

# Inconvenient MESSAGING

Founder of three charities creating change for environmental benefit, **Trewin Restorick**'s latest venture, '**Sizzle**', is already working on impressive ways to deal with Climate Change. He talked to **Fergus Byrne**

**T**rewin Restorick, despite being a powerful voice in the world of environmental initiatives, has gone against the grain of what people have come to expect of those that agitate for action against climate change. As an environmental campaigner, he decided early on that many of his colleagues in environmental activism were likely doing more damage than good for the cause they were supposed to be supporting. In 2014 he set up the environmental charity 'Hubbub' and told me it was largely because 'I was fairly convinced that environmentalists were terrible at communicating.' He says quite candidly that 'their message was quite negative, it was complicated, and it was hard to follow.' So the whole point of setting up 'Hubbub', he explains, was to 'take a complicated issue and make it compelling, relevant, engaging. So, even if you weren't an environmentalist, you would still see the point of doing stuff.'

And doing stuff and starting stuff is what Trewin is good at. 'Hubbub' began by launching initiatives to create behaviour change that was aimed at reaping environmental benefits. As well as installing community fridges and freezers in public places, to help distribute food that might have gone to landfill, he also tackled the scourge of discarded cigarette butts by coming up with a unique way to assist smokers to place their finished cigarettes into specially designed bins. He created 'Ballot Bins' as a customisable voting ashtray, where





*The Ballot Bin that, in this case at least, put Ronaldo ahead*

smokers were given an option of two openings in which to discard their cigarette. The first 'Ballot Bin' asked the question, 'Who's the best player in the world? Ronaldo or Messi?'. Smokers discarded their cigarette butt into a bin section based on their choice. The bins were transparent so every passerby could see how the voting was going. Today the Ballot Bins are in 43 countries around the world, collecting an estimated 15 million cigarette butts a year.

'Ballot Bins' were indeed a stroke of genius and engendered a great deal of publicity, but during Covid Trewin saw a dramatic change in attitudes to another environmental problem. Prior to Covid people had been aware of the damage plastic has been doing to our planet and plastic use had been slowly declining. However, during Covid he says, plastic use just 'fell off' the environmental radar 'because everybody was concerned about hygiene. And so all that behaviour change stuff basically reversed and ground to a halt.'

He could clearly see that the only way to create long-term change was to make it 'really easy, cost effective and viable for everybody to take action.' Trewin's goal is to make environmental action the default, 'not something you have to sort of make an effort to do.' But he knows that's complicated especially when, as he put it, 'the government couldn't give a shit.'

So today, talking about a new initiative called 'Sizzle', his goal is to completely change the structure of how things are done. 'Sizzle' is described as "a creative space where daring and bold organisations

can explore fresh solutions that tackle environmental and social challenges." Trewin's goal for 'Sizzle' is to 'change the rules of the game, the products available and the information available.' He wants to rethink the way products and services are delivered in order to radically reduce environmental impact, whilst at the same time being affordable, high quality and financially viable. 'Sizzle' is already involved in a number of initiatives such as the ban on using peat in horticulture. 'We shouldn't be using peat in horticulture' he says. 'It's been on the environmental agenda for 30 odd years.' However, he says the message is confusing and up to now there has been no alternative. So 'Sizzle' is investing in creating a new product to take the place of peat.

But that's only one of many initiatives that 'Sizzle' is involved in. Behind the scenes at Borough Market, 'Sizzle' has also been transforming the way people use packaging. At the same time they are also doing a lot of research on pets. 'The average dog has a carbon footprint the size of an SUV,' he tells me. 'People have a very close emotional attachment to their pets. You don't want to destroy that. But you actually want a healthy pet and healthy planet.' Even within apparently benign areas like pet care and horticulture, 'Sizzle' is trying to work with businesses 'behind the scenes' to create structures and systems that help our environment which 'the consumer doesn't notice.'

