



Can green retailers get into the black?

by [Martin Moylan](#), Minnesota Public Radio
January 1, 2008

Many local consumers want to buy more environmentally friendly products -- products that are green. Several retailers have opened up recently in the Twin Cities to serve those shoppers. The stores are clearly green. The question is: Can they end up in the black?

Minneapolis — When Christine Hanwick of Minneapolis went shopping for a gift for her mother recently, Hanwick knew her options were limited. That is because Hanwick was looking for something most retailers cannot sell her.

Something "sustainable," she says, "that's going to leave a smaller carbon footprint."

Hanwick found her way to Twin Cities Green on Hennepin Avenue South in Minneapolis. The store offers a wide array of recycled, reclaimed and otherwise earth-friendly products: hats and mittens made from old sweaters, lamp shades created from discarded license plates, and the store's top seller -- toilet tissue made from 100 percent recycled paper.

Hanwick bought her mom a hat and pin for about \$20, and felt she got a good deal.

"I think they're very reasonable in terms of prices," she says. "And there are some really great products here. There are hats, children's goods, furniture, cleaning supplies, lots of neat things."

Twin Cities Green is one of several green stores that have debuted in the Twin Cities in recent months. Other shops include Cool Planet Goods and Sunny Day Earth Solutions. The stores' owners see an opportunity to serve green consumers who cannot find what they want at most big retailers.

Ryan North and his wife, Tina, own Twin Cities Green. Ryan North says they know it will be a struggle to establish their business. Most new small businesses fail, it seems, within four years. But North says their hearts told them to open the shop.

"Green is growing exponentially in this city," he says. "It's really a booming industry here in Minneapolis. People want more choices. People want to live their lives more sustainability, more green. And we want to help them."

North and his wife are actors by trade. They met performing in the long-running "Tony 'n Tina's Wedding."

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- *Consultant
Jacquelyn
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And the Norths remain closely connected to the Twin Cities artistic community. Local artists and craftsmen make many of the goods at Twin Cities Green, recycling things that would otherwise likely end up in the trash.

Small shops like Twin Cities Green are not alone in pursuing the green market. Even mega-retailers, including Wal-Mart and Home Depot, are going green to some extent, offering an increasing supply of green -- or at least apparently green -- goods.

"In the past, green was a niche," says green marketing consultant Jacquelyn Ottman. "It was the purview of the hippies. Now it's very mainstream."

Ottman says there's a lot of opportunity these days in going green, both for big retailers and manufacturers -- and for small businesses. Ottman says that is largely because more green products are available and they work. "We've really seen green products come a long way in the last 20 years from a standpoint of quality," Ottman says. "And, of course, that makes them much more appealing to a mass audience."

Seeing the likes of Target and Wal-Mart selling green products leaves Ryan North with mixed emotions. He hopes there will still be room left for small retailers. "When Target and Wal-Mart start offering green things, I'm kind of torn," he says. "I'm like, 'Great. Good. That's more green things getting out into the world.' But I hope people will see the value of shopping small, shopping local."

Chances are many of the goods North sells will not find their way into big retail stores. That is because they don't lend themselves to mass production and they are made locally.

Stacy Janiak, vice chair of retail for the Deloitte consulting firm, says small green retailers can benefit greatly from their community connections. "The green concept is something that is very appealing to a local market because it tends to add something back to the community," she says. "That green concept, particularly for a smaller shop, would be a fantastic marketing tool."

A recent Deloitte survey found 20 percent of shoppers said they intended to buy more environmentally friendly products this holiday season. And Janiak suspects the desire of consumers to shop green will grow as more retailers go green and more green products become available.

That would greatly please shopper Christine Hanwick. "A lot of people are getting very excited about this concept," she says. "There's a lot of interest. There just needs to be more options."

Some retailers have already turned green concepts into solid nationwide businesses. Whole Foods has nearly 300 stores across the country now. Ten Thousand Villages, which sells crafts made by third-world artisans, is widely considered a true green business. There are now more than 160 Ten Thousand Villages retail outlets in North America.