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Smart Marketing Can Help the Environment Too

by

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Environmental concerns are on most people's minds today. Awareness of the impact human beings have on the environment has been brought home in New York by the critical shortage of sanitary landfill space and the lack of suitable future landfill sites in many counties. The sojourn of New York City's infamous "garbage barge" a couple of summers ago emphasized how desperate the solid waste disposal issue has become.

In many communities solid waste disposal fees are sky rocketing where landfills are near capacity and alternative sites are scarce, if available at all. Many communities have also instituted mandatory recycling of glass, paper, and plastic materials. This has forced consumers to change their behavior, creating awareness of the cost of solid waste disposal in both dollars and time.

Consumers are now paying more attention to the materials they must throw away or recycle. A large percentage of our solid waste stream is packaging from food and consumer products. Manufacturers of these goods have been in the spotlight since consumers view their products as the root of today's solid waste problem. In response, manufacturers have created a revolution in products, as well as in packaging technologies and materials, that radically affect the way consumers shop and use them. Manufacturers and retailers are realizing that these new environmentally improved products are beneficial to the financial bottom line as well.

The range of manufacturer responses to environmental concerns can be seen on supermarket shelves. Products such as laundry detergents and fabric softeners are now available in ultra-concentrated forms that require 50 percent less product per wash. Refill packages further reduce solid waste due to their soft, light-weight plastic film or paper board packaging. Fabric softener is now available in a paper board refill that uses about 68 percent less packaging than the initial hard plastic dispensing container.

A soft plastic refill pouch for household spray cleaner is now available that uses 75 percent less plastic than the spray bottle initially purchased. Other products such as toothpaste and deodorant, traditionally sold with a cardboard outer package surrounding the actual product package, have been redesigned for sale without the outer package. One deodorant manufacturer expects to eliminate about 4 million pounds of cardboard a year.

But the environmental benefits are just part of the success of this packaging revolution. Manufacturers, retailers, and consumers will all benefit from concentrated products and reduced packaging. The storage and distribution of products will be more efficient now that more product will fit into the same space in tractor trailers, railroad cars, warehouses, and supermarkets. Transportation, storage, and handling costs per unit should be reduced.

Space on supermarket shelves has become some of the most expensive real estate in the country as new product introductions have increased more dramatically than the size of new supermarkets. Packages redesigned for environmental concerns have the added benefit of freeing up supermarket shelf space for new products, as well as reducing the pressure on retailers and communities to support ever-larger supermarkets.