

Working for you

THE LATEST ON WHICH? AND OUR CAMPAIGNS

How to help a good cause this Christmas



Which? chief executive Peter Vicary-Smith urges us to check the small print on charity Christmas cards

The first 'charity' Christmas card was produced by UNICEF in 1949. Today, these cards net charities £50m a year.

Of course, we all know that Christmas is a time for giving – and making sure good causes get a fair share is a nice way to spread some festive cheer. Evidently, many people feel the same, as more than half of us bought charity Christmas cards last year.

But the findings of our recent report ('Which charity Christmas card?', Nov 09, p16) make for dismal reading and put some well-known high street stores in the running for a Scrooge award.

You may be surprised to know that, in some cases, charities are making just six pence in every pound of the card price.

There wasn't always such a disparity. Thirty years ago, charity cards were mainly sold in charity shops or through catalogues, and the few chain stores that stocked the cards gave all the profit to good causes.

Then shops started to make money out of it – and it's easy to see why. Christmas cards are big business, accounting for 43% of the greetings card market.

As consumers, are we therefore being lead astray by our best

intentions? When you consider that Next and House of Fraser are giving as little as 6% of the card's price, and that overall only an average of 13% of the card price goes to charities, is it time to take stock of our charitable giving?

Choose carefully

Let's remember that the sale of charity Christmas cards offers charities a risk-free income. They don't have to pay any of the costs of production and also get their name in the public eye, which can be useful for smaller charities in particular.

But some shops offer a much better deal than others. So if you want to buy cards on the high street, plump for the likes of WHSmith, which offers between 20% and 100% on its cards.

But, in my view, if you really want to help a good cause, buy direct from the charity via its shops, catalogue or website – or from a Cards for Good Causes outlet (see www.cardsforcharity.co.uk). And always read the small print carefully to be certain that a good slice of the price will go towards helping those you want to help, not the retailer in the middle.

Season's Greetings!

Which? says

Energy labelling

We've told you several times this year of our concerns over proposed changes to product energy labelling (see August, p77) – we now have the evidence to back us up.

The European Commission wants to change the A-G rating scheme to reflect greater efficiency in modern appliances – but this would leave consumers more confused.

It hopes to add categories, such as A-40% to indicate a product that's 40% more efficient than A – but we would simply tighten criteria so that the A rating remains a high standard.

And our September survey shows that you find the current labels easier to understand. When we asked over 1,000 members of the public to look at three labels, 59% preferred the A-G scheme, 33% liked an A+ label and only 15% opted for the A-40% sample.

John Lewis has also told us that it thinks the current labelling would work better, albeit with revisions. A spokesman said: 'A recalibration of the A-G rating system – with new energy usage and consumer cost tables – would be the most honest and simplest method of change that customers would understand. It would also act as a clear incentive for manufacturers to achieve the new gold standard.'

We're calling on UK MEPs to support amendments to the proposals so the A-G scheme will be kept and labels will have to appear on product advertising – we'll let you know what happens.

Rob Reid,
Which? science
policy advisor



Help us stand up to Britain's banks

More than a year on from the collapse of financial markets, and UK banks appear to have learnt few lessons (see Oct, p77).

Our new campaign – Britain Needs Better Banks – aims to

address ongoing issues after research showed that almost two thirds of people are still angry with banks for their role in the financial crisis and four out of five believe that senior bankers

haven't paid for their mistakes.

We need your support, and stories about how you've been affected. Visit www.bnbb.org for more, and help us change the banking sector for good.