

GREEN MARKETING: A STRATEGIC WEAPON

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ABSTRACT

There are many lessons to be learned to avoid green marketing myopia —the short version of all this is that effective green marketing requires applying good marketing principles to make green products desirable for consumers. The question that remains, however, is, what is green marketing's future? Historically, green marketing has been a misunderstood concept. Business scholars have viewed it as a "fringe" topic, given that environmentalism's acceptance of limits and conservation does not mesh well with marketing's traditional axioms of "give customers what they want" and "sell as much as you can." In practice, green marketing myopia has led to ineffective products and consumer reluctance. Sustainability, however, is destined to dominate twenty-first century commerce. Rising energy prices, growing pollution and resource consumption in Asia, and political pressures to address climate change are driving innovation toward healthier, more-efficient, high-performance products. In short, all marketing will incorporate elements of green marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Although environmental issues influence all human activities, few academic disciplines have integrated green issues into their literature. This is especially true of marketing. As society becomes more concerned with the natural environment, businesses have begun to modify their behavior in an attempt to address society's "new" concerns. Some businesses have been quick to accept concepts like environmental management systems and waste minimization, and have integrated environmental issues into all organizational activities. Some evidence of this is the development of journals such as "Business Strategy and the Environment" and "Greener Management International," which are specifically designed to disseminate research relating to business' environmental behavior.

One business area where environmental issues have received a great deal of discussion in the popular and professional press is marketing. Terms like "Green Marketing" and "Environmental Marketing" appear frequently in the popular press. Many governments around the world have become so concerned about green marketing activities that they have attempted to regulate them. For example, in the United States (US) the Federal Trade Commission and the National Association of Attorneys-General have developed extensive documents examining green marketing issues. One of the biggest problems with the green marketing area is that there has been little attempt to academically examine environmental or green marketing. While some literature does exist, it comes from divergent perspectives.

GREEN MARKETING

Unfortunately, a majority of people believe that green marketing refers solely to the promotion or advertising of products with environmental characteristics. Terms like Phosphate Free, Recyclable, Refillable, Ozone Friendly, and Environmentally Friendly are some of the things consumers most often associate with green marketing. While these terms are green marketing claims, in general green marketing is a much broader concept, one that can be applied to consumer goods, industrial goods and even services. For example, around the world there are resorts that are beginning to promote themselves as "ecotourist" facilities, i.e., facilities that "specialize" in experiencing nature or operating in a fashion that minimizes their environmental impact.

Thus green marketing incorporates a broad range of activities, including product modification, changes to the production process, packaging changes, as well as modifying advertising. Yet defining green marketing is not a simple task. Indeed the terminology used in this area has varied, it includes: Green Marketing, Environmental Marketing and Ecological Marketing. While green marketing came into prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it was first discussed much earlier. The American Marketing Association (AMA) held the first workshop on "Ecological Marketing" in 1975. The proceedings of this workshop resulted in one of the first

books on green marketing entitled "Ecological Marketing". Since that time a number of other books on the topic have been published.

A more sustainable business model requires “product dematerialization”— that is, commerce will shift from the “sale of goods” to the “sale of services” (for example, providing illumination rather than selling light bulbs).

Innovations that transform material goods into efficient streams of services could proliferate if consumers see them as desirable. To avoid green marketing myopia, the future success of product dematerialization and more sustainable services will depend on credibly communicating and delivering consumer-desired value in the marketplace. Only then will product dematerialization steer business onto a more sustainable path. There are many lessons to be learned to avoid green marketing myopia —the short version of all this is that effective green marketing requires applying good marketing principles to make green products desirable for consumers. The question that remains, however, is, what is green marketing’s future? Historically, green marketing has been a misunderstood concept. Business scholars have viewed it as a “fringe” topic, given that environmentalism’s acceptance of limits and conservation does not mesh well with marketing’s traditional axioms of “give customers what they want” and “sell as much as you can.” In practice, green marketing myopia has led to ineffective products and consumer reluctance. Sustainability, however, is destined to dominate twenty-first century commerce. Rising energy prices, growing pollution and resource consumption in Asia, and political pressures to address climate change are driving innovation toward healthier, more-efficient, high-performance products. In short, all marketing will incorporate elements of green marketing.

