



# Green Marketing Trends

## Guidance for Wildlife Friendly Products to Understand and Access Green Markets



2009

By Julie Stein and Ann Koontz

# Green Marketing Trends – Guidance for Wildlife Friendly Products to Understand and Access Green Markets

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# Green Marketing Trends – Guidance for Wildlife Friendly Products to Understand and Access Green Markets

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Photo courtesy of EnterpriseWorks/VITA

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## Introduction

Development and conservation professionals are increasingly incorporating conservation products into their portfolio of activities to contribute to biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation for the communities that live in high biodiversity areas. Tremendous progress has been made in involving communities in good conservation practices, developing enterprises that are sustainable and generating income that also promotes biodiversity conservation. Yet, these groundbreaking enterprises and products still struggle to understand the markets for their products and how to access these markets.

This guidance tool is intended to provide an overview of green market trends using the language, research findings, and market segmentation of U.S. based markets. For many development and conservation professionals, the language of these green markets may be new, but endeavor to learn the marketing language as it will assist you in finding opportunities to best position your conservation products.

One term that has been used extensively by the markets and development and conservation professionals is sustainability. From the markets point of view, 2007 is considered the tipping point for the sustainability movement marking when it moved from niche to mainstream markets. Climate Change, reducing energy dependence and costs, excess consumption, burning forests, threatened species and the media attention around them have been an important driver for both consumers and companies. Going green, is now the common phrase used to characterize the environmental side of the sustainability movement. Corporate response has been enthusiastic with some companies broadcasting their green accomplishments widely in an effort to drive profits through product sales on the consumer end, while others understand that being greener will save them money as they cut costs and green their company operations throughout their value chains. Even before mainstream consumers started driving green purchases, some companies were already driven by stockholders and an institutional culture of Corporate Responsibility.

Whatever the drivers, the power of the educated and wired global consumer, and the non-governmental organizations which organize and mobilize these consumers, continues to expand and evolve so that products take into account both environmental and social issues. Even with a weak global economy, the evidence shows that green and socially responsible products have an upward trend in sales. Strong green sales have continued in the US, Europe and elsewhere with more consumers purchasing green products in 2008 over 2007. These same consumers are often willing to pay a premium for green products deemed to be of higher value than conventional products.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> BCG/Lightspeed Research Survey Oct 2007 and 2008 in Manget, J., Roche C. and Munnich F, Capturing the Green Advantage for Consumer Companies, Boston Consulting Group, January 2009, available from: [http://www.bcg.com/impact\\_expertise/publications/files/Capturing\\_Green\\_Advantage\\_Consumer\\_Companies\\_Jan\\_2009.pdf](http://www.bcg.com/impact_expertise/publications/files/Capturing_Green_Advantage_Consumer_Companies_Jan_2009.pdf)

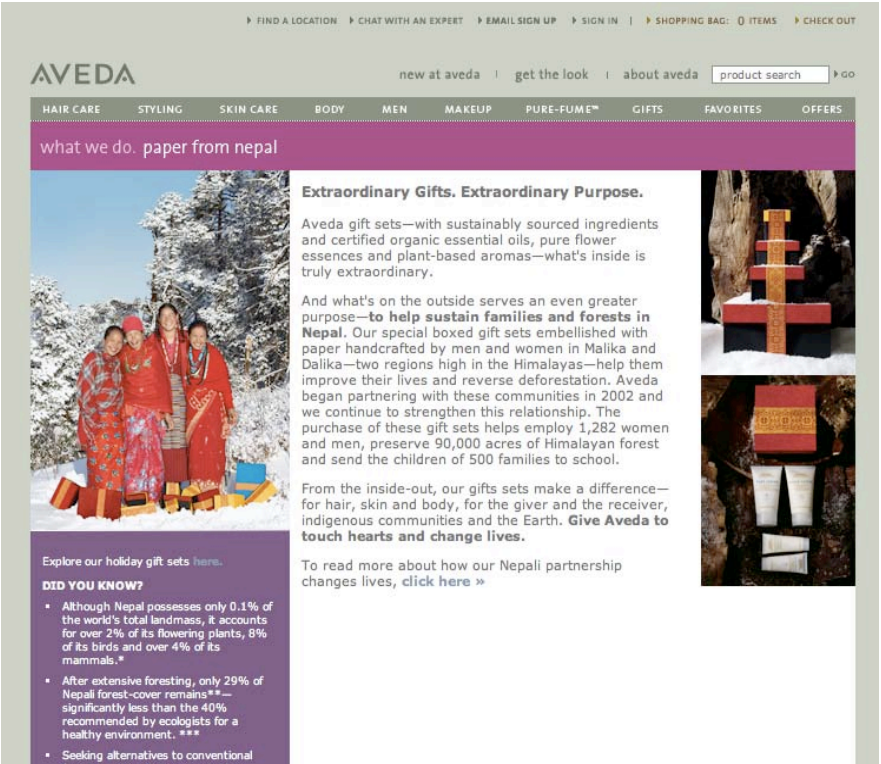
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A recent survey of the U.S sales of organic products both food and non-food (which includes organic fibers, personal care products and pet foods), showed that that market reached \$24.6 billion by the close of 2008, which was an increase of 17.1% over 2007, despite the recession and weakening economy.<sup>2</sup>

The upward trend can be measured by indicators which include:

- consumer purchasing trends and surveys;
- media coverage (television, print, and internet);
- 'green' advertising;
- green product marketing trends; and
- Corporate Sustainability Reports.

