

GREEN DAZE: THE SPA DIRECTOR'S DILEMMA WITH ECO-ADVERTISING

Lisa Sykes, Sustainability Specialist, Universal Companies

Consumers are inundated with numerous advertisements and catalogs featuring “earth-friendly” products. Images of lush tropical plants, fanciful butterflies, or beautiful lanky models frolicking in boundless grassy fields are used by some marketing firms to convince consumers that products are “green”. From oil companies to agriculture conglomerates, everyone is making a running jump to get on the proverbial green bandwagon. However, this daring feat has its challenges, including research and support of environmental claims.

Because they practice holistic therapy, spa professionals make up a large percentage of consumers who demand environmentally conscious products. However, because these professionals are occupied with daily business operations and lack the time needed to examine dozens of labels, they are often targeted by “predator” companies that send them emerald green catalogs touting, “We’re going green!” So, what does a spa professional do?

A strategy often repeated by legitimate, unbiased organizations (such as CorpWatch) is, of course, research. However, time is once again a factor. One can invest a short amount of time by reading through catalogs very carefully to find out if each company’s environmental claim is thoroughly explained and if it reads its own labels. While not all businesses are trying to trick you out of a dollar (some are actually well-meaning in their approach to improve their environmental standards), a few haphazardly create faulty self-checking systems without researching. For example, while recyclable packaging is a good attribute, it shouldn’t be the only attribute that deems a product “eco-friendly”. The product itself may contain a toxic mixture of FD&C dyes, parabens, and phthalates. Another example would be if a company vaguely states, “This product was created using an environmentally-friendly manufacturing process.” Who determines this? Is it ISO 14001-2004 or Öko-Tex certified? Ambiguous claims are warning signs that a company is not doing its research. Specific answers should always be given or readily available, and there should always be a department or a contact person who can accurately and efficiently answer customer questions.

Furthermore, don’t be afraid to inquire about a company’s environmental standards. Perhaps a company has good intentions, but its vagueness causes customer confusion. Calling attention to this type of blunder does two helpful things: (1) it catches errors, thus helping a well-meaning company improve its standards; or, (2) it alerts greenwashers that you’re paying attention, forcing them to actively support their claims.

Being eco-savvy is easier than it appears. Sometimes it just involves something as simple as a few minutes of invested time. Read a company’s standards, and if the standards are specific and make sense,

continued on next page...



universal companies
YOUR ONE SOURCE SPA SOLUTION™

1.800.558.5571 | www.universalcompanies.com

GREEN DAZE: THE SPA DIRECTOR'S DILEMMA WITH ECO-ADVERTISING

continued from first page...

then let the company read its own labels and interrogate its vendors for you, marking each green product appropriately. Ultimately, this will save you valuable time, and it could possibly evolve into a trusting, symbiotic relationship because a company that offers time-saving information, documented research, and a carefully constructed system for its environmental claims has already approached its own eco-advertising dilemma.



universal companies
YOUR ONE SOURCE SPA SOLUTION™

1.800.558.5571 | www.universalcompanies.com