



When It's Greener To Build

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The Real News About Green Marketing : Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow

NEW YORK, NY — Old news : green products don't work and consumers won't pay a premium for them. New news : investment in environmentally-preferable products and technologies can lead to a potent new source of innovation and competitive advantage. Take heed!

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Contrary to what many marketers may think, environmental marketing appeals are growing in number. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star label for energy efficiency, for example, now appears on 11,000 different companies' SKUs in 40 product categories, ranging from washing machines and light bulbs to skyscrapers and homes.

Granted, polls such as Roper's Green Gauge tell us that a high percentage of consumers (around 42 percent) still feel that environmental products don't work as well as conventional ones. This is an unfortunate legacy from the 1970s when low-flow showerheads sputtered and natural detergents left clothes dingy.

Granted, given the choice, all but the greenest of consumers will reach for Tide, a name they trust to get their clothes clean, over the premium-priced, proverbial "Happy Planet" any day, including Earth Day.

Given a brand they trust and armed with the extra knowledge that it happens also to be green, however, a large and growing number of consumers will grab the eco-friendly option. Case in point: the runaway success of Tide Coldwater, with its energy and environmental benefits.

There is even better news. Many green products and technologies have improved significantly since the "crunchy" days of green marketing, and many are so improved they are now superior to their conventional "brown" counterparts. One all too familiar example is Toyota's hybrid Prius that has consumers not only lining up to purchase it, but at a significant premium price as well.

Don't expect to see babies, planets and daisies in these products' ads. That's because they can attract users on the basis of performance, money savings, health and convenience-benefits that appeal to a much wider set of consumers than those in the "deep green" niche - and for the reasons why consumers buy certain products in the first place.

Need a light bulb? Consider the Marathon brand from Philips. A compact fluorescent light bulb that comes with a \$15 price tag but will save you approximately \$26 over its lifetime while sparing you the hassle of changing bulbs, especially appreciated in hard to reach places.

Want cleaner clothes? Try some of the front-loading washers that are now on the market thanks to U.S. Department of Energy regulations requiring higher levels of energy and water efficiency. Chances are the one you buy will not only have the same capacity as your top loader, it leaves your clothes clean and bright, and since it won't agitate the wash load, it comes without the prospect of a shortened life, too.

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Drive fewer than 7,500 miles per year? Look forward to saving thousands of dollars annually by joining one of the 25 "car sharing" services that have sprung up around the U.S. A time-sharing concept for cars imported from the Netherlands, such services let you "borrow" any type of vehicle to suit the particular need of your driving occasion - a van for moving, a sporty small car for running errands around town. This concept innovation represents only one of the possible new business models that green-inspired innovation can bring.

Speaking of Europe, there's a lot on the horizon that marketers should know. In Europe (as well as in Japan) companies are now preparing to respond to government directives and policies that seriously impact how many types of products will be designed and conceived of in the future. Two such examples are the End of Life Vehicles Policy and the WEEE Directive (Waste Electronics and Electrical Equipment) that requires manufacturers to assume responsibility of their products from birth through the end of their lives.

Such initiatives spur foreign competitors to push the outside of the environmental innovation envelope; American companies can't risk being caught offguard, lest falling into the same trap as Ford and GM in a U.S. auto market swiftly veering toward smaller, fuel efficient models.

Environmentalism is fast becoming embedded in the American culture, and consumers are increasingly demanding that environmental performance be a part of any successful product. Representing a signal for innovation in product design and communication, U.S., Roper's poll also tells us that 56 percent of Americans would do more for the environment if they only knew how.

Tomorrow's news : businesses that will grow in the 21st century are those with an appreciation for how "green" is equated with "superior performance"; success in the global marketplace will come as a result of integrating green considerations into innovation.

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