Marketing forecasts remain optimistic about expansion and business opportunities around sustainability into 2009 and 2010.<sup>3</sup> The Natural Marketing Institute estimates the green marketplace will reach \$420 billion by 2010 and has identified several consumer segments (food, personal care, pet products) that have a unique opportunity for green innovation and in attracting consumers with new green options.<sup>4</sup> The webpage to the right illustrates how Aveda is integrating wildlife friendly products from Nepal into their personal care product line.



new at aveda | get the look | about aveda  >go

HAIR CARE STYLING SKIN CARE BODY MEN MAKEUP PURE-FUME™ GIFTS FAVORITES OFFERS

what we do. paper from nepal

**Extraordinary Gifts. Extraordinary Purpose.**

Aveda gift sets—with sustainably sourced ingredients and certified organic essential oils, pure flower essences and plant-based aromas—what's inside is truly extraordinary.

And what's on the outside serves an even greater purpose—to **help sustain families and forests in Nepal**. Our special boxed gift sets embellished with paper handcrafted by men and women in Malika and Dalika—two regions high in the Himalayas—help them improve their lives and reverse deforestation. Aveda began partnering with these communities in 2002 and we continue to strengthen this relationship. The purchase of these gift sets helps employ 1,282 women and men, preserve 90,000 acres of Himalayan forest and send the children of 500 families to school.

From the inside-out, our gifts sets make a difference—for hair, skin and body, for the giver and the receiver, indigenous communities and the Earth. **Give Aveda to touch hearts and change lives.**

To read more about how our Nepali partnership changes lives, [click here](#) »

Explore our holiday gift sets [here](#).

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- Although Nepal possesses only 0.1% of the world's total landmass, it accounts for over 2% of its flowering plants, 8% of its birds and over 4% of its mammals.\*
- After extensive foresting, only 29% of Nepal forest-cover remains\*\*—significantly less than the 40% recommended by ecologists for a healthy environment. \*\*\*
- Seeking alternatives to conventional forest practices helps ensure that

<sup>2</sup> Summary of Organic Trade Association's 2009 Organic Industry Survey available from: [http://www.sustainablelifemedia.com/content/story/brands/sales\\_in\\_organics\\_soar\\_over\\_17\\_percent\\_despite+Recession](http://www.sustainablelifemedia.com/content/story/brands/sales_in_organics_soar_over_17_percent_despite+Recession)

<sup>3</sup> Marketers' Views Remain Bright on the Topic of Sustainability, Despite Gloomy Economy, available from: <http://pov.fleishman.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/ama-fh-sustainability-report.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Winning at Green: Exploring the Potential for Green Innovation using the Nielsen BASES System and NMI's LOHAS Segmentation Model, available from: [http://en-us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen\\_dotcom/en\\_us/documents/pdf/white\\_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf](http://en-us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen_dotcom/en_us/documents/pdf/white_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf)

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## Green Market Opportunities that Can Benefit Development and Conservation

Fortune 500 corporations see opportunities in the green arena and recognize that the road to profitability in 2009 and beyond demands attention to the Triple Bottom Line of People, Planet and Profit. In response these companies have hired CSO's (Chief Sustainability Officers), in their quest to build and maintain a sustainable brand. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) which initially focused on philanthropy is now expanding into greening the product life cycle.



This includes attention to environmental management systems, environmental audits or performance evaluations, reducing wastewater in production processes, reducing volatile organic compounds (VOC's) or other toxic product ingredients, product life cycle assessments, worker safety and health, increasing energy efficiency, increasing recycled content in products, or switching to recyclable or biodegradable packaging. Many Fortune 500 companies are global with offices and operations in both developed and developing nations. These companies can influence and be influenced by green supply chains, which often begin with raw material sourcing from developing countries.



There are green market opportunities that can benefit development and conservation, but one has to appreciate that “green” is a wide and diverse set of practices, with biodiversity conservation still poorly appreciated by most consumers and companies. Change out the language slightly and use wildlife conservation with images of charismatic animals and then buyers’ appreciation and interest in biodiversity conservation increases dramatically. It is for this reason that in this document, “wildlife conservation and wildlife friendly” will be the “marketing terms” used to refer to biodiversity conservation. This guide provides an overview of green market trends with practical advice on how wildlife friendly products from around that world can best access the growing US green markets.

Two Examples of Green  
Photo courtesy of Arlynn Aquino

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*Certified Wildlife Friendly™ is a new certification brand that certifies companies that conserve key species and their habitat while improving the livelihoods of the people who coexist with the wildlife. Certified Wildlife Friendly seeks to promote best science-based practices for conservation in combination with innovative products that support local communities.*

*To Learn more about Eco-labels that make wildlife conservation claims, see [Translinks Product by the Land Tenure Center – “Market Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Strategic Tradeoffs for Wildlife-Friendly Eco-Labels”](#) by Stephanie Jones and Adrian Treves.*



## The Range of Green Options

Most service and business sectors now have green options and alternatives. Green dry cleaners, green cars, green buildings, green mutual funds, and even green luxury hotels. Green also covers issues as diverse as organically grown, no genetically modified organisms (GMO's), biodegradable, carbon footprints, locally grown food, sustainable seafood and forest products, cruelty free, shade grown (coffee), or humanely raised farm animals. There are also much fuzzier green label claims like *environmentally friendly*, *all natural*, and others that have little actual meaning besides the feel good factor. While *green* is now recognized globally as shorthand for environmental consciousness, the specifics of the definition of green varies by country perhaps in part due to the fact that the industry itself has no clear definition for what green actually means. Further, consumers don't always have a clear idea of which *version* of green is preferable.

