

7.1.05

## Maximizing the mindset by Maxwell PR

It's not easy being green. Just ask the Portland Oregon Visitors Association; it's their tagline.

Yet as a marketing firm, we're so committed to the cause of sustainability we'd jump at the chance to help get consumers on board.

Sustainability isn't a product, it's a mindset. It's a set of actions people take to leave the world a better place, to minimize the impact on the environment, and ensure healthy local economies that will serve generations to come. Ultimately, it's about smarter choices — getting consumers to use less, think twice about their actions, and consider the impact of their actions beyond themselves.

The challenge, and conversely the opportunity, lies in helping consumers define and recognize what sustainability is so it's something that's easy to adopt and share with others.

There may not be a better time than now to promote sustainability. Consumers are searching for more meaning in their lives and eschewing corporate America in the wake of Enron; organic products are growing at the fastest rate in retail; awareness of global warming is going mainstream (just consider President Bush's recent press conference at a biodiesel plant); and gas prices are driving interest in renewable energy.

No doubt there are a ton of great organizations already hard at work on the cause, from nonprofits like New American Dream and The Food Alliance to companies like Shorebank Pacific. But in most cases, the story isn't being told in a way that attracts a mass market (although [www.lickglobalwarming.com](http://www.lickglobalwarming.com) is a great exception.) Most sustainability arguments to date have been shared through complex, thoughtful articles and books — while the mainstream market is shopping for fun and eating up sound bytes through the Internet, TV and radio.

If we met a philanthropist willing to accelerate awareness and change the way people think, we'd recommend avoiding a public awareness campaign — traditional advertising, public service announcements, contributed articles and the like. Instead, we'd encourage him or her to think and act like an entrepreneur: invest in creating a sustainability "product." Instead of preaching to consumers, we say: help people define what sustainability is and give them something they recognize. Support new business ventures that make sustainability tangible and that give consumers something to latch onto and make their own.

With no limitations on our thinking or budget, our recommended initiative would include some bold, but also entirely feasible ideas:

- Launching a new, national chain of biodiesel fueling stations and corresponding "Buy Diesel" campaign in conjunction with Volkswagen.
- Developing a branded line of sustainable products in conjunction with well-known industrial designers available only through Target.
- Taking the beloved ReBuilding Center to a national scale.
- Touring the country with "Sustainapalooza," a traveling concert series and road show involving local bands and nonprofit groups who can help propel consumers into action.
- Establish a foundation to provide grants to create and market local farmers markets.
- Partnering with companies like Kettle Foods and Ben & Jerry's to reward sustainable actions, such as purchasing renewable energy, buying natural products, and taking daily actions that minimize impact on the environment.
- Bringing it all together through a Web portal where members can create an interactive sustainability community for sharing their ideas and celebrating positive steps.

Our strategy helps reach a core target audience. As arbiters of "cool," influential consumers seek "badge brands" — products and services that both define who they are and that they can define.

Upstart Jones Soda is successfully competing in Coca Cola's backyard, first by offering soda flavors unheard of in the marketplace, then by inviting consumers into the brand. People can submit photos for consideration as bottle labels, share and create music, and rate



Interest in the Toyota Prius is a clue that sustainability is cool, according to marketing experts.

and review flavors.

Other classic examples are Harley Davidson, which inspires and encourages loyal followers to customize their motorcycles, and Apple, which seems to zig when Microsoft zags.

In the end, to truly gain widespread adoption of sustainability, consumers need help defining what it is. Whether or not our recommendations actually see the light of day, we offer these parting thoughts: Don't preach. Keep it simple. Give consumers tangible examples. Reward them. Offer an outlet to share their points of view and accomplishments. Help them make it their own.

If you're like us, you already think sustainability is cool. Now help us spread the word.

**In their own words:** [Maxwell PR](#) is a boutique Portland public relations firm. We use a variety of standard communications tools: media relations, community outreach, employee communications and marketing, to name a few. But our approach is distinct. In everything we do we work to humanize your story, find an authentic voice and connect with your audiences. The key is to stay true to your brand.