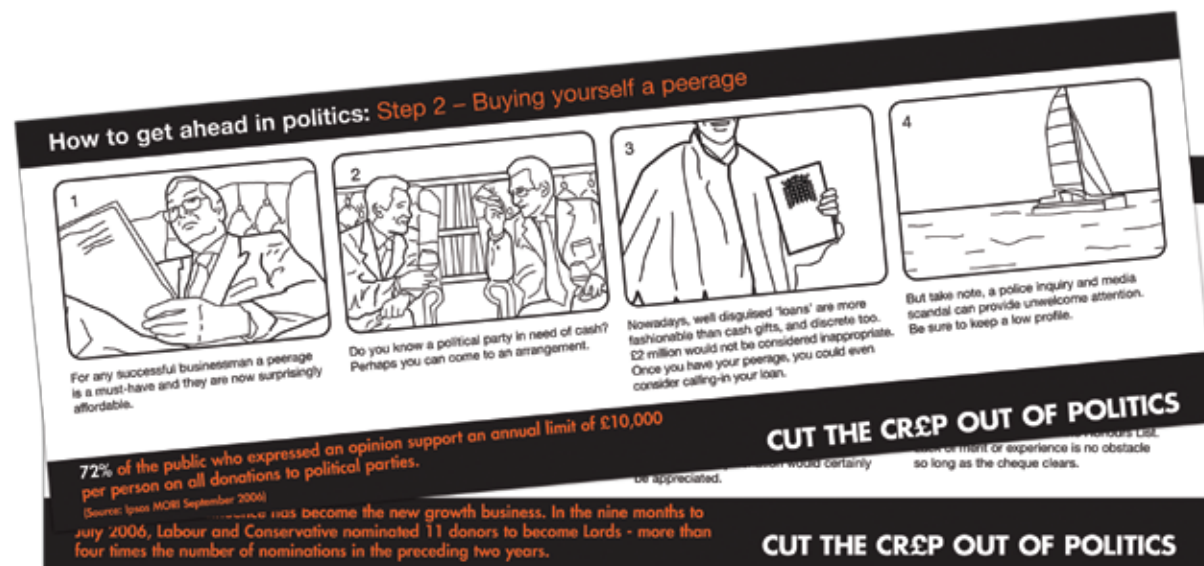
Don't be fooled – this is the most interesting, underrated and impactful of strategies shaping ethical communications. Humour can have the most serious intent, turning a custard pie into a political message. Its power lies in a counterintuitive contradiction of message and meaning, appearance and effect. Whether with a sharpened wit, a playful prank or an infectious laugh, humour gets under the radar – and under the skin. It is like a lockpick's tool kit, getting you in to the most unlikely places.

With the element of surprise, sense of theatre and appreciation of the incongruous it can attack, deflect and seduce.

#### Channel 4 staff recycling initiative

Instead of hectoring staff into recycling, this playful campaign turns office greening into a compelling and seductive melodrama.





**Above: Cut The Cr£p Out Of Politics**

In the style of the Worst Case Scenario handbooks, this campaign, featured in press ads and direct action, lifted the lid on the intrigues of party political funding.

**Right: Global Witness HSBC campaign**

It was too irresistible not to parody HSBC's own advertising in order to highlight its involvement in commercial logging and deforestation.



**Above: "That's All Folks!"**

Co-opting the famous Loony Toon's sign-off into a global warning makes this Provokateur sticker pithy, poignant and decidedly dark in humour.

**Left: iCycle**

This cycling campaign was a viral hit for the iPod generation with its instantly gettable play on the iconic Apple ad.





#### Acme Climate Action logos

Acme Climate Action is a chameleon brand that can be reinvented and reconfigured for endless environmental services or messages. It is both brand and un-brand, poking fun at the world of corporate communications.



**ACME** Climate Action Card

ACME CLIMATE  
CHANGE SOLUTIONS



**ACME  
CLIMATE  
ACTION**



## The Incendiary Blackboard, The Self Destroying Book And The Irrisistible Rise of Acmevism

Many climate change campaigns make noise but not much difference - worse still, they are starting to feel like part of an international nagging movement – and it isn't working. Provokateur's answer was Acme Climate Action, an initiative they dreamt up and funded themselves.