A myriad of related eco-labels and certification programs have been created around each of these issues. Some of these choices by definition include tradeoffs for consumers who must decide *which* green aligns best with their own values and identity. *Which of these issues is most important to each of us?* Because in many ways green is based on our personal values, there is no one quantifiable way for consumers to measure greenness across various products. As a result conscious consumers must gather what information they can between other pressing obligations and hope that their purchases are both within their budgets and their value systems.

Similarly while the concepts behind *sustainability* may have reached the mainstream, recent consumer surveys in the US reveal that the term is not widely used by American

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consumers who are often not able to define ‘sustainability,’ nor can they say for certain which products or companies are considered sustainable. Despite this literacy gap with consumers, the same surveys are finding that sustainability is reflected at the consumer level in a number of behaviors from purchases to non-purchases, and from voting to volunteering.<sup>5</sup> For core sustainability consumers 39% believe their purchasing decisions have a greater impact on society than either voting or involvement in their local community.<sup>6</sup>

While all of these issues are related in some way to biodiversity conservation, products and services that support conservation of endangered species and equitable returns to producers around the world have unique challenges and are only one small niche within the overall green movement. Some wildlife related products will fall under the ‘cause related’ marketing category while others may also be produced using elements of sustainable production and design in addition to supporting species conservation through their purchase.

Each of these layers increases the green credibility of the product and is a defense against charges of ‘green-washing, another buzzword created in the wake of the green movement. In this globally connected and socially networked world consumers demand transparency and access to information but because the green umbrella covers so many different activities, products and services, consumers can be overwhelmed sifting through competing and confusing environmental product claims. As we saw above buzzwords like *green* and *sustainable* have already lost meaning through overuse or misuse. This flurry of sometimes unsubstantiated green marketing claims has resulted in the US Federal Trade Commission initiating a review of its Green Guides which include guidelines for companies making green claims to protect consumers.

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*In the context of today's business climate products cannot support wildlife conservation, yet be produced in a sweatshop using child labor – consumers demand both halves of the people/planet equation when voting with their pocketbook.*



*Photo courtesy of Ann Koontz*

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<sup>5</sup> The Hartman Group, Executive Summary of Sustainability: The Rise of Consumer Responsibility, January 2009, available from: <http://www.hartman-group.com/publications/view/81>

<sup>6</sup> Sustainability: The Rise of Consumer Responsibility, The Hartman Group, 2009, PowerPoint presentation summarizing full report available from: <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/datastore/234-1236.pdf>



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It is comforting to know that consumers are buying green more than ever, despite the economic downturn, but the market is in constant flux with consumers resonating with different green messages at different times. As we track the evolution in sustainability thinking it will be interesting to see how the movement redefines itself in the coming years and what the “hot” marketing terms will be. In the final analysis we will all benefit from environmentally literate and empowered consumers ‘voting’ their values through purchases to support responsible and transparent companies, products and services. Reaching those consumers quickly, effectively and efficiently is critical in moving towards that vision. A thoughtfully executed green marketing plan is one tool to empower consumers helping them to weed through information overload and make purchases that have meaning for them by aligning with their values.

## Green Market Segmentation

### Target Consumers and Which Green is Most Important to Them?

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*Contrary to the image of an idealist who eschews materialism, recent research shows green shoppers are great shoppers – they actually buy more during each trip, shop more frequently, are less price sensitive and more loyal to green products they pick than the typical shopper.*

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So who is this green consumer we are trying to reach? Recent surveys show that there are many shades of green consumers and although in general educated women and Baby Boomers play an important role, the demographic crosses several age, gender, geographic, and ethnic boundaries so they defy traditional market segmentation approaches. Shifting away from demography, it is more important to understand the *psychographic* of this socially conscious consumer. This is central to a successful green marketing strategy as it turns out the green shopper defies common stereotypes. Contrary to the image of an idealist who eschews materialism, recent research shows green shoppers are great shoppers – they actually buy more during each trip, shop more frequently, are less price sensitive and more loyal to green products they pick than the typical shopper.<sup>7</sup>

## The LOHAS Consumer

Market research companies refer to these green leaning consumers by various labels (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability or *LOHAS* consumers, *Cultural Creatives*,

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<sup>7</sup> Finding the Green in Today’s Shoppers: Sustainability Trends and New Shopper Insights, The Grocery Manufacturers Association and Deloitte, 2009, available from: [http://www.greenbiz.com/files/document/US\\_CP\\_GMADeloitteGreenShopperStudy\\_2009.pdf](http://www.greenbiz.com/files/document/US_CP_GMADeloitteGreenShopperStudy_2009.pdf)

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*Influentials*) but there is unanimity regarding their influence. A snapshot of the LOHAS<sup>8</sup> consumer reveals a passionate, environmentally and socially responsible consumer segment and shows them to be early adopters who can be used as predictors of upcoming trends. They tend to be influential over friends and family, are more brand loyal than other consumers especially to companies whose values match their own, and most importantly, are willing to put their money behind their beliefs and values.<sup>9</sup>

As research continues to unpack the evolving LOHAS consumer their significance to wildlife friendly products and services becomes increasingly apparent. Interestingly, in addition to their purchasing decisions and influence in their communities and beyond, the LOHAS consumers in the US

lead all others in charitable contributions to two types of organizations: animals' rights groups and wildlife charities. For wildlife philanthropy the difference in giving between the general population and the LOHAS segment is more than double (10% give to wildlife charities in the general population versus 22% for LOHAS consumers).<sup>10</sup> For contributions to Humanitarian Agencies, 32% of LOHAS consumers are giving versus 19% in the general population.