Trewin Rosterick's entry into the world of environmental initiatives came in a roundabout way. After what he calls a 'terrible' degree in History at Southampton he went back to his home town of Plymouth to work at the local council trying to help the many thousands of people made redundant from the dockyard to create new businesses. In some cases those businesses included recycling old materials and making them available locally. At the time, he recalls, many of them would not have been seen as 'Green' businesses but today he says they would fit that category.

His next career move was to join 'Friends of the Earth' as their recycling campaigner; setting up the first door to door recycling collection and eventually becoming their head of fundraising. He left to set up his first charity 'Global Action Plan' which he ran for 'twenty odd years' and was trained by Al Gore as a Climate Ambassador. He then started the environmental charity 'Hubbub' and another called 'Recorra', both of which are now successful environmental change instigators.

Trewin recalls his time at 'Friends of the Earth' under Jonathan Porritt as a 'massive education' on environment issues. He remembers them as 'the charity that highlighted global warming as it was called at the time. They highlighted the rainforest destruction, they highlighted air quality in cities.' He



says he has built on that education ever since and has always followed the science. 'But science is quite scary, and' he says 'continues to get scarier.'

However, it's because the science has become ever scarier that he believes it's important to get everybody involved. He says climate and environmental activism has to include everyone. 'It can't be an elitist conversation, with people in earnest-looking glasses, talking to each other in a language that nobody else understands and telling everybody else how they should live their lives,' which he believes it was for some time and 'largely' still is. 'It's a very narrow demographic group. It hasn't really hit the mainstream in the sense it should have.' He describes environmental messaging as 'a failure to make something really important relevant to people.'

Trewin's take on government action doesn't make happy reading. He admits that he may point to failings within the current government but he does also offer some balance. He believes this government sees environmentalism and climate change as an issue that they can 'differentiate on and politicise', pointing to 'ridiculous conversations about 15 minutes cities, the attack on civil rights and the rubbishing of Net Zero.'

Whilst he agrees that governments 'need to give

space to the innovators to innovate' he says there are two things that are happening. 'One is that free marketeers don't want any government intervention. It's an attack on one of their basic beliefs. Then the other issue, which is more contentious, is there are a lot of people making a lot of money out of the current systems and they tend to be conservative, with a small and big C. And they don't want systems to change.' He cites the tobacco industry as an example, saying that those most threatened 'will do whatever they can to cause confusion and delay, and that's what we're seeing.'

But on the other side, he says 'Labour is beholden to the unions. There are certain traditional industries which are going to have to change.' So he sees that there's an equally 'big anchor' on the other political side that's saying 'Oh we can't destroy this industry, because it's funding the unions.' He says you need a 'just and fair transition, and no government has really, in this country looked at what is a fair transition. How do you safeguard those who are going to lose, and accelerate the speed of the winners?'

And while Trewin's current focus is to work with large companies to help them institute change within their own systems, he is aware of the barriers that

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make it difficult for them. However, he believes some of the 'more progressive' companies are starting to agree that they must 'positively influence policy.'

I ask him about the concerns many businesses have about the politicisation of their efforts to create change. Many publicly facing businesses are afraid to lift their heads above the parapet for fear of being ridiculed for not doing enough, or even harassed by those with vested interests and their own agenda. It's a situation known as 'green hushing'. Trewin says he understands their predicament and doesn't envy them. 'But at the end of the day we are facing a 'global crisis' around food supplies and water 'too much or too little' and companies are realising that if they want to continue to operate they need 'a stable climate and stable environments to operate within.' It's in the interests of large companies to push for change.

And based on the 'circular economy' the concept that products should be devised as sustainable or recyclable from the initial design stage, it seems that we aren't seeing as many innovations for future products as we could be. 'There needs to be a total change in conceptual thinking about how you deal with products,' he says. He cites fast fashion as the prime example. 'Fast fashion, which is getting faster and faster and faster, operates because it makes small margins on huge amounts of product.' Fashion desperately needs an alternative model, but Trewin admits that that's easier said than done. He says one of the obvious alternatives is to increase the pricing model so that people don't discard clothes so quickly. However, that creates the argument that you are just hitting those that can't afford expensive clothes.

