

Heart of Green

February 07, 2009

Green Retailing



I just returned from speaking on the Eco-Friendly Retail Panel at the [San Francisco International Gift Fair](#) with Betsy Rosenberg and Jared Blumenfeld, and the response from the audience was phenomenal. As we joked, if you like the person you are giving a gift to, then why not give a handsome healthy green gift - rather than a toxic one. Now if you don't like the person, that is another story.

But in all seriousness, it was wonderful to see the Gift Fair's new category called Green By Design. Booths displaying this hopeful sign were showcasing eco-friendly products for consideration by retailers. Some of the exciting Green By Design products included the very attractive and functional [Clean Conscience bags](#) made in the USA from recycled PET fabric (look out for their organic cotton bags and PET aprons and table linens coming soon) and the [Elisabethan](#) eco-fashion line

handmade in Colorado exclusively from reclaimed fabrics and appliques. As Elizabeth said, they will take the discarded shirts off your back (pretty please) and turn them into new fashion pieces, Cradle To Cradle style. I had the pleasure of meeting the president of the [ReUse People](#) plus the founder of the hip, edgy, artistic Political Gridlock t-shirts, which will be transitioning to organic cotton or bamboo fabric in the near future. How was attendance at the SF International Gift Fair? Let's just say that there was a line to get in at 8:45 am. Now that is impressive in today's economy!

Green Retailing or Gtailing

What is green retailing? It is both 1) what you sell and 2) how you sell it.

1) The What: A green product is one that benefits both people and the planet and is ideally regenerative for life on Earth.

- Ingredients - beneficial, certified organic, biodynamic, sustainable, recycled, non-toxic
- How - produced ethically, efficiently, and sustainably without depleting or polluting
- Where - made in the USA, locally, or fair trade (living wage)
- In What - sold in minimal or eco-friendly packaging
- For What - will be actually used, not just landfilled
- Now What - durable and can ideally be recycled, upcycled or taken back and broken down into its biological and technical nutrients for reuse in new products

Standards that people can trust are becoming increasingly important for both retailers and consumers as claims of "green" proliferate. We cannot take green claims at face value. We have to ask questions and scrutinize ingredient lists.

Great standards to look for are:

- USDA Organic Seal - contains 95%+ certified organic ingredients or Made With Organic Ingredients equates to 70%+
- Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) wood produced in a sustainable way. Avoid the spurious SFI standard by the logging industry. Ask for FSC or reclaimed wood or bamboo (a rapidly-growing grass weed)
- Energy Star label for energy efficient appliances
- Green America Seal, which used to be called Co-op America
- TransfairUSA for fair trade
- Cradle To Cradle
- (No nanoparticles and GMO. Avoid these)

2) The How: You can operate and sell in a green way.

- Green Customer Touch Points including bags made from recycled content, a bag credit if consumers bring their own bag, eco-friendly packaging, CFL or LED lights, green cleaning products, business cards and marketing materials on recycled paper, reusable glassware for water, and emailing receipts if desired. It is important that customer interfacing items be as sustainable as possible to convey a consistent message. My personal pet peeve is the petroleum paraffin candle with artificial fragrance burning into a store's air like a diesel engine. There is no faster way to scare off sensitive customers. You can burn a soy or beeswax candle with botanicals.
- Generate Energy & Water Cost Savings from both water conservation and energy efficiency measures (CFLs, power strips, utility audits, less AC blasting) to help provide funds for any going green transition costs.
- Operate in a Green Way such as by using zero-VOC paints, reclaimed or FSC wood, non-toxic varnishes, recycled papers, and hybrid delivery trucks. If building stores, consider filing for LEED certification.
- Explain The Positive Benefits of the eco-friendly products in a positive and upbeat way without gloom and doom or guilt. Educate in a loving way. Provide affirming testimonials and press clippings. Create a hip eco-lifestyle vibe.
- Partner with Green Events and environmental nonprofits to get the word out such as Global Green and Healthy Child Healthy World. Provide samples and incentives to encourage newbies to try green products. They will convert!
- Provide a Solid Value Proposition. A green product must still have the winning combination of performance, style, and sustainability for its price. A retailer must still have a good location, enticing product selection, and an inviting helpful staff if offline and an excellent web site that is search-engine-optimized if online.
- Be Authentic. Don't overstate or overpromote and then underdeliver.
- Tell Your Story. Why are you inspired to care about the environment. What moves you the most? Is it the national themes of energy independence and green American jobs? Was it Al Gore's film? Was it the birth of your child? Explain why you care and customers will empathize and share their story too.
- Don't be afraid to put your Toe in the Water and go green in a small way at first. Going green is a journey. Feel good and proud about the things you can do and are doing.

For an abundance of independently-reviewed, hip, stylish eco products, please see www.ecofabulous.com, and the next time you have to give a gift, consider giving a green one!

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