WHY ARE FIRMS USING GREEN MARKETING?

When looking through the literature there are several suggested reasons for firms increased use of Green Marketing. Five possible reasons cited are:

1. Organizations perceive environmental marketing to be an opportunity that can be used to achieve its objectives;
2. Organizations believe they have a moral obligation to be more socially responsible;
3. Governmental bodies are forcing firms to become more responsible;
4. Competitors' environmental activities pressure firms to change their environmental marketing activities; and
5. Cost factors associated with waste disposal, or reductions in material usage forces firms to modify their behavior.



DELHI'S FAMOUS CNG AUTORICKSHAW

1. OPPORTUNITIES

It appears that all types of consumers, both individual and industrial are becoming more concerned and aware about the natural environment. In a 1992 study of 16 countries, more than 50% of consumers in each country, other than Singapore, indicated they were concerned about the environment. A 1994 study in Australia found that 84.6% of the sample believed all individuals had a responsibility to care for the environment. A further 80% of this sample indicated that they had modified their behavior, including their purchasing behavior, due to

environmental reasons. As demands change, many firms see these changes as an opportunity to be exploited.

Given these figures, it can be assumed that firms marketing goods with environmental characteristics will have a competitive advantage over firms marketing non-environmentally responsible alternatives. There are numerous example of firms who have strived to become more environmentally responsible, in an attempt to better satisfy their consumer needs.

- McDonald's replaced its clam shell packaging with waxed paper because of increased consumer concern relating to polystyrene production and Ozone depletion.
- Tuna manufacturers modified their fishing techniques because of the increased concern over driftnet fishing, and the resulting death of dolphins.
- Xerox introduced a "high quality" recycled photocopier paper in an attempt to satisfy the demands of firms for less environmentally harmful products.

This is not to imply that all firms who have undertaken environmental marketing activities actually improve their behavior. In some cases firms have misled consumers in an attempt to gain market share. In other cases firms have jumped on the green bandwagon without considering the accuracy of their behavior, their claims, or the effectiveness of their products. This lack of consideration of the true "greenness" of activities may result in firms making false or misleading green marketing claims.

2. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many firms are beginning to realize that they are members of the wider community and therefore must behave in an environmentally responsible fashion. This translates into firms that believe they must achieve environmental objectives as well as profit related objectives. This results in environmental issues being integrated into the firm's corporate culture. Firms in this situation can take two perspectives;

- 1) They can use the fact that they are environmentally responsible as a marketing tool; or

2) They can become responsible without promoting this fact.

There are examples of firms adopting both strategies. Organizations like the Body Shop heavily promote the fact that they are environmentally responsible. While this behavior is a competitive advantage, the firm was established specifically to offer consumers environmentally responsible alternatives to conventional cosmetic products. This philosophy is directly tied to the overall corporate culture, rather than simply being a competitive tool.

An example of a firm that does not promote its environmental initiatives is Coca-Cola. They have invested large sums of money in various recycling activities, as well as having modified their packaging to minimize its environmental impact. While being concerned about the environment, Coke has not used this concern as a marketing tool. Thus many consumers may not realize that Coke is a very environmentally committed organization.

Another firm who is very environmentally responsible but does not promote this fact, at least outside the organization, is Walt Disney World (WDW). WDW has an extensive waste management program and infrastructure in place, yet these facilities are not highlighted in their general tourist promotional activities.



**SOME COMPANIES THAT USE GREEN MARKETING AS SOCIAL
 RESPONSIBILITY.**

3. GOVERNMENTAL PRESSURE

As with all marketing related activities, governments want to "protect" consumers and society; this protection has significant green marketing implications. Governmental regulations relating to environmental marketing are designed to protect consumers in several ways,

- 1) Reduce production of harmful goods or by-products;
- 2) Modify consumer and industry's use and/or consumption of harmful goods; or
- 3) Ensure that all types of consumers have the ability to evaluate the environmental composition of goods.

