

AM AWARDS – Environmental Award

Entry

Background to this award:

Dear Judges,

You know, when I suggested (quite strongly) that AM run an Environmental Award last year to Stephen Briers, this was not quite what I had in mind.

I imagined an Environmental Award would be focussed on reducing the environmental impact of the UK vehicle parc, of empowering customers and promoting greener options. I thought that intelligent use of resources that are freely available and promoted by the Government would be in the spotlight. I was hoping that clever ideas and initiatives that challenged the ingrained ways of the motor trade would be encouraged. I presumed that following the advice of the vast majority of World scientific opinion to reduce the emissions and ingrained habits of the UK's millions of new car buyers and motorists would be the emphasis of the Award.

However, reading the entry form made me reluctant even to have a go, at winning.

Why?

...because the Award application is talking about my “Environmental Policy”; reducing energy consumption, training staff and how the environmental policy has impacted business efficiency, which is not quite what I had in mind for environmental excellence.

However, after discussing with Stephen Briers, he says my entry will be accepted even though it does not really focus on these points, so let me do my best to explain why I should win the AM Environmental Policy award 2008.

I will add that I have a BSc in Applied Chemistry and an MSc in Environmental Management, so I do have the qualifications to back up my claims and give the madness in my methods some credibility.

There is more to the environment than having an Environmental Policy! ☺

- Ling



As seen on...



... I eat Dragons for breakfast!



AM AWARDS – Environmental Award; Why LINGsCARS.com should win...

My business environmental footprint.

LINGsCARS.com is already head and shoulders above any other entrant in this category.

From Jan-Nov 2007 I have already placed £25m of cars at retail value on contract hire with end users (mainly private customers) – this is double my 2006 output. Until one month ago I did not even have the carbon footprint of an office, I operated from my home in a converted dining room. I do separate my paper, glass and metal waste and send them for recycling, my whole light-energy use was 2 x 50w fluorescent tubes, and my heating and ventilation overhead was 1 x domestic gas fired radiator. I had no commute.

In October, I chose a new office and bought it carefully, only 1km from my home. I have used low-energy lights throughout and the office is reasonably new and well-insulated.



LINGsCARS.com is purely web-based and is already an AM Award winning website. It is the most efficient business model in the car sales industry, I believe.



For instance, I achieved my £25m (retail value) of car sales so far in 2007 with only one telephone. The bill for this phone is less than £100/month. I hope that demonstrates the emphasis I place on efficiency and a purely electronic communication style of business. I talk via email and webchat. My paper use is incredibly low, and my business water consumption is about 3 litres/day, in the form of cups of Chinese tea. My greenhouse gas emissions increase dramatically the day after I eat an Indian Curry. But, joking aside, that puts it in perspective, I hope.

Do I have an environmental policy in the sense of the meaning on the application form? No, sorry, that would be a complete waste of time, effort and, er... energy. Plus, I like curries.

So why should LINGsCARS.com win this AM Environmental Policy Award?

Well...

I have researched this environmental subject widely. I have corresponded with the **Department for Transport**, have been in discussions with the **VCA** (the VCA is the designated UK approval authority which compiles the UK vehicle environmental data) and the **SMMT** (the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders). But Sir Nicholas Stern would not return my calls, unfortunately.

I decided the most effective environmental strategy was to EMPOWER CUSTOMERS to make good choices. The decisions customers make in their choice of cars and their motoring habits massively outweigh any further business efficiencies that would sound good on paper but have little overall effect on total UK environmental emissions.

Empowering Customers

I have around 50,000 visitors to LINGsCARS.com every month. That is over half a million unique consumers visiting my website per year. Far more people view my website and interact with it, than visit even the largest dealership group in the UK.

My customers drive brand-new cars. These cars are far less polluting than cars built just a few years ago. As an extreme example, it would take 50 new cars to produce the same emissions per kilometre as a vehicle made in 1970. By their nature, these new cars will be emitting the lowest levels of pollutants than they will ever produce in their lifetimes, as they get older. However, road transport contributes considerably to Europe's continuing air quality problems. But you know all that, I think.

My customers have obtained their cars by the lowest polluting method possible - by acquiring them electronically from the internet. No one has had to travel to a showroom (repeatedly) or contributed to car dealers' massive environmental overheads (heating, lighting, water use, fuel, staffing costs). The cars I supply are often delivered direct from manufacturers' depots, or where they have been "through" a dealer, they have not required the showroom overhead (these efficiencies have the added benefit of reducing costs!). Part-exchanges are valued online, too.

Also, my customers agree to adhere to a fixed mileage allowance (usually 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 miles per annum) and they are charged for "excess" miles. This means they are far more aware of the costs involved in unnecessary journeys in their new cars. To a certain extent, my customers will consider "*is my journey really necessary?*" and "*would it be cheaper to do this long trip on the train?*"

So, it is probably the case that my customers have the smallest environmental footprint of any set of new car customers in the UK!

I took the additional step of investing heavily in providing my website visitors with the most comprehensive environmental information, presented in the most useable way, in the UK today. They have the tools to choose cars well.

What green information I give customers

I have managed to provide my website visitors and customers with far more environmental information than they could find at even the "greenest" dealership. With the blessing of the Department for Transport and the VCA, I have hot-linked the whole of their environmental information (and also NCAP safety information and crash-test videos) to virtually every new car I can supply (over 300 models) from most brands.



