



Shades of green.

Consumers' awareness of--and attitudes toward--environmental impact vary tremendously.

A recent Yahoo! study found that 77% of consumers identify themselves as "green." But only 57% claim to have made any green purchase in the past six months.

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The Yahoo! study's results may have been skewed by an unrepresentative sample. They queried residents of New York, Chicago and Portland only. (And Yahoo's relatively small – 17.6% – share of search traffic might also have compromised statistical validity.)

Skewed or not, the 20 percentage point disparity between consumers calling themselves green and those who made **even one** green purchase in the last six months is telling.

And that 20-point gap may be optimistic. A Stanford University study found that only 33% of people are ready to make eco-friendly purchase decisions.

Two of the most popular green consumer ranking systems may help clarify the dichotomy between the significant majority of adults who proclaim themselves to be eco-friendly consumers and minority who actually are:

The Natural Marketing Institute's lifestyle segmentation provides an interesting model of consumers' attitudes and actions on environmentally-influenced purchase decisions:

- **LOHAS** (lifestyles of health and sustainability) – environmentally engaged and involved, they buy green even if the products are more expensive: 16% of total population.
- **Naturalites** – use natural products because of a perception of health/wellness benefits: 25%.
- **Conventional** – want green products that save them money in the long run (such as compact florescent bulbs and high gas-mileage cars): 23%.
- **Drifters** – not very concerned with environmental issues: 23%.
- **Unconcerned** – environmental considerations don't enter into their purchase decisions: 14%.

Mediamark Research & Intelligence's study defined six categories of consumers' environmentally-related beliefs and actions:

- **Green Advocates** – Environmental impact is a significant – often the most significant – factor in brand choice. They are also environmental activists/evangelists.
- **Green At Their Best** – Environmental impact is significant. They choose green

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brands even if they're more expensive or less convenient.

- **Green But Only If** – They think and act green, but not if choosing a green brand costs more or is less convenient.
- **Green In Theory** – They talk the talk but don't walk the walk.
- **Green At The Supermarket** – They buy organic foods, but more because of health and wellness concerns than for environmental considerations.
- **UnGreen** – No interest in environmental products or issues.

MRI found some interesting – and occasionally counterintuitive – demographic correlations to these psychographic profiles:

- **Millenials** (b. 1997-1994) were disproportionately UnGreen. They were 18% more likely than the norm to be UnGreen.
- **Older people** were the greenest. Boomers (b. 1946-1964) were by far the most active Green Advocates, at 28% above the norm. Pre-Boomers (b. before 1946) were the most likely to be Green At Their Best, at 14% over norm.
- **GenXers** were the most likely to be Green at the Supermarket, at 6% more than the norm.

National Geographic recently released their annual Greendex survey, and America was firmly ensconced in last place among the eighteen nations surveyed. Large developing nations, like India and Brazil, dominated the top spots. That may simply indicate that their people cannot afford the automobiles, energy use and solid waste which are within the means of people in more developed countries. But even among developed nations, we're dead last.

Apparently, despite our professions of environmental concern, we don't do much about it.

One reason for this disparity was pointed out by Joel Makower in an "eartheasy" posting: "Though polls tell us that most consumers prefer green products, the polls are misleading: they fail to ask the right questions. If I pose a question as a green versus ungreen choice...the answer is obvious: everyone prefers the greener choice. But if you probe deeper into consumer attitudes, the real answer is that consumers will choose the greener product **if** it doesn't cost more, comes from a brand they know and trust, can be purchased at stores where they already shop, doesn't require a significant change of habits to use and has at least the same level of quality, performance and endurance as the less-green alternative."

Makower's estimate of the green marketplace is significantly lower than the 64% total of LOHAS, Naturalites and Conventionals in the Natural Marketing Institute's matrix; lower than the 57% claimed in the Yahoo study; and even lower than the 33% in the Stanford research. Makower estimates green consumers – those who regularly seek out and buy green products regardless of how much more they cost or what lengths to which one must go to find them – at 10% to 12% of the total.

That number is reinforced by The Hartman Group, a Washington state research firm. Their studies estimate green consumers at 13%.

That small base of truly green consumers presents a marketing and communications challenge.

At first it might seem that a green claim couldn't hurt, since about three-quarters of consumers pay lip service to the idea of buying green products. But an article in the January, 2008, *Harvard Business Review* refutes that concept. According to "Don't Bother with the 'Green' Consumer," marketers should choose between an environmental appeal targeted to the small green consumer core group or a more generic claim aimed at a broader population. Their findings were that environmentally-targeted claims are relatively ineffective toward the population as a whole.

Our conclusion is that marketers must decide whether they want to capture a smaller core green group – who can probably be turned into fanatic supporters of a brand that

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promises and delivers green benefits – or use a more "What's in it for me?" approach to go after the much larger group, peripherally green consumers. Either approach can be effective, but you can't have it both ways.

At least not until America catches up with France and Russia in environmentalism.

To learn more about environmental marketing and communications [click here](#) or call us at 865-330-0033.

Next week: Green? Prove it. Consumers are skeptical and confused about green claims.

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