Just what are LOHAS consumers buying and where are they buying them? Among other goods and services

LOHAS consumers are buying organic label products and products related to health, wellness and sustainable lifestyles. The price and availability of green options has grown tremendously with green products now widely available at US retailers like Target, Home Depot, Wal-Mart and Staples. As the product outlets move from niche to

Hey wakeup; did you hear we are popular with the LOHAS crowd!  
Photo courtesy of Emma Munis

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<sup>8</sup> LOHAS was jointly coined by thought leaders at Gaiam, a provider of information, goods and services to customers who value the environment, a sustainable economy, healthy lifestyles, alternative healthcare and personal development (see [www.gaiam.com](http://www.gaiam.com)), and the Natural Marketing Institute. Approximately 19% percent of the adults in the U.S., or 41 million people or 1 in 4 adult Americans, are currently considered LOHAS Consumers. Source: [www.lohas.com](http://www.lohas.com)

<sup>9</sup> French, S. and G. Rogers. *Understanding the LOHAS Consumer: The Rise of Ethical Consumerism: A Strategic Market Research Update* from The Natural marketing Institute (NMI). Available from: [www.lohas.com/journal/consumertrends.htm](http://www.lohas.com/journal/consumertrends.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Natural Marketing Institute's 2008 LOHAS Consumer Trends Database, available from: <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2008/12/29/lohas-consumers-drive-charitable-donations/>

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mainstream markets LOHAS products are now available to millions of consumers and this has allowed prices to come down. As the size of the market pie grows there are many opportunities for marketing and growth. “Keys to Winning @ Green” provide some guidance on positioning your wildlife friendly products to attract LOHAS consumers.

## KEYS to WINNING @ GREEN



(adapted from Nielsen/NMI LOHAS segmentation analysis, Winning at Green, 2009, full graphic available from: [http://en-us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen\\_dotcom/en\\_us/documents/pdf/white\\_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf](http://en-us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen_dotcom/en_us/documents/pdf/white_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf))

Market research guru and sociologist Paul Ray looked beyond demographics digging into consumer values and lifestyles to define a similar group of consumers he calls the *Cultural Creatives* who account for a large percentage of those purchasing LOHAS products. This segment, that includes 26% of American adults according to Ray, is good at synthesizing information from a variety of sources from radio, to the Internet to other print media. Conventional marketing such as TV ads and direct mail do *not* speak to them in general and they actively seek to build relationships with people and companies they buy things from.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Paul Ray by the LOHAS Journal available from: [www.rand.org/scitech/stpi/ourfuture/Consumer/sec6\\_creatives.html](http://www.rand.org/scitech/stpi/ourfuture/Consumer/sec6_creatives.html)

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Other research by consumer trend experts Ed Keller and Jon Berry identifies a related category that they've dubbed the *Influential Americans*<sup>12</sup> who are considered to be the leading disseminators of information in the consumer and public opinion marketplace. *Influentials* represent the one in ten people who tell the other nine how to vote, where to eat and what to buy. This consumer segment uses social networks frequently, and their opinions and recommendations are highly trusted. They are considered to be information hubs in word of mouth marketing that help to create buzz about products. They are early adopters and become the shapers and champions of products.<sup>13</sup>

To reach this segment comprised of influential early adopters on the cutting edge of social change its important not to underestimate the viral power of social networks to create word of mouth buzz and build relationships. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, as well as the Blogosphere have a global reach and are especially effective for those with a low or non-existent marketing and advertising budget. Word of mouth campaigns, and online product or service reviews on Amazon.com and other trusted sites, both positive and negative, are popular and powerful with these consumers, and play a role in purchasing decisions. Many of these word of mouth campaigns are waged through social networks and through cross website pollination originating with a Fan Page created on Facebook for example and link to a Blog and including videos posted to

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## ***The Power of the Blog***

*Be sure to google your company and brand name often to find out if other blogs have picked up your products and messages.*

*The Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network recently was picked up on the Keyboard Culture website, by blogger Corbett Kroehler who wrote:*

### ***Wildlife Friendly Certification from Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network Augments Definition of Fair Trade Products and Services***

*I am very enthusiastic about the Wildlife Friendly certification program. It does exactly what we need. It exposes flaws in existing products and services and then offers alternatives. Now, given the strict standards which I set here on Keyboard Culture for labeling anything as truly green, you may ask how I measure the depth of green of the Wildlife Friendly Enterprise Network's (WFEN) program. It is simple. First, whereas other fair trade programs do a fine job of raising awareness of environmental degradation in general, the WFEN uses the red list of key threatened species of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, a British academic body which practices the highest standards of scientific work. From there, the WFEN sets very specific criteria in its certification process for products.*

*To read the complete blog go to:*

[www.keyboard-culture-global-warming.com/2009/03/wildlife\\_friendly\\_certification\\_from\\_wildlife\\_friendly\\_enterprise\\_network\\_augments\\_definition\\_of\\_fai.html](http://www.keyboard-culture-global-warming.com/2009/03/wildlife_friendly_certification_from_wildlife_friendly_enterprise_network_augments_definition_of_fai.html)

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<sup>12</sup> For an in depth analyses see [The Influentials](#) by Ed Keller and Jon Berry, The Free Press, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> GfK Roper Consulting, Influentials Market Analysis 2.0, synopsis available from:

[http://www.gfknop.com/imperia/md/content/gfk\\_nop/consumertrends/gfk\\_roper\\_consulting\\_-\\_influentials.pdf](http://www.gfknop.com/imperia/md/content/gfk_nop/consumertrends/gfk_roper_consulting_-_influentials.pdf)

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YouTube. Web phenomenon that are attracting attention often then get picked up by national or global media, including print, TV, music or film, that are tracking cultural trends.

