

The Vibrant Life of the Eco-Friendly Movement (Go Green, Go!)

By Debrah Rosen
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It's a veritable vegetable patch out there with all the green offerings available. From trade shows to catalogs, you can't escape this growing trend. But just how has it changed in the last year since it debuted on the promotional products scene?

It's Getting Serious

For starters, it's gotten much more serious — or at least, end users are taking their green initiatives much more seriously. It's not enough for a product to be made of partly recycled materials. Consumers want to know that the products they buy — and the companies behind them — are environmentally friendly from start to finish.

"The demand for authentic, responsible products has grown," says Michele Petruccelli, director of product development at Leed's in New Kensington, Pa. "The green trend is going much further than just products that are made from recycled materials. And forget about items that are reusable but have no recycled contents — those are completely passé."

Instead, Petruccelli says, customers have become much more savvy and are doing their own research. "They don't just believe any supplier that says that they are green; customers are asking probing questions and taking a close look at what materials are being used," she adds.

Kurt Rothacker, marketing project manager at Bridgeport, Conn.-based Prime Resources Corp., has noticed a similar trend. "As people become more environmentally conscious, they have also become educated regarding products, materials and processes utilized in the industry," he says. "It is the informed salesperson who makes the most impact with these products by understanding them and being able to communicate their knowledge to the buyer."

New Markets

Heightened awareness to the green movement has also led to increased markets for these goods. At Santa Fe, N.M.-based Symphony Handmade Seed Papers Inc., president Laura Sjoblom has noticed a change in her customer makeup. At past trade shows, about 80 percent of her prospects were female. In fact, "I was swarmed by women in the booth at all times," she recalls. "Now we get requests to develop direct mail pieces and create custom shapes, and it is all over the board — male and female."

After 12 years in the industry, Sjoblom reports that her business has more than doubled in the 2007-2008 season. Last year, Symphony created a seed-paper box mailer for the movie "An Inconvenient Truth," former vice president Al Gore's film about global warming. "The package that the gift comes in is equally as important as the gift, so I believe that we will be paying more attention to green packaging," she says.

New Product Categories

As with any fledgling product category, demand leads to innovation. Jennifer Grigorian, director of advertising and marketing for Sweda Co. in City of Industry, Calif., expects eco-friendly offerings to expand into every product category — including more solar electronics and water-powered goods — despite its beginnings primarily in recycled bags and paper products. "Now that we are all adapting the green theme into our lives at a much more aggressive pace, we are learning that green is more than just those product categories," Grigorian says. "It is no longer just a trend; it is a new way of thinking and conserving for our future and the future of our planet."

Finding new ways to live green, suppliers will be looking to advance their manufacturing capabilities. "To satisfy this demand for more and varied products, new materials and manufacturing will surely be developed," Rothacker predicts. Among the likely developments are stronger and more durable bioplastics, more varied natural textiles and new recycling techniques.

Expanded Choices

Many industry top-dogs are setting an example by expanding their green options. "In 2009 look for Leed's to introduce products that support an environmentally responsible lifestyle," Petruccelli says. The company, which started smaller in 2007 with "cut and sew" pieces, including bags made from recycled materials, has since expanded green offerings, adding stationery, drinkware, writing instruments and growables, such as plants. In July 2007, Gemline in Lawrence, Mass., introduced its Eco-Choice line featuring nine products. Now, the line includes 39 products, says Wendy Farrell, the company's marketing manager. Tustin, Calif.-based Logomark started its green line off with a bang when it introduced the Eco Lifestyle catalog in May featuring more than 100 Earth-friendly items. And Prime Resources even developed the Eco-Responsible numbering system to serve as a comprehensive guide so distributors know what makes each of the company's products environmentally friendly.

Suppliers are also sourcing new options to expand their green lines. Pam Myers, director of marketing at Digispec in Las Vegas, says the company looked into offering a recycled version of the company's popular MousePaper mouse pad, which began with careful research and print testing. "Once that was complete, we had to look at the difference in cost and decide if it was an acceptable alternative for our customers," Myers says. "It was, and the green MousePaper was added to our product line."

Growing Demand

From here, there's nowhere to go but up. Demand and product offerings are continually on the rise, and the future holds even more potential. "A few years ago, requests for recycled materials surfaced randomly from the west coast. After launching our Eco Lifestyle catalog this year, which merchandises products into recycled, recyclable, sustainable, reusable and energy-saving categories, we are seeing an increase in the number of opportunities we have to partner with our distributors to source green products for their end users both in event/spot orders as well as program business," reports Anne Dapremont, Logomark's vice president of sales.

Perhaps one unintended positive consequence of the green movement is how it can save people money in the long term. Logomark fulfilled an order of mugs for a tech company with 300 employees. The company conducted a cost analysis and determined that they were spending too much on disposable cups. By providing each employee with a "work mug," they were able to recoup their investment in two months by not buying disposable cups.

For more ideas on encouraging the eco-friendly trend, check out these hot case studies to the right. n

Case in Point:

A great success story recently was with our new 4-in-1 Shopper's Bundle Bag set. A local charity was having a clothing drive. They purchased the 4-in-1 Shopper's Bundle in a partnership with several restaurants, yogurt shops, beauty salons and other local businesses. The bundles were on sale at these locations prior to the drive. Every tote full of clothing you donated would earn you a discount or coupon from one of the participating stores. For every full bundle pack (four bags) of clothing you dropped off, they gave you another 4-in-1 Shopper's Bundle for free. It was a very exciting event for the charity and the participating stores, as well as the hundreds of people who attended the event.
Sweda Co.; City of Industry, Calif.

A semiconductor company wanted to eliminate bottled water on its campus. They installed high-quality filters as part of a cost savings and green campaign, and wanted to give their employees a reusable mug to encourage them to use new filtered water stations. They chose the Pratico 15-Ounce Mug because it is

microwavable and dishwasher safe. The company preferred this piece because it is not an auto tumbler and would be less likely to leave their campus. The end users wanted a slip of paper inserted in each box detailing their green initiative. The drive has saved the company thousands of dollars each month on bottled water and garbage fees. Also, the visibility of the mug in green with their logo has spurred other eco-conscious practices around campus.
Logomark; Tustin, Calif.