LINGsCARS.com is now the most environmentally focussed supplier of new cars in the UK. It is with great satisfaction that I see my customers viewing webpages containing over 300 new car models, sorting them by CO² emissions instead of simply by price or model type, or power output, which are the only options any of my competitors in the marketplace care to offer.

The time will come when all cars are marketed with greenhouse emissions as the most important factor, and LINGsCARS is the first business in the UK to achieve this.



The comparative or "fridge" label, compulsory in car showrooms - except you've got to DRIVE there to see it!

Comparative Labels

I took the decision to code into HTML, SQL and PHP (and make available for printing at home) the "Comparative Labels" or the "fridge" type labels you see at Comet and Curry's on new fridges and washing machines. No other UK website or dealership bothers (or wants) to allow their customers to do this. One day this will be forced upon every car business. I have made my code freely available for any dealer who wants to use it, and published a tutorial on how to dynamically include this in their websites. This guide was published on the Automotive Management forum on 26th October 2006. To date, no dealer has contacted me to use my code.

If showroom-based car dealers fail to show fuel consumption labels on new cars on display, or to make available to potential buyers the results of the fuel consumption tests as listed in the Government booklet, it renders them liable on conviction to a fine of up to £5,000. This is why dealers miraculously achieve these "minimum standards" - under threat of a £5,000 fine! I am the only UK new car provider to make these labels available freely and electronically, with no coercion.

Comparative Judgements

I make sure that at-a-glance CO², fuel economy and the coloured "greenness indicator bars" are displayed clearly on my homepage car listings for easy comparison purposes. When a customer clicks through into an individual car's detail, they can see even more information. This includes the CO² (again) and all three EC fuel consumption measurements. I even include the EU noise rating and the road tax "class" which may influence a customer's car choice decision. *(Please bear in mind that the road tax is completely free, from me - I include that cost information so a customer has more clues about the environmental impact of their new car).* A very important feature is to be able to compare many different cars on my main car listing pages. No franchised dealer will allow this, as they are mainly representing just one brand, so how is the average customer expected to make comparative judgements? Comparison adds meaning.



CO₂: 238g/km G 31mpg
euro NCAP ★★★★★

Personal Contract Hire
NEW Nissan Pathfinder
2.5 dCi (174bhp) Sport
4WD Station Wagon
(7-seat) 5dr 2488cc
Auto

3+23 = 2 yr rent

£405.36

per month inc VAT

Full environmental info is shown
for each new car

Results

The customer response has been phenomenal. Many people tell me that having this information and being able to easily sort and compare new cars at the point of sale, based on their "greenness" is a great help to them in the decision making process. Support from professional sources has also been very strong:

Martin Callanan, Euro MP who sits on the Transport Committees for Euro 6 wrote: *"Ling and her unique website LINGsCARS.com displays environmental information in a way that leads the UK motor industry. Following my discussions with her about greening the business, Ling has grasped the environmental nettle and is giving UK car buyers comprehensive*



Martin Callanan MEP

environmental data on all new cars for sale in the UK to enable them to make an informed choice. LINGsCARS gives a fantastic amount of green information on her new cars, which the rest of the UK motor industry would do well to emulate. Using the internet is already the most energy efficient way of researching and buying a new car, so well done Ling for taking the personal responsibility to push this carbon data to the top of her agenda and to push environmental awareness a big step further"

Chris Macgowan, outgoing Chief Executive of the SMMT wrote: "Ling, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity at SMMT to look at the impact of the



Christopher Macgowan

(environmental) label in a different media from the car showroom. We have always been aware that like the "white goods" label on which the car label is based, that its merits extend beyond the car showroom. In addition we know that the earlier in the buying process the purchaser thinks about low CO² emissions the more consideration it will be given in the buying process."

The Government VCA wrote: "I can appreciate the efforts you are making to improve environmental awareness amongst your customers and I'm sure that your approach will be of help to them when deciding on a new car. At this time there is no legal requirement for dealers to display this information on their websites. Your comments and in depth suggestions on how we might improve the output of the data will be considered alongside any other proposals for change."

The Green Car Guide wrote: "LINGsCARS.com is the only new-car sales site in cyberspace where consumers can compare this important information... Visitors to Ling's website can even print off the approved CO² "Comparative Label" - like the one on fridges in electrical shops. LINGsCARS is the only website in the world where this is possible. Ironically, to view this environmental label from any other motor dealer in the UK, customers have to DRIVE to their showroom, creating yet more CO²!"



AutoblogGreen, world leading Green car site wrote:

"LINGsCARS also offers opinions... The key for AutoblogGreen readers is that each car is listed with a coloured environmental scale, so CO² emissions and fuel economy are easy to know at a glance."

Giving away my methods, encouraging others

Additionally, I have suggested to Stephen Briers that AM offer this information electronically in database form so that many more dealers find it easier and less political to tap into it, and am carrying out introductions on this basis with the VCA.

I am willing to provide website source code and technical assistance for any other motor dealer to copy this method of displaying environmental data for customers, and have advertised this repeatedly on the AM Forum.

That's my entry, thanks for reading and I would love to win this Environmental motor industry award! - Ling