Governments establish regulations designed to control the amount of hazardous wastes produced by firms. Many by-products of production are controlled through the issuing of various environmental licenses, thus modifying organizational behavior. In some cases governments try to "induce" final consumers to become more responsible. For example, some governments have introduced voluntary curb-side recycling programs, making it easier for consumers to act responsibly. In other cases governments tax individuals who act in an irresponsible fashion. For example in Australia there is a higher gas tax associated with leaded petrol.

One of the more recent publicized environmental regulations undertaken by governments has been the establishment of guidelines designed to "control" green marketing claims. These regulations include the Australian Trade Practices Commission's (TPC) "Environmental Claims in Marketing - A Guideline, the US Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) "Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing Claims" and the regulations suggested by the National Association of Attorneys-General. These regulations are all designed to ensure consumers have the appropriate information which would enable them to evaluate firm's environmental claims. In addition to these guidelines many States in the US have introduced legislation to control various environmental marketing activities. In most cases these State laws are more stringent than the FTC's guidelines. To date the majority of prosecutions of firms using misleading green marketing has occurred in State rather than Federal courts.

Thus governmental attempts to protect consumers from false or misleading claims should theoretically provide consumers with the ability to make more informed decisions. In Australia

where regulations have affected many companies, one unintended casualty was an advertisement for the Federal Government's environmental labeling program "Environmental Choice." This ad was deemed to breach the TPC's guidelines, as it implied that only products with the logo were environmentally responsible.

4. COMPETITIVE PRESSURE

Another major force in the environmental marketing area has been firms' desire to maintain their competitive position. In many cases firms observe competitors promoting their environmental behaviors and attempt to emulate this behavior. In some instances this competitive pressure has caused an entire industry to modify and thus reduce its detrimental environmental behavior. For example, it could be argued that Xerox's "Revive 100% Recycled paper" was introduced a few years ago in an attempt to address the introduction of recycled photocopier paper by other manufacturers. In another example when one tuna manufacturer stopped using driftnets the others followed suit.

5. COST OR PROFIT ISSUES

Firms may also use green marketing in an attempt to address cost or profit related issues. Disposing of environmentally harmful by-products, such as polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contaminated oil are becoming increasingly costly and in some cases difficult. Therefore firms that can reduce harmful wastes may incur substantial cost savings. When attempting to minimize waste, firms are often forced to re-examine their production processes. In these cases they often develop more effective production processes that not only reduce waste, but reduce the need for some raw materials. This serves as a double cost savings, since both waste and raw material are reduced.

In other cases firms attempt to find end-of-pipe solutions, instead of minimizing waste. In these situations firms try to find markets or uses for their waste materials, where one firm's waste becomes another firm's input of production. One Australian example of this is a firm who

produces acidic waste water as a by-product of production and sells it to a firm involved in neutralizing base materials.

The last way in which cost or profit issues may affect firms' environmental marketing activities is that new industries may be developed. This can occur in two ways:

- 1) A firm develops a technology for reducing waste and sells it to other firms; or
- 2) A waste recycling or removal industry develops.

For example, firms that clean the oil in large industrial condensers increase the life of those condensers, removing the need for replacing the oil, as well as the need to dispose of the waste oil. This reduces operating costs for those owning the condensers and generates revenue for those firms cleaning the oil.

SOME PROBLEMS WITH GOING GREEN

No matter why a firm uses green marketing there are a number of potential problems that they must overcome. One of the main problems is that firms using green marketing must ensure that their activities are not misleading to consumers or industry, and do not breach any of the regulations or laws dealing with environmental marketing. For example marketers in the US must ensure their green marketing claims can meet the following set of criteria, in order to comply with the FTC's guidelines. Green marketing claims must;

- Clearly state environmental benefits;
- Explain environmental characteristics;
- Explain how benefits are achieved;
- Ensure comparative differences are justified;
- Ensure negative factors are taken into consideration; and
- Only use meaningful terms and pictures.

