

## How to Appeal to Changing Needs of Today's Mainstream Green Consumers

By Christopher Menone

Much of today's green marketing is wasted because it fails to target the changing needs of today's more mainstream consumers. That's a key message in Jacquie Ottman's just released book, *The New Rules of Green Marketing*.

Since 1989, Jacquelyn Ottman, a green marketing pioneer, adviser to the Fortune 500 and acknowledged guru of all things green, has been tracking the transition of the green consumer from fringe to now mainstream. In her new book, which is sure to become the go-to resource guide on the topic, Ottman reveals what it takes to succeed in this new green marketplace, providing insight into the specific needs of today's mainstream consumers, and how companies large and small have responded with fresh green marketing strategies.

### Green Marketers Need to Promote "Added Value"

As green products have begun to rival their "brown" counterparts in quality and ubiquity, savvy marketers have moved beyond targeting "deep green" consumers with a "save the planet" pitch. Instead, they appeal to today's newly mainstream consumers by promoting the *added value* their products provide: better health, superior performance, good taste, cost-effectiveness—and even status.

But it's not this easy. Along with the many opportunities associated with communicating these added values come many challenges. In *The New Rules of Green Marketing*, Ottman offers five strategies to overcome these challenges and take advantage of the myriad opportunities afforded by the now \$290 billion green marketplace:

Four Deep-Green Sub-Segments



Chart: J. Ottman Consulting, Inc.

1. **Know your customer.** There are many different kinds of environmental and social issues—water quality, hazardous waste, and pollution from cars and trucks top the list, but no consumer can be equally concerned about them all. So, in selecting the right consumer to target, keep in mind that consumers can be segmented demographically—but perhaps more importantly—psychographically, including by areas of personal interest: natural resource conservation, health, animals, and the outdoors, as depicted below and described in more depth in the book.

2. **Appeal to consumers' self-interest.** Although the environment is important to consumers, it will likely not be the *primary* motivation for today's mainstream consumers to buy one brand over a competitor's. In other words, as Ottman cautions, don't be "green marketing myopic"! Remember that consumers buy products to meet basic needs, not for altruistic reasons. When shopping they look to stretch their budgets and reduce risks. They will, however, spring for the premium price when to preserve health—"save me" over the more conventional "save the planet" pitches that appealed to their "deep green" cousins. That's why AFM Safecoat Paint is quick to assure consumers it is "The only paint that is doctor recommended."

3. **Educate and empower consumers with solutions.** Consumers want to match up their shopping choices with their green values, and actively seek out information to make informed purchasing decision as well as to use and dispose of products and packages responsibly. Especially effective are emotion-laden messages that help consumers acquire a sense of control over

their lives and their world. Consider for example, Method's empowering "People Against Dirty Campaign" featured on the methodhome.com website or their equally empowering "Say no to (laundry) jugs" campaign for their new 8x concentrated laundry liquid and waste-free squirt bottle. As Ottman points out in the book, "Advertisers that make the effort to teach, educational messages represent special opportunities to boost purchase intent, enhance imagery, and bolster credibility".

**4. Reassure on performance.** Consider the challenges green marketers face. Green technologies and materials are not only new to the consumer, they can look or perform very differently from the so-called "brown" goods they were designed to replace. Not surprisingly given their history, greener products are still perceived by many consumers to not work as well, either. Ottman advises to remove this potential barrier to purchase by addressing the issue head on. Just one example: ads for Seventh Generation dish liquid assert: "Because you don't have to choose between safety and spotless dishes."

**5. Engage the community.** Today's consumers are generally distrustful of advertising and they increasingly tend to trust the recommendations of friends and family even more than traditional forms of paid media—in fact as of 2009, 90% reported that they trust "recommendations from people I know" more than "ads on TV" (61%) (Source: Nielsen). Hence, the astronomical rise in importance of social media in the past few years.

Whole Foods is one brand that makes it easy for consumers to share information about their brand with each other. They engage over 450,000 Facebook fans and nearly 2 million Twitter followers in lively conversation. To celebrate their one-millionth Twitter follower, they held a contest that asked followers to tweet their food philosophies in five words or less, rewarding the most creative with Whole Foods gift cards.

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