But even the current trend towards buying upcycled, recycled and used clothing is not going to change the habits of people buying cheap garments, especially online. Whilst the concept of trying to cut down on waste clothing is laudable, it is a fraction of the industry. Trewin recounts a classic example of someone buying three items online to see which one fits. In one research project the products' journey was tracked. Three were returned, shipped back across the world and sat in a warehouse in Hong Kong. By the time they came out of the warehouse they were no longer in vogue so were then sent to the north of England where they had the labels removed. They were then tracked as being shipped to Poland where Trewin believes they were eventually incinerated.

One of the answers he says could be 'super fast fashion'. He mentions research being done in London on whether clothing could be made from products like citrus peel or nettles. 'So, if you have a material which actually degrades super quickly, that helps deal with the fast fashion.' The product becomes compostable. Again, it's a laudable concept but so far not economically viable. 'And then you've got to convince the consumer to buy a pair of nettle jeans,' he says.

'Sizzle' is determined to tackle many of the problems that are contributing to climate change. Even if they are what might be seen as benign industries such as pets or gardening. He is horrified by how few people grow their own food and the fact that recent figures show that less people now grow their own food than in the past.

'As more extreme weather hits' he says 'people need



to grow different things, they need different skills.' He says we need to take into account things like drought and flood. 'The amount of food that we're growing for free ourselves has gone from 3% down to just 1%. I mean, that seems completely counterintuitive to the narrative.'

But of course that's because we have been spoilt by getting cheap food from the supermarkets. I ask him if there is a way to tackle that and his answer is a blast of reality. 'I think the climate is doing that for us' he says. 'This has been a shocking year so far for the basic commodities. They just haven't either been able to harvest or plant this year.' And that's not just in the UK. He cites markers such as India banning the export of certain types of rice last year because of climate pressures. 'You've got prices of olive oil going through the roof, because of the climatic pressures and the diseases in the growing countries. Tomatoes, similarly, being really hit by the drought in Spain.' He has seen evidence that appears to show that 'food prices will rise 1-2% per year because of climate.'

'Sizzle's' ambitions are vast and exciting. Where necessary it will bypass government to get industry to work towards its own sustainable future, which in itself may well be an inconvenient message for those tasked with running countries.

Another positive, though for some people possibly contentious, project that Trewin highlights coincidentally has a link to the Westcountry. When training to become one of Al Gore's first UK Climate Ambassadors, promoting messages from the film *An Inconvenient Truth*, Trewin was introduced to the idea for a 'Super Grid', a system that would connect the

abundance of renewable energy sources in Africa to energy-hungry European countries. Despite the significant benefits, the idea never progressed. At the time the financial model didn't stack up and the technology wasn't sufficiently advanced. However, a new UK-based business has pulled together a high-quality team and some serious investment as they believe changes to costs and technological advances could make it a viable proposition.

A company called Xlinks, headed up by former CEO of Tesco, Sir David Lewis, plans to run a 2,485 mile long underwater cable connecting the UK with a renewable energy rich region of Morocco. It would be powered entirely by solar and wind and supported by a battery storage facility. The cabling would run underground to the site of an existing substation near Bideford in Devon and the company believes that the project could ultimately supply 8% of the UK's electricity needs. Crucially the company aims to provide a near constant source of flexible and predictable clean energy, complementing the renewable energy already generated in the UK.

According to Trewin only time will tell whether this project might work and whether the vision could turn into reality. Looking back at the initial concept in *An Inconvenient Truth* he says "I am sure Al Gore would approve."

*Trewin Restorick will be talking at a Wilding Weekend event in Dorset in June. For further information visit [www.juliabailes.com](http://www.juliabailes.com).*