Environmental marketing can mean big bucks for golf industry suppliers

Manufacturers can use green marketing to distinguish their products from other competitors

By Peter Blais

With the vast majority of Americans calling themselves "environmentalists," green marketing is becoming the hottest topic to hit advertising in years, according to a pair of marketing experts.

"Brand after brand is being forced to look at the implications of manufacturing, packaging and marketing on the environment. These trends usually start on the consumer side, but eventually impact the business-to-business side. The golf industry is no exception," said Dennis Chase, executive editor of the advertising trade journal Ad Age.

Chase and Owen Towne, product manager/hyngicides/ turf and ornamentals for Charles Craig's Agricultural Division, made their comments during a recent Golf Course News-sponsored marketing seminar in Oak Brook, Ill.

A recent Ad Age survey asked consumers to rate marketers and brands on how concerned they appeared to be about the environment. Procter & Gamble Co. (named by 6 percent) and McDonald's (4 percent) were rated the top two environmentally conscious firms.

But most respondents (66 percent) — including many self-proclaimed "virgin environmentalists," who said environmental consciousness weighed heavily in their buying decisions — could not name a single environmentally conscious company.

Such contradictions plague green marketers. Advertisers constantly struggle with consumers' belief that all brands of a certain product are basically the same.

For example, while the soft-drink manufacturing industry has tried hard to develop an environmental consciousness (probably because of recyclable bottles and cans), individual companies like Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola and Seven-Up all received basically the same approval ratings.

But the consumer's view of overall parity also gives the smart green marketer the chance to breakaway from the pack, especially with the green consumer, Chase said.

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Field burning accord reached in Northwest

Field-burning opponents, government agencies and turfgrass seed growers have hammered out an agreement that may end decades of argument over burning practices in Washington and Idaho.

The two states are major suppliers of proprietary grass seed used on golf courses. Growers annually purge their fields of pests and disease by burning them. But with population growing in the region, the practice has brought increasing opposition.

Glenn Jacklin, Post Falls grower services manager for Jacklin Seed Co. of Post Falls, Idaho, said this first year under the negotiated burning limits "went very well — maybe too well."

He explained that this fall's weather conditions were optimal for burning. And because the burns went so well, opponents may demand even more concessions when the two sides renegotiate the so-called Bi-State Regional Snode Management Plan.

Jacklin said: "Our general feeling is guarded optimism. But we still are cautious because we've done battle with these folks so long that we can't let our guard down."

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Government and business are not concerned enough about the environment, according to about three-fourths of those surveyed. Yet, when compared with the environmental advantages of their products, barely half (51 percent) believes the advertising information is accurate.

"Clearly, the public has more confidence in individuals with credibility... than with the federal government or business," Chase said.

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Chase and Towne were among the more than 600 people who attended the seminar.

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"Our plan is to broaden recognition of the Miles name, especially when the word was blowing into Spokane, Wash., from Idaho or into Couer d'Alene, Idaho, from Spokane County," Chase said.

"The regional management plan brought the two areas together and treated it as a regional problem," Jacklin said. "We regulated it so we don't send smoke at each other."

Clean-air groups and Spokane County wanted some kind of entity in Idaho to control the burns there. The Intermountain Grass Growers in Idaho have always regulated themselves. They did so again this year, but under the bi-state plan.

This year, Jacklin said, "we're going to the Idaho Legislature to try to form some type of smoke management advisory board or similar agency."

In the past, growers in Idaho could burn their fields seven days a week and those in Spokane were given 16 consecutive days to burn.

Moby's parent company reorganizes, changes name

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