The Big Idea was to create a new narrative to climate change that would be fresh, creative, engaging and active. What started as a packet of stickers evolved into a book - published by 4th Estate in 2008 - and then went online.

Every page of the book was designed to be torn out and used. Inside were stickers for light switches and home appliances, letters for troublesome politicians and companies, inspiring posters for home and office, a home energy audit, labels to re-use envelopes, DIY ideas to give throwaways a new lease of life, a notebook cover for creative recycling, pop out action cards and more... even the front and back cover could be re-purposed into a tasteful picture frame.

The 'Acme' moniker was deliberately unusual, unlike anything from the world of charities and government. 'Acme' suggested something universal and generic, while 'Action' was what it was all about: doing something.

The book received glowing reviews and the website was a finalist at the 2007 Green Awards. Although a chalkboard animation (p45) resulted in a near devastating office fire, plans are afoot to launch a global movement of Acmevists.

See more at [www.acmeclimateaction.com](http://www.acmeclimateaction.com)

### Acme Climate Action – the book

Less a book and more of a kit, Acme Climate Action is designed to be destroyed, containing an unfeasible number of practical action tools.



### Acme marketing campaign

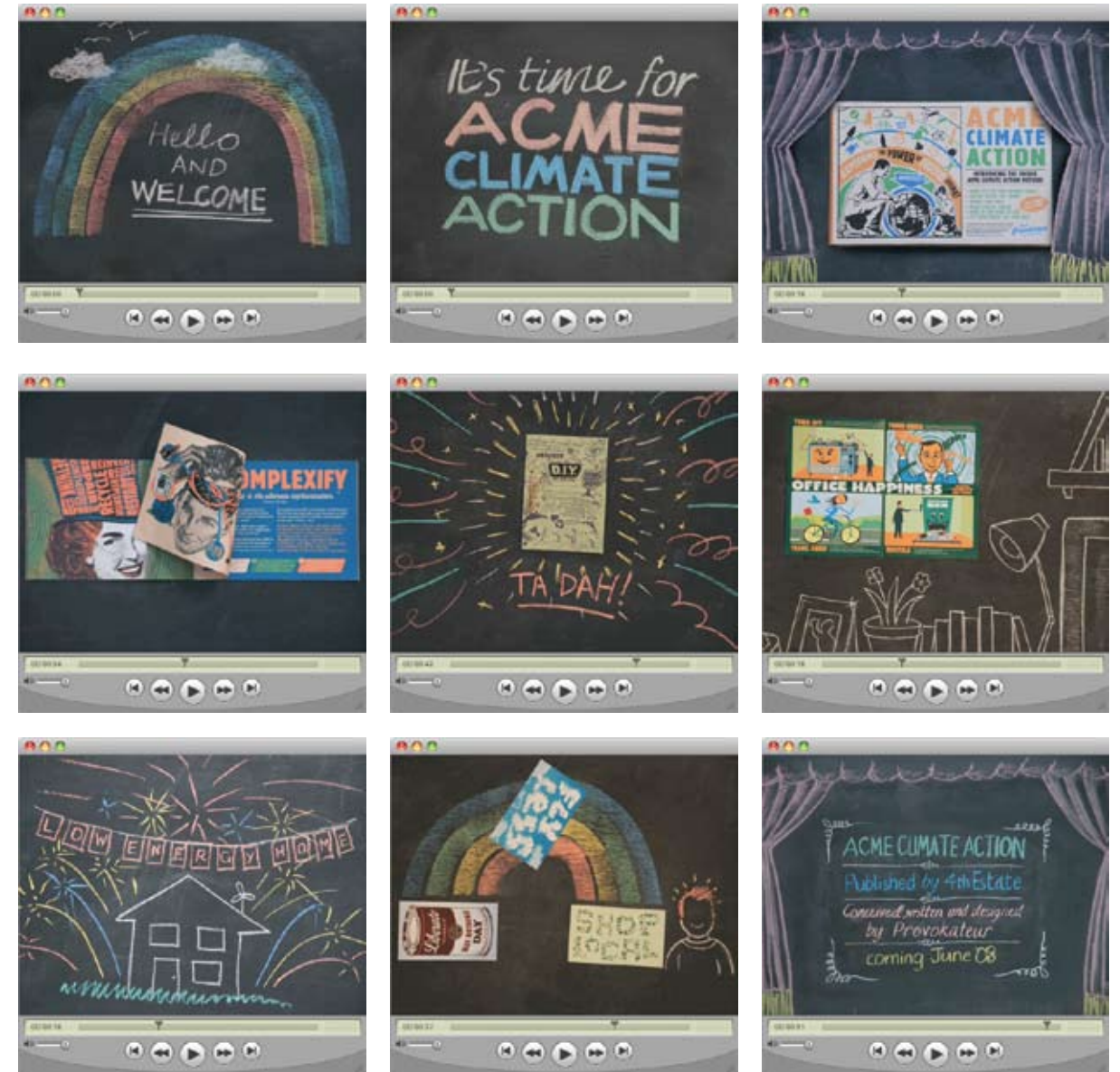
Referencing Fifties self-help ads, these billboards treated commuters to a dose of irreverent Acme irreverent humour.