It is important to note that for *Influential* consumers' traditional advertising and marketing channels using a top down one-way transmission between companies and the masses don't work. *Influentials* rely on conversational word of mouth and print recommendations from multiple trusted sources including family and friends, and once genuine buzz is generated it can manifest into what Ed Keller and Jon Berry call an Influence Spiral. This is an exponentially expanding spiral of learning, sharing, experimentation and exploration, and adoption.<sup>14</sup> Seth Godin calls this phenomenon an ideavirus.<sup>15</sup> With this new paradigm of information exchange and idea adoption in mind it is critical that you tell your story in a way that it can be retold easily and resonates with thought leaders or buzz agents who will then share it with others to create this spiral of influence. Godin also advises using *permission marketing* which he describes as delivering anticipated personal and relevant ads to the people who want to get them. This is always more effective, he points out, than yelling at strangers who are not receptive to your message.<sup>16</sup>

## Looking Beyond LOHAS

The initial target for your green product is undeniably within the LOHAS consumer segment, but be aware that green products are now moving beyond this niche. For example while nearly 20% of consumers fall into the LOHAS “environmental steward” segment, more than 60% have at least some interest in green, and are willing to try products that are relevant to their needs so there is life beyond LOHAS for green products. To reach consumers beyond the LOHAS niche the primary challenges will be to educate the consumer on the products specific environmental benefit, i.e. wildlife conservation, while still delivering its primary functional benefit, and getting the price right.<sup>17</sup>



Help protect elephants by buying Wildlife Friendly Honey – sure but the honey better be top quality if you want my repeat purchase.

Photo courtesy of Emma Munis

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<sup>14</sup> Keller, E. and J. Berry, *The Influentials*, The Free Press, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> You can download this free e-book online, which is the most successful e-book of all time according to Godin: <http://www.digitalproductreporter.com/unleashing-the-ideavirus-ebook-free-download.html>

<sup>16</sup> See Seth Godin's book *Permission Marketing*, Simon & Schuster, 1999 or download the first 1/3 of the book gratis at [www.permission.com](http://www.permission.com)

<sup>17</sup> *Winning at Green: Exploring the Potential for Green Innovation using the Nielsen BASES System and NMI's LOHAS Segmentation Model*, available from: <http://en->

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## Evaluate your Product in the Green Context

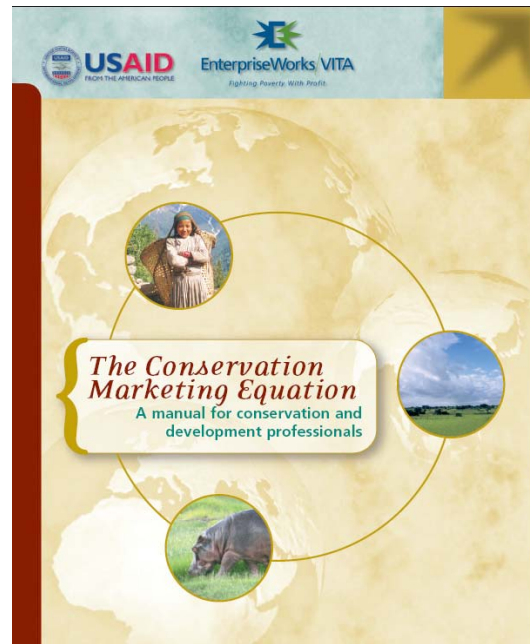
Marketing your wildlife friendly product or service means:

- All traditional business principles apply (meeting target customers needs better than competitors).
- The product quantity and timing of when you have the product to sell is dependent on sustainable harvesting practices and product seasonality.
- Conservation and social equity messages are part of the product's “unique selling points”, but CANNOT make up for poor quality and/or non competitive pricing.

To be successful in the market, you first have to make sure your product is competitive on price, quality, and in the quantities that make it cost effective to deliver to the target market. On top of these business basics, you must also overlay the wildlife conservation and social equity requirements. When you consider all these factors together, many products will not be feasible. Conducting this product assessment can be tricky, but there is a tool, also developed under the Translinks program that can help you quickly evaluate your products.

The Conservation Marketing Equation manual is designed as a decision support tool to be used by an individual or project team whose goal is to better understand product development and marketing that promotes conservation and social equity. The assumption is that the proposed product needs to be financially sustainable and this tool provides specific information and product worksheets to assess market readiness.

The manual allows you to prioritize your product development efforts in the areas in which you lack information, and aims to provide valuable insight on where to find this information. The examples used throughout the text incorporate actual product development and marketing lessons from a decade of field work by EnterpriseWorks/VITA and its partners in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.



The Conservation Marketing Equation Manual and interactive worksheet can be downloaded at [www.enterpriseworks.org](http://www.enterpriseworks.org)

[us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen\\_dotcom/en\\_us/documents/pdf/white\\_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf](http://us.nielsen.com/etc/medialib/nielsen_dotcom/en_us/documents/pdf/white_papers.Par.39825.File.dat/Final%20Winning%20at%20Green%20White%20Paper.pdf)

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*“Consumers are seeking narratives about the people and places behind the products they buy.”*



*Photo courtesy of Ann Koontz*

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Most green consumers are willing to pay a small premium (between 5 – 10%) for green products if they believe the products are healthier, safer or better for the environment so combining functionality with the right price is imperative. Sustainability can be a tiebreaker for consumers if quality and price are equal. But as we saw above, almost as important to the success of your product is the ability to spread the word effectively through social networks to build relationships with your consumers. To do this, it turns out, you must be a good storyteller. Consumers are seeking narratives about the people and places behind the products they buy.