Another problem firm's face is that those who modify their products due to increased consumer concern must contend with the fact that consumers' perceptions are sometimes not correct. Take for example the McDonald's case where it has replaced its clam shells with plastic coated paper. There is ongoing scientific debate which is more environmentally friendly. Some scientific evidence suggests that when taking a cradle-to-grave approach, polystyrene is less environmentally harmful. If this is the case McDonald's bowed to consumer pressure, yet has chosen the more environmentally harmful option.

When firms attempt to become socially responsible, they may face the risk that the environmentally responsible action of today will be found to be harmful in the future. Take for example the aerosol industry which has switched from CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) to HFCs (hydrofluorocarbons) only to be told HFCs are also a greenhouse gas. Some firms now use DME (dimethyl ether) as an aerosol propellant, which may also harm the ozone layer. Given the limited scientific knowledge at any point in time, it may be impossible for a firm to be certain they have made the correct environmental decision. This may explain why some firms, like Coca-Cola and Walt Disney World, are becoming socially responsible without publicizing the point. They may be protecting themselves from potential future negative backlash; if it is determined they made the wrong decision in the past.

While governmental regulation is designed to give consumers the opportunity to make better decisions or to motivate them to be more environmentally responsible, there is difficulty in establishing policies that will address all environmental issues. For example, guidelines developed to control environmental marketing address only a very narrow set of issues, i.e., the truthfulness of environmental marketing claims. If governments want to modify consumer behavior they need to establish a different set of regulations. Thus governmental attempts to protect the environment may result in a proliferation of regulations and guidelines, with no one central controlling body.

Reacting to competitive pressures can cause all "followers" to make the same mistake as the "leader." A costly example of this was the Mobil Corporation who followed the competition

and introduced "biodegradable" plastic garbage bags. While technically these bags were biodegradable, the conditions under which they were disposed did not allow biodegradation to occur. Mobil was sued by several US states for using misleading advertising claims. Thus blindly following the competition can have costly ramifications.

The push to reduce costs or increase profits may not force firms to address the important issue of environmental degradation. End-of-pipe solutions may not actually reduce the waste but rather shift it around. While this may be beneficial, it does not necessarily address the larger environmental problem, though it may minimize its short term affects. Ultimately most waste produced will enter the waste stream, therefore to be environmentally responsible organizations should attempt to minimize their waste, rather than find "appropriate" uses for it.

Some green products do not offer any of the inherent five consumer desired benefits noted above. This was the case when energy-efficient and CFC-free refrigerators were introduced in China in the 1990s. While Chinese consumers preferred and were willing to pay about 15 percent more for refrigerators that were "energy efficient," they did not connect the environmental advantage of "CFC-free" with either energy efficiency or savings. Consequently, the "CFC-free" feature had little impact on purchase decisions. To encourage demand, the CFC-free feature was bundled with attributes desired by Chinese consumers, which included energy efficiency, savings, brand/quality, and outstanding after-sales service. Given consumer demand for convenience, incorporating time-saving or ease-of-use features into green products can further expand their mainstream acceptance. Ford's hybrid Escape SUV comes with an optional 110-volt AC power outlet suitable for work, tailgating, or camping. Convenience has also enhanced the appeal of Interface's recyclable FLOR carpeting, which is marketed as "practical, goof-proof, and versatile." FLOR comes in modular square tiles with four peel-and-stick dots on the back for easy installation (and pull up for altering, recycling, or washing with water in the sink). Modularity offers versatility to assemble tiles for a custom look. Interface promotes the idea that its carpet tiles can be changed and reconfigured in minutes to dress up a room for any

occasion. The tiles come in pizza-style boxes for storage, and ease of use is FLOR's primary consumer appeal.