Above: **Acme Climate Action website**  
The website was another labour of love, with downloadable resources, the Acme Watch 'climate rogues' database and access to a growing community of online Acmevists.

Opposite: **Acme Climate Action animation**  
Painstaking stop-frame animation created on a chalk blackboard showing Acme in action. Despite its childish innocence, production left Provokateur's studios consumed by fire.





# INSPIRATION

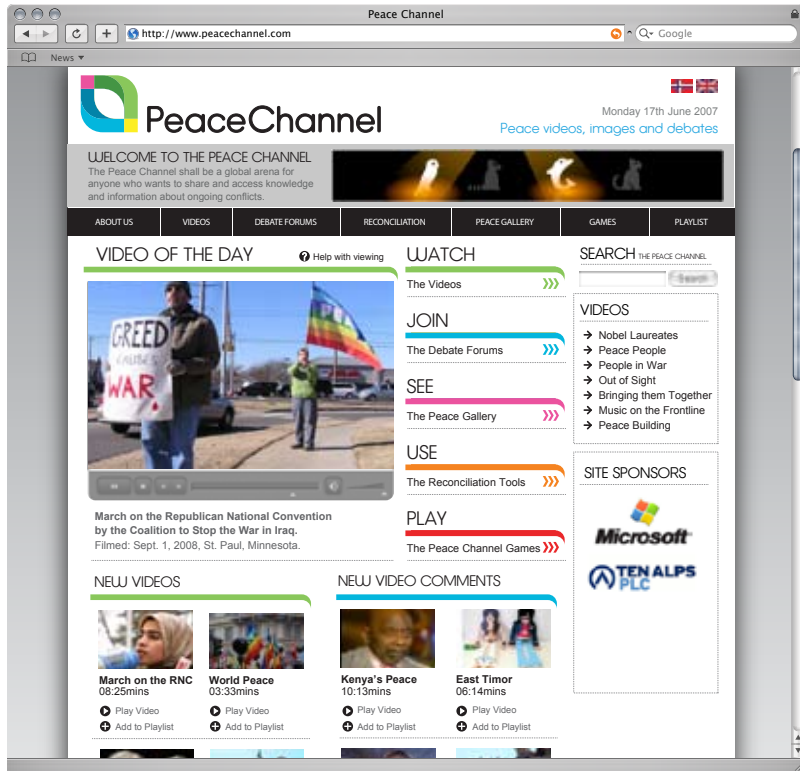
Integrity might be the grounding for ethical communication, but inspiration is the spark that makes change happen. It takes an infectious energy that is positive and transformative and where one is always inspired *to* something. Inspiration is where vision, resolution and action meet. It cuts through inertia and connects individuals to ideas.

Within ethical communications, inspiration is about turning belief into action, and action into change: it is the catalytic agent that gets the mind dreaming, the brain humming and the wheels turning. "The mind is not a vessel to be filled," said Plutarch, "but a fire to be ignited." This is the task for ethical communication.