## **The Importance of Telling Your Story**

Now that we know a little more about the LOHAS consumer it's easier to understand why telling the story of your brand is essential. Storytelling is an ancient art, and provides a way to help us understand the world around us. Stories continue to help us define our cultural identity through the

various local or global tribes we self identify with. Storytelling has gained in significance and reach in the modern digital age. Through technology new tribes are forming in new ways and online communities provide a democratic mechanism for people to quickly broadcast on a daily basis the details of who they are and what they care about.

Stories are also the perfect medium for spreading a good idea and are important to reaching consumers because a great story told well will appeal to core values and this not only begins the process of relationship building with consumers but since our core values guide our daily behaviors and decisions, including what we purchase, this is an important vehicle for reaching consumers and selling products. The concept of a product *Brand* has evolved into much more than just a logo, label or name. A Brand has evolved into an experience, a lifestyle choice, and an encapsulation of the purchasers' identity and values. You will need to define what *your* brand's promise to the marketplace is. Whatever the specifics may be, this promise is the commitment that you make to each of the people who invest in your product or service.<sup>18</sup> This promise that you make to the marketplace is part of your story.

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<sup>18</sup> Uncovering Your Unique Brand of Good, Cheryl Heller, CEO, Heller Communication Design, Sandy Skees, Founder and President, Communications4Good, Presentation at Sustainable Brands International, Miami Beach, Florida, Dec 11 2009

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## How Do I Tell My Story

### Nut and Bolts of Storytelling: Revealing your Brand through a Storytelling Plan

So as a sustainable wildlife friendly brand how do you best tell and share your inspirational story in an authentic way that begins to build a relationship with consumers? One bit of advice is to *help others to tell your story well*. When you teach others to tell your story in a compelling way you can create product evangelists, (which in the case of wildlife friendly products also means biodiversity conservation evangelists) and you begin to actually influence the influencers who are trusted sources of information for the rest of the marketplace. In this way you can initiate both person-to-person storytelling and viral marketing. And while consumers used to support brands because they responded: 'I like it.' LOHAS consumers now support brands because of a more aspirational and emotional response to your product or brand: 'I am like it.'<sup>19</sup>

Just as a new start up business needs a Business Plan your product needs a Storytelling Plan as part of your marketing strategy. In fact your Storytelling Plan is just one part of your overall Business Plan. The following Storytelling Plan template is abridged and adapted from Seth Godin who believes that your story is your product:<sup>20</sup>

**1. Which Worldview are you addressing?** First you must define the group who you will be telling your story to because in order to get noticed your story needs to match their particular worldview in a clear and obvious way. Worldview here refers to the rules, values, beliefs, and biases of a consumer. A worldview is the lens used to look at every decision a person is asked to make. In the context of wildlife friendly, you are telling your story to people who want to conserve animals in the wild, but also care about the lives of the people who coexist with the wildlife.

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### *Just Make the Plan*

*Here are some quick tips to assemble your storytelling plan.*

*\*Write a product and project resume – by listing all the product attributes and project activities and impacts you will have a template to cut and paste from for different stories.*

*\*Keep a storytelling journal with examples of product stories that are particularly moving and effective.*

*\*Include great wildlife photos – remember if you don't have a good camera or stock photos already, ask for donations of photographs from visitors to your project site.*

*\*Use compelling human photos which stress ethnic/cultural diversity, not poverty.*

*\*Use data on wildlife and their conditions to educate your buyers.*

*\*Incorporate statistics on how product sales impact education, women and children, and other issues that relate a compelling and genuine human interest dimension.*

*\*Convey clearly how the buyer's support can make a difference.*

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<sup>19</sup> Pam Van Orden, Sustainable Brands International, Miami Beach, Dec. 9-12 2008, in her presentation From Context to Content: Telling your Sustainable Brand Story, 9 Dec 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Seth Godin, All Marketers are Liars: The power of telling authentic stories in a low trust world, Portfolio, 2005.



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- 2. How will you live your story?** You must be authentic and keep your brand's promises every day from your product to your product's packaging to your organizational operations, to your own lifestyle. Wildlife friendly products have a competitive advantage here – you already have what most corporations are aspiring to create – an authentic and aspirational story that you are living every day through your conservation work.
- 3. How can you *frame* your story so that your story is easy for your fans to retell to their friends?** Frames are the elements of a story that make it easier to leverage the worldview a consumer already has. The way you frame a story determines who will hear it because the words and images you choose (the frames) reinforce a bias somebody is already feeling because of their unique worldview. Refer to the textbox “Just Make the Plan” for guidance on what to assemble to tell your story. Complete several two to three paragraph draft stories with two to three pictures and share with several potential customers to get their feedback.

What are some of the important elements that go into creating a great story that will capture your consumers' imagination? The bullet list below was again adapted from Seth Godin.<sup>21</sup>

Great stories:

1. Are true
2. Make a promise
3. Are trusted
4. Are subtle
5. Capture your attention quickly
6. Don't appeal to logic but do appeal to the senses
7. Match the worldview of a tiny but important audience (who then spreads your story for you)
8. Are philosophically consistent

Once you've learned how to tell your story, where should you tell it? According to recent research the top three physical places to relay your story to consumers are (in order of importance): 1) on the product label or “on-pack,” 2) on the internet, and 3) through in store point of sale outlets including signage and salespeople.<sup>22</sup> Recent research shows that while 95% of shoppers surveyed indicated that they are ready and willing to consider green products, they only purchased green on 22% of their shopping trips. This indicates a lost opportunity and a ‘green gap’ between market readiness and

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<sup>21</sup> Seth Godin, All Marketers are Liars: The power of telling authentic stories in a low trust world, Portfolio, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Sustainability: The Rise of Consumer Responsibility, The Hartman Group, 2009, PowerPoint presentation summarizing full report available from: <http://ucce.ucdavis.edu/files/datastore/234-1236.pdf>

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market delivery, between what consumers say they do and what they actually do.<sup>23</sup> There are some key touchpoints along the path to purchase to connect with shoppers using inspiration and information to educate and move consumers along their green learning curve.<sup>24</sup> This is why it is so important to help your retail outlets to tell your story well.