Austin (Texas) Energy's "Green Choice" program has led the US in renewable energy sales for the past three years. In 2006, demand for wind energy outpaced supply so that the utility resorted to selecting new "Green Choice" subscribers by lottery. While most utilities find it challenging to sell green electricity at a premium price on its environmental merit, **Austin Energy's success comes from bundling three benefits that appeal to commercial power users: First**, Green Choice customers are recognized in broadcast media for their corporate responsibility; **second**, the green power is marketed as "home grown," appealing to Texan loyalties; and **third**, the program offers a fixed price that is locked in for 10 years. Because wind power's cost is derived primarily from the construction of wind farms and is not subject to volatile fossil fuel costs, Austin Energy passes its inherent price stability onto its Green Choice customers. Thus, companies participating in Green Choice enjoy the predictability of their future energy costs in an otherwise volatile energy market.

The analysis suggests that successful green marketing programs have broadened the consumer appeal of green products by convincing consumers of their "non-green" consumer value. **The lesson for crafting effective green marketing strategies is that planners need to identify the inherent consumer value of green product attributes** (for example, energy efficiency's inherent long-term money savings) **or bundle desired consumer value into green products** (such as fixed pricing of wind power) **and to draw marketing attention to this consumer value.**

Calibration of Consumer Knowledge

Many of the successful green products in the analysis described here **employ compelling, educational marketing messages and slogans that connect green product attributes with desired consumer value.** That is, the marketing programs successfully calibrated consumer

knowledge to recognize the green product's consumer benefits. In many instances, the environmental benefit was positioned as secondary, if mentioned at all. Changes made in EPA's Energy Star logo provide an example, illustrating the program's improved message calibration over the years. One of Energy Star's early marketing messages, "EPA Pollution Preventer," was not only ambiguous but myopically focused on pollution rather than a more mainstream consumer benefit. A later promotional message, "Saving The Earth. Saving Your Money." better associated energy efficiency with consumer value, and one of its more recent slogans, "Money Isn't All You're Saving," touts economic savings as the chief benefit. This newest slogan also encourages consumers to think implicitly about what else they are "saving"—the logo's illustration of the Earth suggests the answer, educating consumers that "saving the Earth" can also meet consumer self-interest.

The connection between environmental benefit and consumer value is evident in Earthbound Farm Organic's slogan, "Delicious produce is our business, but health is our bottom line," which communicates that pesticide-free produce is flavorful and healthy. Likewise, Tide Coldwater's "Deep Clean. Save Green." slogan not only assures consumers of the detergent's cleaning performance, but the term "green" offers a double meaning, connecting Tide's cost saving with its environmental benefit. Citizen's solar-powered Eco-Drive watch's slogan, "Unstoppable Caliber," communicates the product's convenience and performance (that is, the battery will not die) as well as prestige.

Some compelling marketing communications educate consumers to recognize green products as "solutions" for their personal needs *and* the environment. When introducing its Renewal brand, Rayovac positioned the reusable alkaline batteries as a solution for heavy battery users and the environment with concurrent ads touting "How to save \$150 on a CD player that costs \$100" and "How to save 147 batteries from going to landfills." Complementing the money savings and landfill angles, another ad in the campaign featured sports star Michael Jordan proclaiming, "More Power. More Music. And More Game Time." to connect Renewal batteries' performance to convenience. In practice, the analysis conducted here suggests that advertising

that draws attention to how the environmental product benefit can deliver desired personal value can broaden consumer acceptance of green products.

Credibility of Product Claims

Credibility is the foundation of effective green marketing. Green products must meet or exceed consumer expectations by delivering their promised consumer value and providing substantive environmental benefits. Often, consumers don't have the expertise or ability to verify green products' environmental and consumer values, creating misperceptions and skepticism. As exemplified in the case of Mobil's Hefty photodegradable plastic trash bag described earlier, green marketing that touts a product's or a company's environmental credentials can spark the scrutiny of advocacy groups or regulators. For example, although it was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, sugar substitute Splenda's "Made from sugar, so it tastes like sugar" slogan and claim of being "natural" have been challenged by the Sugar Association and Generation Green, a health advocacy group, as misleading given that its processing results in a product that is "unrecognizable as sugar."

