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The Meaning of Green

Brands Speak Out ~ the new world of Sustainable "Green" Brand Icons as Cultural Nomenclature

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Green logos, icons and brand symbols ~ where is the consumer to go to learn what they mean, what their intrinsic value is and relevance to their everyday lives ~ in their quest toward becoming good environmental stewards?!

This new lexicon of jargon is actually meaningful, but only to a select few who understand it!

Manufacturers and marketers frequently use terms such as sustainable, renewable, recyclable, biodegradable, compostable or refillable, to claim that their packaging is green.

There has also been an increase in the use of environmental logos, seals and third-party certification programs purporting to verify the positive environmental impact of product packaging.

Some examples are the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) for pulp sourcing, Climate Leaders for EPA programs, Green-e Certified for energy and Carbon Neutral for emissions.

This trend toward verification is attributed to the rise in mandatory national reporting.

Companies that join these programs agree to voluntarily reduce their environmental impact beyond what is required by law.

In addition, these programs act as a powerful communication tool with consumers and corporate stakeholders, as the perception of the seal on a package denotes authenticity.

But often times, when claims are used to sell products, consumer perception and substantiation issues may arise.

Consumers may have varying interpretations of such seals and programs, and there is a great deal of confusion, false perceptions, and inflated reality.

Many of these claims have no real substantiated definition, and no sanctioned regulations and if and how to use them.

Today, the challenge is how to translate this learning, to clarify sustainability in packaging

Let's say for example, a package claims that the company is 100% wind-powered...what does this really mean and how does the message get carried through to the consumer? In other words, what is the real value or tangible benefit of this claim, and why should consumers care because there is a real (not perceived) knowledge gap.



Green-e

Verified, **Certified**
Renewable Energy
and Greenhouse Gas
Emission Reductions

Marketers and designers must communicate with authenticity, transparency and sustainability ~ in a language that consumers understand and find meaningful to their small steps on a daily basis toward becoming environmental stewards.

Thus, the subject squarely centers around education through communication and lifestyle change/shift.

In the business of brand design, visual imagery has become an emotional "short hand" to trigger consumer buying motivations and purchase responses, so it is key to learn how to translate the new green vocabulary into valid nomenclature.

Sustainable is defined as indefinitely viable, capable of maintaining productivity or usefulness in the long term.



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Sustainable design, graphic or otherwise, seeks to reduce impacts on the environment by relying on the use of renewable resources, among other measures.

So, how do we impact this reality? Moreover, can we?

Again, consumer education and clearer labeling may help pressure the corporations into action. Perhaps if the consumer really understood who's claims were sincere, this would become a beneficial point of difference to drive the corporations to making the investments. The corporations who had the foresight to invest in removing trans fats before there was pressure to, found themselves in a profitable position once the consumers were educated better.

Another route would be some sort of government incentive to go green.

The real world shopping environment

The consumer has contact with packaging every day and contributes to the growing problem of waste through packaging. Our research has found that not only do consumers want to simplify their daily lives, they do not want or need all the unnecessary packaging that their brands come in; they perceive it as extraneous to the product.

Packaging is also an easy target for legislature, as I mentioned earlier, that the FTC is now involved in creating mandates around the validity of claims.

And, there are some glaringly obvious disconnects: e.g., food with a 6 month shelf life in packages that last 6,000 years!!

So now you not only have solid waste but also greenhouse gases!!

Reducing the environmental footprint of packaging requires the cooperation of the entire value chain.

According to Andrew Savitz, author of The Triple Bottom Line, breakthrough Innovation is needed in at least four areas:

- Packaging Materials
- Packaging Design
- Recycling
- New Businesses

Lastly, in terms of brand icons as cultural nomenclature, a new consumer language has been created and it speaks of clarity in protecting the environment, shifting conspicuous consumption to mindful consumption, thus reducing our footprint, creating a healthy balance between consumerism and capitalism, and caring for our living earth.

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