

THE GREEN PAGES

Keep the marketplace free of greenwashed merchandise



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seriously protecting the earth's health, but now things have changed. As we continue to put a strain on the earth, capitalism faces a crisis. Today there are new standards for evaluating success, recognizing that society depends on the economy and that the economy depends on the global ecosystem. Green demand has thus exploded, but satisfying it requires sincerity.

As one shopper wrote to The Federal Trade Commission, an agency charged with setting clear rules for marketing claims: "Many 'organic' non-food items sell at a higher price because it is more expensive to use organic-certified ingredients. Organic consumers know this, and it is important enough to many of them that they are willing to pay a higher price. However, businesses have taken advantage of this and market largely synthetic 'junk' at marked up 'organic' prices. As a consumer I want assurance that when I make the decision to go organic that I am actually supporting the organic movement and not lining the pockets of some unscrupulous company pulling the wool over my eyes."

Certifications like USDA Organic can help consumers, but the problem extends beyond just organics. Other standards such as the International Organization for Standardization's ISO 14024:1999 and 14025:2006 use life cycle analysis to substantiate and quantify green claims. The FTC's "Green

Guides" establish clear rules and eliminate vague claims like all-natural and ecofriendly. They address confusion from irrelevant language like "made with no CFCs," the use of which has been banned for 30 years. Updates to the

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FTC's guides are due out this year.

As a result of defined standards, consumers can act when they see fraud, and agencies can address their complaints. For example, in 2009 the FTC acted against Dyne-E International, Inc. and its owner, George Wheeler, to resolve issues with a false claim that their Light-load towels were biodegradable, a term included in the guides.

The FTC ordered Dyne-E to stop all misleading claims and to submit evidence to any future claims whenever asked. The order lasts 20 years, and each violation to it may result in a civil penalty of \$16,000. Additionally, consumer complaints filed with the FTC are entered into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database that more than 1,800 civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad can access.

Outside the U.S., a 2008 complaint was filed with Advertising Standards Canada against Nestlé Waters Canada Pure Life after they advertised, "bottled water is the most environmentally responsible consumer product in the world."

Ask any conservationist, environmentalist or naturalist what they think about the bottled-water industry, and they'll

give you an earful. They'll tell you about leaching plastic, a trash island in the Pacific and water extraction permits that strain entire ecosystems. Nestlé Pure Life may be a convenient alternative to unhealthy soda, but environmentalist contend that it's not an "Eco-Friendly Choice."

"Failure to be careful about language can lead to serious backlash," writes Shel Horowitz in his book, "Guerrilla Marketing Goes Green: Winning Strategies to Improve Your Profits and Your Planet" (Wiley, 2010, co-authored with Jay Conrad Levinson).

"Of course, Nestlé could have easily avoided the specific Canadian complaint (and resultant bad publicity) by being more careful in its copywriting," Horowitz maintains. "Rewriting the claim as follows could have rendered this particular complaint moot: 'bottled water could be considered an environmentally responsible consumer product, especially in parts of the world where tap water is not safe to drink.'"

Meanwhile, it's often our oldest, most unsophisticated companies that produce the greenest products. In the Lehigh Valley, we enjoy things like apple butter and honey, made essentially the same way as 70 years ago, before many harmful chemicals were invented. Simple ingredients and efficient processes make these products as green today as in 1940, regardless of whether or not they wear a label that says so.

Whether simple or complex, your green product deserves the conscientious consumer's respect. Just be sure to seek advice if you are unsure how to label it. Your business, your customers and the planet depend on it. Trick-or-treat can be a fun way to get candy, but it's no way to promote a product.

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Except for maybe on Halloween night, no one likes an imposter. Conscientious consumers, in an attempt to reduce their environmental footprint, will pay extra to avoid cheap, toxic ingredients or companies that don't conserve natural resources.

THE GREEN SCENE

As a sad result, some companies are tempted to costume their product or service in a green label even if it's not. The practice is called "greenwashing." Not only can it destroy a company's reputation, but it also hurts both planet and consumer.

Not long ago, market demand for green was small enough that most companies watched with indifference. Profits were driven by controlling expenses without

