

Business & Economy**Green Marketers Run Into Eco-Skeptics***Run Date: 07/28/08**By Besa Luci  
WeNews correspondent*

*Massive green-marketing campaigns aimed at women are spurring watchdogs and advisors into action. Big Green Pursue offers budgeting advice and Women's Voice for the Earth presses for full disclosure of cleaning product ingredients.*

(WOMENSENEWS)--U.S. companies' intensifying efforts to portray themselves and their products as environmentally sensitive are often aimed at women, who account for more than 80 percent of all retail purchases, according to government statistics.

"Women believe in the power of their purse," says Jennifer Ganshirt, co-managing partner at Frank About Women, a marketing-to-women communications company based in Winston-Salem, N.C.



Green cleaning party  
in Newbury Park, Calif.

*Credit: Women's Voices for the Earth*

Women are more likely than men to move the green movement forward, Ganshirt says. "The option of buying green is up on the list in the way women support the movement through their behavior."

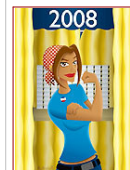
In March, Frank About Women produced a study of 1,084 female consumers that found 32 percent willing to pay more for green products. Twenty-five percent said all the products they purchase are green, and 52 percent said they will buy green products if they benefit their family's health.

The corporate pursuit of a green profile has been fast and intense.

As recently as three years ago, it was rare for companies to advertise their environmental attributes.

But a 2008 survey of more than 600 executives found that 71 percent of the roughly 30 companies they represent have adopted a green design approach and 83 percent took environmental issues into account in their strategic decisions. The study was conducted by BearingPoint, a global management and technology consulting firm with headquarters in Mclean, Va.

Frank About Women's survey--conducted for clients, which include Bissell, a vacuum cleaner company; Abbott Laboratories, a pharmaceutical

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developer and manufacturer; and TJ Maxx, a women's clothing retailer--boiled respondents down to four types of green shoppers.

### Green Shopping Groups

The "eco-evangelist" embraces the movement as a way of life. The "convenience first customer" wants information presented as simply as possible. And the "home health administrator" links a healthy family to a healthy home and a healthy planet.

Then, for the sales team, there's a problem category. She's the "eco-cynic" who is skeptical of green marketing claims and might just be drawn toward a group such as Women's Voices for the Earth, a women-centered group concerned about the health impacts of environmental toxins.

"One of the main problems--something we are concerned about--is that there is no standard for what constitutes green or natural or environmentally friendly; there is no government standard at all," said Erin Thompson, senior campaigns organizer at Women's Voices for the Earth.

Since companies use their own definition of "green," particularly when it comes to cleaning products, Thompson said there is room for wariness about "green washing."

Women's Voices for the Earth, which formed in 1995 and is based in Missoula, Mont., is currently pushing five leading cleaning product companies to disclose all ingredients used in their products. The companies include Clorox, of Oakland, Calif.; SC Johnson, Racine, Wisc.; Proctor and Gamble, Cincinnati; Reckitt Benckiser, Slough, U.K.; and Simple Green, Huntington Harbour, Calif.

### Focus on Fertility

The organization is particularly concerned about 2-Butoxyethanol, an ethanol solvent found in glass cleaners that has been linked to reduced fertility rates, Thompson said.

Another group that scrutinizes the environmental claims of "green" products is Big Green Purse, a Web site that offers eco-lifestyle tips and shopping suggestions to women.

"A lot I'm hearing is that consumers are extremely confused about what is green and what isn't because looking at cleaning products, it says environmental friendly, but you look at the back and it says warning-caution," says Diane MacEachern, an international environmental lifestyle consultant who lives outside of Washington, D.C., and created Big Green Purse.

MacEachern says consumers who really want to be sure they are buying environmentally sensitive products should look for a certification by an independent product analyst.

Consumers Union, a Yonkers, N.Y., nonprofit, launched GreenerChoices.org on Earth Day, April 22, 2005. The Web site monitors and often challenges the claims of green products.

Clorox, for example, introduced a line of Green Works products this year, which includes all-purpose bathroom, glass-and-surface and toilet-bowl cleaners. The company says the products are at least 99 percent "natural," which it defines as having ingredients mainly from plant and mineral materials and containing less than 1 percent petrochemicals.



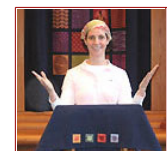
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GreenerChoices points out that while Clorox goes beyond federal requirements by disclosing all of the product ingredients, a "natural" ingredient does not necessarily mean nontoxic or nonirritating. For example, they point out that even cleaners like lemon juice, which are safe enough to eat, can be irritating to the eyes or skin.

TerraChoice, a 13-year-old environmental marketing company with offices in Philadelphia and Ottawa, in 2007 deployed research teams to check the environmental claims of six leading chain stores that sold products ranging from household cleaners to electronics. Its report doesn't name the companies.

### **Common Greenwashing Sins**

After looking at 1,753 environmental claims on 1,018 products, the company identified "six sins of greenwashing."

The most common--associated with 57 percent of all the products they surveyed--was the "sin of the hidden trade-off." Perpetrators peddle one particular attribute of the product--such as recycled paper--but ignore more basic environmental concerns, such as the amount of energy required by the manufacturing process or the distance it had to travel to reach the consumer.

Another common sin is that of vagueness. Placing the recycling-loop graphic on a package, for instance, might indicate the entire product is made from recycled material. But it could just pertain to just the wrapping.

Uncertainty about products' real environmental costs and effects prompted Women's Voices for the Earth to launch a nationwide "Green Cleaning Parties" effort this March to teach people how to make their own "green cleaners" from ingredients they know are safe and non-toxic. Around 400 people from across the country--New York, California, Texas and Nevada--and even Canada and Singapore--have so far signed up to host a party, Thompson said. Most are women.

"The party kit comes with recipe cards, which women choose to make all-purpose cleaners," Thompson said. "And they mix up some of their own recipes made with vinegar, baking soda, olive oil; ingredients that we know are not harmful to your health."

MacEachern, meanwhile, provides readers of her Big Green Purse Web site with advice about how to shift \$1,000 of their budgets to products that she considers truly green.

"We are at the beginning of this whole process of verification," she said. "But I'm trying to encourage women to use their consumer clout to make manufacturing more environmentally responsible by shifting their budget to those (products) that have already been certified."

*Besa Luci, a native of Kosovo, is a recent graduate of the University of Missouri's Graduate School of Journalism.*

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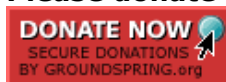
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