## Acme Campaign Kit

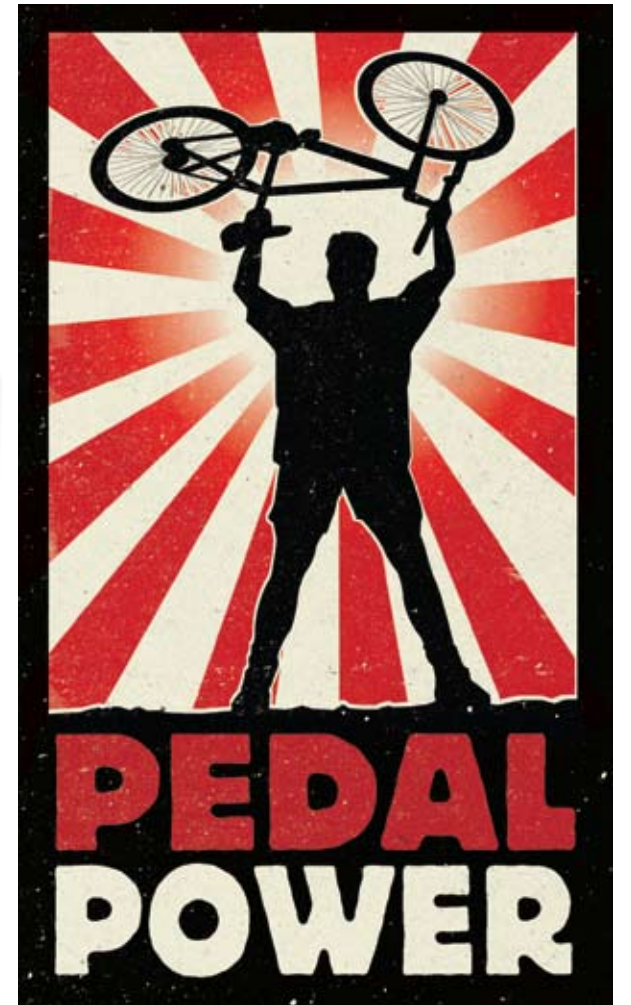
The precursor to Acme Climate Action was this pack of campaigning stickers which introduced the world to the offbeat Acme sensibility.





Left & Above: **The Peace Channel**  
Branding and design for a global initiative launched by Sir Bob Geldof and the Norwegian Point of Peace Foundation to promote discussion, debate and the sharing of ideas around peace.

Right: **First they ignore you...**  
From the Provokateur postcard collection (p9), this Gandhi quotation is an inspirational mantra for activists and optimists.



**People Power campaign**  
A series of posters produced to inspire sustainable thinking in a disposable world.



## Last words

Designers and communicators have long debated the ethics of their craft. In 1964, the seminal First Things First manifesto appealed for designers to pursue ‘more useful and lasting forms of communication’. 34 years later, Adbusters updated the manifesto and called for the ‘exploration and production of a new kind of meaning’ in what they saw as a battle for the ‘mental environment’ against the uncontested rise of consumerism. Even more recently, champions of ‘sustainable design’ have unveiled manifestos for a greener industry and disciples of Designism have made declarations for a more caring one.

But is anybody listening? First Things First still comes last; Adbusters is still angry; Designism isn’t; and most visual communicators are continuing down Milton Glaser’s ‘Road to Hell’ (not that Mr Glaser is on a road to Hell, he merely wrote about one). ‘Socially conscious design’ (what a drab concept that sounds) seems so often to be either self righteous smugger or an amusing diversion.

Getting right to the heart of this is a cheeky poster by illustrator Frank Chimero. In big bold caps it declares: “Design Won’t Save The World”, with the postscript, “Go volunteer at a soup kitchen you pretentious fuck.” Delicious.

Is this the repressed id of graphic design today, more interested in the rewards of immaculate kerning than social change? Or is there an uncomfortable truth here that, really, graphic design shouldn’t get ideas above its station?

The notion of design having a social role to play is far from new – and hardly a conceit. Artists and designers have long served as messengers, missionaries, revolutionaries, agitators, and propagandists. Centuries before the holy Brand Guidelines, visual communication was being sharpened as a tool of religion, war and politics. First Things First might bemoan the commercialisation of graphic design, but 44 years earlier it was taken to its greatest and darkest heights in Nazi Germany in a terrible exemplar of the true power of design.

