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Consumers Want Companies to Shoulder the Green Burden



Aug. 7, 2008 - Nine in ten U.S. consumers think environmental responsibility is important, but they still expect companies to do most of the heavy lifting - by marketing greener products, according to a new report.

Most consumers are content to pass the green burden on to companies, which they perceive as being able to make more of a difference, according to the new "Green AMPlified" study conducted by marketing firm AMP Agency.

"[Consumers are] aware of what they can do to make a difference and feel some guilt associated with not doing enough," says Anastasia Toomey, AMP's senior vice president of consumer insights. "But, among all respondents, it's the companies they buy from who they still feel should lead the charge and have the power to impact global efforts for change. They feel they are only one person, but companies have the size and money to do more good."

While generally unwilling to make sacrifices for greener living, most consumers are quite prepared to reward companies with proven green credentials, the survey suggests. After learning of a company's environmental commitment, 57% say they are likely to trust the company, 60% are likely to purchase its products, and 58% are likely to recommend the company or its products to others, the study finds. More than half (53%) say they factor a company's social and environmental activities into their purchasing decisions.

At the same time, however, it's getting more difficult for companies to pass consumers' smell test on environmental responsibility, the survey notes. Forty percent of consumers say they rely on product packaging for information on a company's eco-performance. Yet 44% insist they "sometimes, but not often," believe the green claims on product packages.

Consumers' top complaints on green messaging include unverifiable or overly generalized claims, and statements that appear contradictory to other behaviors of the company, according to the report.

"Consumers want to trust the companies behind the products," the study's authors note. "They are simply asking them to be more explicit and transparent about their policies and to help educate the public on the benefits of their products and claims and how to participate in eco-friendly practices."

It's unclear from the report whether consumers will continue to expect companies to take on most of the responsibility for

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environmental progress. Almost half (47%) of younger consumers report feeling guilty when they don't take action on environmental issues, compared to 33% of baby boomers who feel guilty when they don't take action. In fact, 50% of so-called "millennials" say it is irresponsible not to "act green."

"For millennial consumers particularly, who report a greater sense of responsibility when it comes to acting eco-friendly, it's evident that being green is a weighty issue," says AMP's Toomey. "This powerful group of citizens appears to expect more of themselves in the green space and much more from the companies they will spend their money with."

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