We can derive from past research that green claims should be specific and meaningful. Toyota recognizes the ambiguity of the term "green" and discourages its use in its marketing of its gas-electric hybrid cars. One proposed slogan, "Drive green, breathe blue" was dismissed in favor of specific claims about fuel efficiency, such as "Less gas in. Less gasses out." Further, **environmental claims must be humble and not over-promise.** When Ford Motor Company publicized in *National Geographic* and other magazines its new eco-designed Rouge River Plant that incorporated the world's largest living roof of plants, critics questioned the authenticity of Ford's environmental commitment given the poor fuel economy of the automaker's best-selling SUVs. Even the Prius has garnered some criticism for achieving considerably less mileage (approximately 26 percent less according to *Consumer Reports*) than its government sticker rating claims, although the actual reduced mileage does not appear to be hampering sales. Nonetheless, green product attributes need to be communicated honestly and qualified for

believability (in other words, consumer benefits and environmental effectiveness claims need to be compared with comparable alternatives or likely usage scenarios). For example, Toyota includes an “actual mileage may vary” disclaimer in Prius advertising. When Ford’s hybrid Escape SUV owners complained that they were not achieving expected mileage ratings, Ford launched the “Fuel-Economy School” campaign to educate drivers about ways to maximize fuel efficiency. Further, EPA is reconsidering how it estimates hybrid mileage ratings to better reflect realistic driving conditions (such as heavy acceleration and air conditioner usage).

Third Party Endorsements and Eco-Certifications

Expert third parties with respected standards for environmental testing (such as independent laboratories, government agencies, private consultants, or nonprofit advocacy organizations) can provide green product endorsements and/ or “seals of approval” to help clarify and bolster the believability of product claims. The “Energy Star” label, discussed earlier, is a common certification that distinguishes certain electronic products as consuming up to 30 percent less energy than comparable alternatives. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “USDA Organic” certifies the production and handling of organic produce and dairy products.



SOME ECO-LABELS AND CERTIFICATIONS

Green Seal and Scientific Certification Systems emblems certify a broad spectrum of green products. Green Seal sets specific criteria for various categories of products, ranging from paints to cleaning agents to hotel properties, and for a fee, companies can have their products evaluated and monitored annually for certification. Green Seal has certified the Hyatt Regency in Washington, DC, for the hotel's comprehensive energy and water conservation, recycling programs, and environmental practices. By contrast, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) certifies specific product claims or provides a detailed "eco-profile" for a product's environmental impact for display on product labels for a broad array of products, from agricultural products to fisheries to construction.

Although eco-certifications differentiate products and aid in consumer decision making, they are not without controversy. The science behind eco-seals can appear subjective and/or

complex, and critics may take issue with certification criteria. For example, GreenOrder, a New York-based environmental consulting firm, has devised a scorecard to evaluate clean-tech products marketed in General Electric's "Ecomagination" initiative, which range from fuel-efficient aircraft engines to wind turbines to water treatment technologies. Only those passing GreenOrder's criteria are marketed as Ecomagination products, but critics have questioned GE's inclusion of "cleaner coal" (that is, coal gasification for cleaner burning and sequestration of carbon dioxide emissions) as an "Ecomagination" product.

Consequently, when seeking endorsements and eco-certifications, marketers should consider the environmental tradeoffs and complexity of their products and the third parties behind endorsements and/or certifications: Is the third party respected? Are its certification methodologies accepted by leading environmentalists, industry experts, government regulators, and other key stakeholders? Marketers should educate their customers about the meaning behind an endorsement or an eco-seal's criteria. GE recognizes that its cleaner coal technology is controversial but hopes that robust marketing and educational outreach will convince society about cleaner coal's environmental benefits. On its Web site, GE references U.S. Energy Information Administration's statistics that coal accounts for about 24 percent of the world's total energy consumption, arguing that coal will continue to be a dominant source of energy due to its abundance and the increasing electrification of populous nations such as China and India.

