



## Marketing Messages

**MARY CHARLESON**

### *Al Gore's truth hits home*

Billed as "The Truth is About to Hit Home," the September 29 live Vancouver presentation of **An Inconvenient Truth** by Al Gore was a sell out with 1,500 in attendance at the Westin Bayshore.

Among the facts that most of us are scarcely able to fathom was the realization that the polar ice cap is melting at 10 times the rate previously estimated. Stated Gore, "In the last 3 weeks the amount of ice melting in the artic has been completely unprecedented. In only 6 days an area the size of the US state of Florida disappeared. In the week before that, an area almost twice the size of Britain disappeared. Experts are now saying, if we don't act with urgency, the entire ice cap will be completely gone in less than 23 years." He went on to note that the occurrence of that event would result in a rise in sea level of 6 meters, resulting in over 100 million people worldwide being displaced. Although he didn't have the animated slide to show the impact on a coastal area like Vancouver, it was pretty sobering to do the mental math. Forget expenditures on terrorism and airport security. It would all be under water. The prospect of relying on dikes like New Orleans doesn't fit our "Best Place on Earth" image.

Gore has updated his presentation on many fronts since the DVD release of the film, most notably offering more hope to those daunted by the size of the problem, gripped by inaction, despite knowledge. Yes, we were assured, changing your light bulbs could really make a difference. In fact it was the power of the collective which both Gore and Suzuki dwelled upon. Small steps made by many to make a big difference. Speaking to existing technologies, Gore emphasized the incredible economic opportunity that exists for companies who choose to be leaders in change. "With existing technology, we could reduce our footprint by 90%," noted Gore.

So why aren't we?

That question really took on significance, not at the presentation, but afterward, in the bowels of the Westin Bayshore underground parking lot. That is when the real "Truth was About to Hit Home." I started to make a mental count of the hybrids versus large sedan and SUV's in the lot. There was no contest. Let's hope the Hummer with Washington plates was an oblivious visiting tourist and not an event attendee. With apologies to Toyota, an event sponsor, the only hybrids I saw were the display models and the cabs driving people home. But it was the loud sound roaring and echoing throughout the parkade that really caught my attention. And then it dawned on me. That was a massive fan system, sucking the CO2 emissions out of the air from the tangled web of idling cars waiting to get out of the parking garage. Although I was driving a Honda Fit, possibly one of the most fuel-efficient cars in the garage, I too was victim of a terrible hypocrisy. And that was the moment of enlightenment.

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Judging by Gore's followers, a predominantly young, hip urban crowd with a few business type suits over 50, this crowd would dump their gas dependent cars for an alternative in a heartbeat if a viable, widely distributed choice existed. Gore has done a tremendous job galvanizing opinion, raising public awareness and lending an air of rock star cool to the green movement. Some politicians have listened. Gordon Campbell has pledged a 33% reduction in carbon emissions in BC by 2020. Though both Gore and Suzuki were critical of our federal governments "aspirational goals" pledged at the recent summit in Sydney, Australia. They both emphasized that fear of economic loss was incredibly short sighted and challenged business and industries to rise to the task and work together to re-invent the future. They suggest just as we retooled auto plants in the 1940s to support war efforts overseas, we are fully capable of a mass change in a short time if there is both political and business will. The economic prosperity from such a shift could be unprecedented.

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Ask your political representatives. Ask the businesses that you deal with. Ask yourself. We need some answers.

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