And finally whom do you tell your story to? It turns out not all consumer eyes and ears are equal. As we saw above, the experts in consumer marketing believe that a particular group of consumers will spread your story like a green virus that makes them more valuable than others. The early adopters or buzz agents outlined in the sections above are exactly the subset of consumers you need to captivate and then reward for re-telling your great story over and over again.

But, how do you identify and harness these early adopter consumers for your products and wildlife conservation story? Identify repeat purchasers and ask for feedback on your products to identify consumers who feel passionate about your products and work. Offer a “refer a friend” promotion to actively enlist your early adopters to spread the word.



Hey Mom, can we be early adopters?  
Photo courtesy of Emma Munis

We learned that LOHAS consumers want a relationship with the companies they buy products from and that they can synthesize diverse bits of information from various sources. By learning how to tell stories well we can highlight the importance of preserving cultural and biological diversity around the world and make visible the complex but compelling stories about the struggle for coexistence between wildlife and people around the world. In doing this we can create a common shared experience with the consumer to begin this relationship building and to initiative conversations with consumers. We can use the power of narrative to link complex conservation and development concepts. We can engage consumers to become a part of the story themselves by purchasing beautiful products and then retelling the story themselves to their friends and family. When your product and story aligns with the lifestyle aspirations of your consumers you will have

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on the Green Gap and how to motivate your consumers see Cracking the Green Code: Using a Values Based Model to Improve Customer Communications and Marketing, John Marshall Roberts, EcoAlign, Project Energy Code, 2009, available from: <http://www.ecoalign.com/node/312>

<sup>24</sup> Finding the Green in Today’s Shoppers: Sustainability Trends and New Shopper Insights, The Grocery Manufacturers Association and Deloitte, 2009, available from: [http://www.greenbiz.com/files/document/US\\_CP\\_GMADeloitteGreenShopperStudy\\_2009.pdf](http://www.greenbiz.com/files/document/US_CP_GMADeloitteGreenShopperStudy_2009.pdf)

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the foundation for a relationship with your consumer. And ultimately these products and the stories behind them become symbols and vehicles for coexistence of people and wildlife.

## **Branding Strategies: The Role of Eco-labels and Trust Labels**

One response to growing consumer skepticism is the Eco-Label or Trust Label to build credibility for product claims. There are challenges and opportunities related to these labels. Currently there are over 400 labels available in the marketplace, although only a handful of these are global in nature, and many of these labels are related or overlap. Critics of Eco-labels claim this proliferation creates consumer confusion and they predict a shakeout warning that weaker, less transparent and less meaningful labels will not survive. There are some efforts underway to harmonize across labels to reduce consumer confusion. The International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling, or ISEAL, Alliance is working towards standardization and Codes of Good Practice with many of the largest and most established certification schemes (Forest Stewardship Council, Marine Stewardship Council, Rainforest Alliance) as founding members. Another critique of eco-labels is that funding, monitoring and running these organizations is costly and labor intensive and there are barriers to entry for small companies that cannot afford expensive application or certification fees.

Yet other experts in green marketing are advising companies to investigate the use of certification schemes for their products to build consumer confidence, and to partner with non-profits, who are functioning less like adversaries, and more like strategic consultants to companies. Proponents of labels believe that robust and transparent certifications are important to consumers. And with 30 years of work already done in the field there are a handful of established and trusted certifiers who can offer companies a cheaper and quicker way to build brand reputation by adopting a recognized certification mark for new product lines.



Would you like to build some consumer confidence together?

Photo courtesy of Emma Munis

In addition, from a producer's point of view, there is often relief when they can rely on someone else's standards rather than having to develop and monitor their own from scratch, or having to try to comply with standards developed by several non profits with competing or conflicting missions.

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Consumers also appreciate labels that include both social and environmental considerations because they feel their purchase is even more effective and meaningful. In a 2007 survey 75% of LOHAS consumers agreed that a seal or certification mark indicating a product is environmentally friendly raises the likelihood that they will purchase it.<sup>25</sup> Websites have now been created specifically to help consumers navigate the landscape of Eco-Labels, what they mean, and whether they can be trusted.<sup>26</sup> Consumer Report (see box below) is a leading example.

