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Principles of Ecology and Management:

International Challenges for Future Practitioners

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7 Green Marketing

Contents

Green consumption
Segmenting green consumers
Green intentions vs. green purchases

Corporate initiatives
'Push' vs. 'pull' marketing
The green marketing mix

Learning objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- Isolate green consumers' varying motivations
- Identify obstacles to green purchasing
- Apply classical marketing mix analysis to green business lines

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Introduction

Ecology and Management students are generally well advanced in their business studies, justifying this chapter's assumption that readers need no introduction to the principles of marketing. Those seeking to review basic concepts in this discipline can refer to useful texts such as *The Busy Manager's Guide to Marketing* (Donaldson 2009).

At one level, the traditional marketing aim of increasing consumption conflicts with the environmental goal of reducing resource utilisation. Beyond these contradictory aims, however, there are many areas where standard marketing concepts can be applied within a green framework. The first step is to determine in which way green marketing resembles or differs from other branches of the discipline.

? How mainstream can green marketing ever hope to become?

Marketing analysts have long spoken of an 'essential tension between environmentalism and modern mass consumption' (MacKoy *et al*. 1995). This is rooted in the basic conflict between the anti-materialist values that have traditionally animated the green movement (see Chapter 1) and the financial and/or consumerist definition of success prevailing in many societies today. The effect is often to undermine the credibility of **green marketing** from the outset. It bears repeating that much of the world continues to see the ecological imperative as less of a priority than this book (and presumably, its readership) does.

Green marketing: Where companies offer products or services that are largely defined by their environmental benefits.

Such scepticism is unsurprising at two levels. Firstly, for many consumers facing a purchasing decision, the environment is still a secondary consideration (Esty and Winston 2006). Whether this apathy is a consequence of potential buyers' financial or socio-economic conditions, cultural values or other factors, the fact is that green consumption remains the exception rather than the rule (Peattie and Crane 2005).

Secondly, many green activists are averse to the kind of marketing that, while proclaiming a company's good intentions, still induces people to consume ever greater quantities of material goods, sparking further resource depletion and pollution. A number of companies stand accused of a manipulative, **greenwash** approach where they gloss over their activities' overall ecological cost by overstating a few token gestures (see *Chapter 7 online case study*). Several websites have been created specifically to expose the inconsistencies in certain companies' environmental claims. *The Guardian* newspaper runs one such site in the UK, regularly featuring stories such as the one published on

Greenwash: Where companies' advertising overstates the extent of the environmental activism.

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2 April 2009 when Swedish furniture retailer Ikea was taken to task for publicising that 5.8 per cent of all of its customers in France use public transportation to visit its retail outlets in that country – while neglecting to mention that the company's decision to build out-of-town increases everyone else's automobile use. Skewed representations of this kind aggravate the lack of credibility from which green marketers already suffer. Overcoming this hurdle will require a more realistic dialogue between companies and consumers. This is not something that can be resolved in the short-term, but it appears to be the only way to help green marketing transcend its currently marginal status.

? How sincere is green marketing?

Green consumption

Since one of the main goals of any marketing drive is to implant in consumers' minds the idea that a company shares their values so they feel at ease with themselves when purchasing its goods, companies will necessarily struggle when advertising their green credentials to consumers who are oblivious to the ecological imperative. Green marketing enthusiasts often argue that companies should proactively 'push' potential consumers towards greener behaviour (Grant 2007) but this kind of top-down approach will only resonate with consumers if they see it as relevant to their immediate concerns.

Yet different customer groups find different things relevant at different times. It is true that since the late 20th century, an ever-greater number of consumers have signalled a desire to engage in purchasing acts that align with their sense of social responsibility. The idea that economic actors might be driven by **altruistic** attitudes has led to the rise of 'cause-related' or **social marketing** (Kotler and Lee 2005; see *Web Resource 7.1*), or the notion that companies can market to social partners in a way that enhances global welfare by achieving certain non-business goals: a social justice agenda, and an ecological one.

Altruism: Sense of greater concern for the welfare of others than for one's own immediate (material) self-interest.]

Social marketing: Commercial efforts by companies to affect consumers' behaviour in a way that will enhance the broader social good.

Segmenting green consumers

Ethical marketing broadens people's sense of self-interest to include strong elements of communitarianism. It asks potential customers to behave in an altruistic way that may not correspond to what they perceive as their immediate material interest but satisfies other longings (Grant 2007). The problem is that this approach creates a conflict between self-interest and group-interest that is akin, in psychological

Chapter extract

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