



## **Building Clean and Green Brands**

By Greg Sieck

**B**uilding a valuable clean technology brand is quickly becoming one of the most complex branding tasks any company can undertake. Clean technology is relevant to mass targets, based on complex—often misunderstood—technologies and the claims, language and launch of new approaches are moving at a rate that makes Moore’s Law look antiquated. Further, every brand with a marketing budget or PR agency is trying to attach some type of “green” message to their brand, adding to the noise and confusion.

It’s not surprising that consumers are confused or completely put off, and the results in the marketplace are astounding. According to a 2007 Terrachoice study, greenwashing is the latest incarnation of whitewashing. Using metrics from the FTC and EPA, Terrachoice concluded that all but one, out of more than 1,000 products reviewed, raised red flags. In a 2007 Burst Media study of 6,000 US adults, more than 70% of respondents recalled seeing a green ad. Twenty percent said they never believe the claim and over two-thirds say they only believe the claim “sometimes.”

Even with that amount of cynicism, a 2007 University of Maryland study found that Americans are willing, in 2008, to spend \$104 billion for environmentally friendly products and technologies. As a result, the 2007 Green Purchasing Report found that businesses are finding themselves compelled to adopt green purchasing practices to acquiesce to their customers’ demands for green-ness. A whopping 98% expect green purchasing to increase in the future.

In evaluating the environmental values of the Global 100 Most Valuable Brands, Andrew Shapiro, CEO of GreenOrder said, “Consumers are becoming more educated and savvy about corporate environmental practices. They know when a company is making a broad claim that doesn’t have much weight behind it.” This insight into the consumer psyche is one that any company seeking to make inroads into clean and green marketing must take into account.

Consider the lessons learned from the organic food movement... a good idea, and an idea that has resulted in a premium grade of food... even premium grocery store brands. But growing, manufacturing and labeling practices vary widely. The FDA is in a constant battle with manufacturers and growers and, in the EU, the argument has moved on to genetically modified foods. The result is erosion of consumer trust, which, by implication, reduces brand value.

## Building Clean and Green Brands (continued)



If you are a provider of clean technology, this is the market environment that you must live with. Your challenge is to become credible, differentiate yourself among customers and investors and garner market share and pricing that will allow you to become a viable, long-term business. Companies seeking to establish brand credibility in the clean technology should adhere to this simple code:

**C**larity is essential. Be absolutely clear about what your brand is going to do to change the world for the better. Are you reducing dependence on non-renewable energy sources? Reducing the amount of waste going into landfills? Making cars that only emit water vapor as exhaust? Get to the benefit and make it big, and clear.

**L**isten to what your stakeholders are saying and be prepared to change quickly. This is the furthest thing from a static market that you will ever find. The technology in your specific category is changing. Your competition is changing and the sophistication of your customers is changing every day. A car that gets 35 MPG on gasoline sounds good, but it's not a hybrid, or fuel-cell powered, or Flex fuel powered or Bio-Diesel powered.

**E**ducate the people closest to the company in great detail on why what you are doing is important. Create a viral community of supporters who know, and believe, that you can make a difference. One of the great things about running a company that can change the world for the better is that your employees and investors believe in what you are doing. Enable and empower them to move your brand into the conversation.

**A**uthenticity means more than just producing a product or technology. The brand must be authentically sustainable in its practices—walking the clean walk from day one. Consider the damage that could be caused if you're claiming to change the world, while at the same time operating a messy plant or dumping outdated IT materials into third-world landfills.

**N**umbers tell the story and numbers don't lie. Use facts to make the case for your technology and your brand. 50% more efficient, one-tenth the energy required, 75 MPG, zero-landfill, removes 275,000 cars from the road during every commute. Nothing brings benefits to life like the facts.

Perhaps the most important element of all is to have an idea that embodies the CLEAN code. Tesla Motors builds electric automobiles that are very high performance. They believe "driving an electric car should not be punishment"—something most people can agree with. SunPower combines high efficiency with beautiful esthetics, making solar power "Intelegant." Applied Materials uses their unrivalled ability to scale entire industries to "Accelerate Solar." And finally, General Electric puts its imagination to work with 'Eco-Imagination.'

These ideas move very functional benefits into the emotional attachments that can be the genesis of long-term trust, brand equity and profitable growth.

**About Sieck Growth Consulting:** *Sieck Growth is a boutique brand strategy and identity firm that specializes in integrating sophisticated strategy with world-class design. The firm works with global brands from Fortune 50 to startups, including Dolby, Kroger, Trend Micro, Wendy's International and Information Resources Inc. (IRI). Recent work for sustainable companies includes SunPower, Intechra and MBA Polymers. For more information contact Greg Sieck at [greg@sieckgrowth.com](mailto:greg@sieckgrowth.com) or (415) 717-4460*