### Excerpted from Consumer Reports – what makes a good Eco-Label?

<http://greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/eco-good.cfm>

*Below are the criteria the Consumers Union uses to evaluate eco-labels. Generally, the best eco-labels are seals or logos indicating that an independent organization has verified that a product meets a set of meaningful and consistent standards for environmental protection and/or social justice.*

- *Meaningful and verifiable: Eco-labels should have a set of environmentally meaningful standards. These standards should be verifiable by the certifier or another independent inspection organization.*
- *Consistent and clear: An eco-label used on one product should have the same meaning if used on other products. Standards should be written in a way that can be verified in a consistent manner so that the label is consistent in meaning among different products.*
- *Transparency: The organization behind an eco-label should make information about organizational structure, funding, board of directors, and certification standards available to the public. If such information is withheld, it is difficult to determine the meaning and clarity of the standards or the independence of the certifying organization.*
- *Independent and protected from conflict of interest: Organizations establishing standards and deciding who can use a logo should not have any ties to, and should not receive any funding from the sale of certified products or contributions from logo users beyond fees for certification. Employees of companies whose products are certified or applying for certification should not be on the board of directors of the certifier (and no one affiliated with the certifier should be on the board of directors of the organization being certified). Some certifying organizations have explicit conflict of interest policies prohibiting such affiliations.*
- *Opportunities for public comment: All certification standards should be developed with input from multiple stakeholders including consumers, industry, environmentalists and social representatives in a way that doesn't compromise the independence of the certifier. For example, industry representatives can play an important advisory role without having direct financial, decision-making or management ties to the certifier.*

Another example is World of Good. In an effort to tap the aspirations of the LOHAS consumer, the World of Good by eBay partnership was launched in 2008 with the goal of becoming the world's largest online marketplace. World of Good by eBay uses a system called Trustology where they partner with respected independent organizations called Trust Providers, like Wildlife Friendly™ or Rainforest Alliance, to assure online customers that every purchase on World of Good positively impacts people and planet.

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<sup>25</sup> 2007 LOHAS Consumer Trends Database, Natural Marketing Institute, 2008, except available from: <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2008/05/20/green-labels-positively-impact-purchase-behavior/>

<sup>26</sup> See Consumer Reports website <http://greenerchoices.org/eco-labels/eco-home.cfm> and [www.ecolabelling.org](http://www.ecolabelling.org) for examples

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Priya Haji and Amy Skeeters-Behrens describe the typical eBay consumer as ‘socially responsible when convenient’ and see World of Good by eBay as the mechanism to expose millions of eBay consumers to new ideas and ‘move them to the next level.’<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

*“The desire to do what the people we admire are doing is the glue that keeps our society together. It’s the secret ingredient in every successful marketing venture as well.”*

*Seth Godin, All Marketers are Liars*

Green markets have moved from niche to mainstream and have become the cost of entry in many consumer categories. More and more admired people are embracing green. The good news is that your wildlife friendly product or service already has a competitive advantage differentiating it from non-green competitors and even many green competitors. You have compelling and authentic stories to tell and your organization or company is already walking the talk. Get your unique story out into the market, make sure your product is priced competitively and your quality is high and you will find buyers. In closing let us hear from what LOHAS consumers are looking for in their own words from the LOHAS Journal blog:

- Prove It – get recognizable third party certifications on your products. These certifications are independent and have their own screening process. Additionally, any other seals of approval will provide better buy in from the consumer.
- Validation From Others – word of mouth is the best form of marketing. Get the word out about your product. Make sure your staff is well educated and understand they are part of the product sell. Remember that all employees are ambassadors of your products. If they represent you well then you will look good.
- Audits by Third Parties – getting eco-audits or providing transparency on your business practices will demonstrate to customers you don’t have anything to hide. If there are instances where you can’t exclude a non-natural component to your product, then come clean with it and let people know you are aware of the situation and that you are working on it. Consumers will appreciate this much more than the stone wall policies some corporations use. They want you to be honest and real with them.

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<sup>27</sup> WorldofGood.com by eBay: Brand as Market Catalyst, Priya Haji, CEO & Co-Founder, World of Good Inc. and Amy Skeeters-Behrens, Global Marketing Manager, WorldofGood.com, Presentation at Sustainable Brands International, Miami Beach, Florida, Dec 10 2009

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- Partner with a Non-Profit that Makes Sense – For example, if you are a company promoting an eco-friendly product it makes more sense to partner with a conservation oriented nonprofit that consumers can see the logical connection.
- Let the Detectives Work – Provide access to in-depth information about your company and your products. Place a website link on your packaging that allows those that are interested in learning more about your product to do some research.
- Come Down from the Mountain – people relate to people better than they relate to brands. Tell your story. Tell the story of those in your company. This gives your company personality and faces that people understand and relate to. They want to have conversations where they can speak ‘with’ and not spoken ‘at’.
- Walk the Talk – look into areas of your business that can be improved upon to demonstrate you are an authentic LOHAS company. Get a focus group of employees to concentrate on areas that they collectively see they can improve upon.
- Keep on Truckin’ – Remember this is a work in progress and is not something that is done and then forgotten about. This work needs to be constantly adapted with the ever changing market. LOHAS consumers will let you know when you slack. Keep up on the latest happenings in the LOHAS space to know how best to position your brand.

Finally, check out the additional resources section and visit the recommended websites on a regular basis to stay update to date on green market trends to best position your wildlife friendly products.



**Keep on Truckin’!**  
Photo courtesy of Ann Koontz

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## Additional Resources

### 1. Conferences

- a. Sustainable Brands International: <http://www.sustainablebrandsinternational.com/>
- b. The LOHAS Forum: <http://www.lohas.com/forum/>

### 2. Suggested Reading

- a. All Marketers are Liars, Seth Godin
- b. For other helpful books by Seth Godin see: <http://www.sethgodin.com/sg/>
- c. The Cluetrain Manifesto, Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, David Weinberger
- d. The Influentials, Ed Keller and Jon Berry

### 3. Websites of interest

- a. Sustainable Life Media: <http://www.sustainablelifemedia.com>
- b. The LOHAS Journal: <http://www.lohas.com/>
- c. [www.Cluetrain.com](http://www.Cluetrain.com), you can read the seminal book on the new marketing paradigm, The Cluetrain Manifesto, from this site as well as read their “95 Theses”