Word-of-Mouth Evangelism and the Internet

Increasingly, consumers have grown skeptical of commercial messages, and they're turning to the collective wisdom and experience of their friends and peers about products. Word-of-mouth or "buzz" is perceived to be very credible, especially as consumers consider and try to comprehend complex product innovations. The Internet, through e-mail and its vast, accessible repository of information, Web sites, search engines, blogs, product ratings sites, podcasts, and other digital platforms, has opened significant opportunities for tapping consumers' social and

communication networks to diffuse credible “word-of-mouth” (buzz facilitated by the Internet) about green products.

In 2005, Proctor & Gamble partnered with the non-profit organization, the Alliance to Save Energy (ASE), in a “viral marketing” campaign to spread news about the money-saving benefits of laundering clothes in cold water with specially formulated Tide Coldwater. ASE provided credibility for the detergent by auditing and backing P&G’s claims that consumers could save an average of \$63 a year if they switched from warm to cold water washes. ASE sent e-mail promotions encouraging consumers to visit Tide.com, an interactive Web site and take the “Coldwater Challenge” by registering to receive a free sample. Visitors could calculate how much money they would save by using the detergent, learn other energy-saving laundry tips, and refer email addresses of their friends to take the challenge as well. Tide.com offered an engaging map of the United States where, over time, visitors could track and watch their personal networks grow across the country when their friends logged onto the site to request a free sample.

Given the immediacy of e-mail and the Internet, word-of-mouth is fast becoming an important vehicle for spreading credible news about new products. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 44 percent of online U.S. adults (about 50 million Americans) are “content creators,” meaning that they contribute to the Internet via blogs, product recommendations, and reviews. To facilitate buzz, however, marketers need to create credible messages, stories, and Web sites about their products that are so compelling, interesting, and/or entertaining that consumers will seek the information out and forward it to their friends and family. The fact that P&G was able to achieve this for a low-involvement product is quite remarkable.

International online marketing consultant Hitwise reported that ASE’s e-mail campaign increased traffic at the Tide Coldwater Web site by 900 percent in the first week, and then tripled that level in week two. Within a few months, more than one million Americans accepted the

“Coldwater Challenge,” and word-of-mouth cascaded through ten degrees of separation across all 50 states and more than 33,000 zip codes. In October 2005, Hitwise reported that Tide.com ranked as the twelfth most popular site by market share of visits in the “Lifestyle—House and Garden” category. No other laundry detergent brand’s Web site has gained a significant Web presence in terms of the number of visits.

CONCLUSION

There are many lessons to be learned to avoid green marketing myopia —the short version of all this is that effective green marketing requires applying good marketing principles to make green products desirable for consumers. The question that remains, however, is, what is green marketing’s future? Historically, green marketing has been a misunderstood concept. Business scholars have viewed it as a “fringe” topic, given that environmentalism’s acceptance of limits and conservation does not mesh well with marketing’s traditional axioms of “give customers what they want” and “sell as much as you can.” In practice, green marketing myopia has led to ineffective products and consumer reluctance. Sustainability, however, is destined to dominate twenty-first century commerce. Rising energy prices, growing pollution and resource consumption in Asia, and political pressures to address climate change are driving innovation toward healthier, more-efficient, high-performance products. In short, all marketing will incorporate elements of green marketing. A more sustainable business model requires “product dematerialization”— that is, commerce will shift from the “sale of goods” to the “sale of services” (for example, providing illumination rather than selling light bulbs).

Innovations that transform material goods into efficient streams of services could proliferate if consumers see them as desirable. To avoid green marketing myopia, the future success of product dematerialization and more sustainable services will depend on credibly communicating and delivering consumer-desired value in the marketplace. Only then will product dematerialization steer business onto a more sustainable path.

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