The point might be uncomfortable, but it’s an important one. Visual communication has always been a tool of social and political change – its role in selling consumerism only came later. It’s significant that the father of modern advertising, Edward Bernays, was first a master of propaganda at the US War Department in 1917; only when the war ended did corporations begin to covet the power he had harnessed.

The irony is that today, political and social concerns are seen as either extraneous or inappropriate to the craft of visual communication. We’ve become so absorbed in selling trainers and toothpaste that we imagine it’s improper to do anything else. The idea that ‘design won’t save the world’ has become a pervading ethos within an industry that apparently celebrates its own indifference.

The co-option of visual communication by business has convinced its practitioners that it was ever thus. Schools of design train students to handle their tools like jobbing carpenters and off they go, eager logo monkeys hungry for business. This is the reality of visual communication, or the reality we’ve come to accept. There might be a government awareness campaign or a pro bono charity job, but our real business is selling.

Those writing their manifestos for a new theory of design talk about ‘responsibility’ and ‘citizenship’ and certainly that’s an ethos Provokateur shares. But those notions miss an important point. The creative industry has downgraded from an understanding of ideas to an enchantment with things. We’ve taken the most powerful tool for social change and committed it to the most mundane of tasks.

It hasn’t been fashionable to use the word ‘propaganda’ for a good seventy years - instead, we refashioned it ‘social marketing’ and ‘public affairs’ (apparently a sweeter pill to swallow). But it is time for those who craft visual communications to look again at what they do.

Let us be propagandists in the true sense of the word; not, as we imagine, a disseminator of lies but a propagator of ideas, and let those ideas be driven by more than product. Let us be propagandists that understand how visual communication has always connected with politics and society, and that being a lever for change is greater by far than being a tool of business.

Instead of imagining politics and ethics have no place in design, we must realise it’s always been there, we just forgot about it. Design can save the world - if we want it to.





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It hasn’t been fashionable to use the word ‘propaganda’ for a good seventy years - instead, we refashioned it ‘social marketing’ and ‘public affairs’ (apparently a sweeter pill to swallow). But it is time for those who craft visual communications to look again at what they do.

Let us be propagandists in the true sense of the word; not, as we imagine, a disseminator of lies but a propagator of ideas, and let those ideas be driven by more than product. Let us be propagandists that understand how visual communication has always connected with politics and society, and that being a lever for change is greater by far than being a tool of business.

Instead of imagining politics and ethics have no place in design, we must realise it’s always been there, we just forgot about it. Design can save the world - if we want it to.



## Mischief makes good

The work contained here is a slice of creative mischief from the ethical communications agency, Provokateur.

The agency was founded by Joshua Blackburn whose past lives found him in the Labour Party's 1997 election 'war room', the housing charity Shelter and the corporate branding agency, Wolff Olins. His ambition for Provokateur was to create a new kind of creative agency that would transform the world of ethical communications.

Provokateur works only for clients it believes in: charities, campaigns, ethical consumerism, cultural enterprises, universities, the public sector and companies it likes. It offers a rare combination of strategic thinking and creative passion that reflects its determination to deliver amazing work for amazing organisations.

For over six years, Provokateur has been lucky enough to do just that. Its client list includes Greenpeace, Leonard Cheshire, Channel 4, Global Witness, Gift Aid, the Kofi Annan Foundation, Crisis, Lonely Planet, The Open University, Penguin Books and English Public Libraries to name but a few. From branding to campaigning, product design to online communications, Provokateur's originality and energy has made it a thought leader in the ethical space.

Provokateur's commitment to being an 'agency for change' is reflected not only in its client list but also in its self funded enterprises. Its two biggest ventures, Acme Climate Action and We Want Tap, demonstrate its belief in the pioneer philosophy it promotes to its clients.

In creating this book, Provokateur hopes to share its ideas and continue to be a catalyst in the evolution of ethical communications.

To find out more, visit [www.provokateur.com](http://www.provokateur.com)



## It's a question of belief

We believe in *the client*

We believe in *our work*

We believe in *ideas*

We believe in *creativity*

We believe in *action*

We believe in *challenging the rules*

We believe in *keeping a sense of humour*

We believe in *integrity*

*We believe we can change the world*

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100% Recycled  
No dolphins were  
harmed in the  
making of this book.



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“If everyone demanded peace instead of another television set, then there’d be peace.”

John Lennon