

Eco Sparkle: Why ecologically responsible jewelry is the brand of the future

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by Marc Choyt

We know how expensive it is to develop a brand. If one is working with the independent jeweler as a channel of distribution, not only must one sell to the owner of the store, but one must sell it also to the sales staff. This is a zero sum game in a cut throat market that is very difficult to make ground in, particularly in economies like we have today.

As a manufacturer implementing socially and environmentally responsible jewelry, we have a distinct advantage. Our marketing angle ties into our customer's very survival.

What percentage of the market in the US is really concerned about environmental issues today? I suspect that if you chart this group on a bell curve, you'd be in the heart of the market.

Consider Toyota Corporation. Look at Honda, BP and GM. Even Wal-Mart. What are they pushing on their ads?

Green, green, green.

What is the jewelry industry pushing? Pretty much the same images that they were decades ago.

The aware consumer who is most passionate about the environment, who is purchasing organics and buying hybrid cars, know that the last five years have been the hottest on record. They know that three species are going extinct every hour.

Many in this group would never even walk into a jewelry store. I personally see this demographic as a huge potential market for my products. But even those who are not hosting Al Gore video parties want to feel they are part of a greater movement toward social and ecologically responsible practices.

A few years ago, I heard the CEO of GM on the radio say something to the effect of...we are going to continue to make our suburban and SUVs because that is what the American customer wants. I thought, what a fool.

What is the next chapter of his business plan for 2008 and 2009 as Toyota goes for the jugular with its introduction of cheaper hybrid cars that even my wife, who has never bought a new car, has her eye on? I say, fifty-fifty that the next chapter is chapter 11.

We would have to ask Toyota whether people are buying their cars because of the green factor or because of mileage. At this point, I would wager it is both. For the first few years, when the hybrid cars are so expensive, it was the green market that is really driving their new technology. Now, however, it is the mainstream market.

Admittedly, there is no future benefit, such as saving on gas when one buys a piece of jewelry that is responsibly produced. Yet the deep emotional, sentimental connection between a customer and a piece of jewelry actually makes jewelry an even more compelling product category for responsible production. Jewelry is an emotional purchase, and if a customer can do it and feel that they are supporting the survival of them and their children, why wouldn't they?

Could the jewelry industry be traveling down the same road as General Motors? Certainly, yes. Like GM, the industry is reluctant to change. Opportunities, such as the internet, have been missed. A consensus trance still holds: all but a few believe that business can be conducted with a disregard to human rights and the environment even though these issues are in the forefront of the American public.

At present, the marketing of jewelry which perpetuates a disconnection between the product and effects of the purchase is so powerful that for now, the jewelry industry appears relatively safe—like the arctic ice caps ten years ago.

Yet those ice caps are melting faster than anyone could have ever predicted and some are already benefiting from this change. No, I'm not talking about real estate speculation in Siberia which is supposed to be our next temperate zone. I'm referring people like Torry Hoover, of President of Hoover and Strong who has seen surge in interest of his ecologically responsible metals.

Those of us who have addressed these issues now just have to wait until we end up be in the position of Toyota. It is not a question of if. It is only a question of when.

Martin Rapaport made a great connection when he talked about "Spiritual Sparkle." But there is also an "Eco Sparkle" that is just as compelling. In fact, in the long term, eco sparkle may well prove to be the most successful marketing angle in the industry.

The time to take action is now. The profit an average jewelry company makes on selling one engagement ring can offset the carbon of their company for an entire year. You can visit www.fairjewelry.org to find out how to be part of the solution.

Author Bio:

Marc Choyt is President of Reflective Images, www.celticjewelry.com, an award winning designer jewelry company that practices fair trade, ecological, socially responsible business. Marc authors www.fairjewelry.org a movement website for consumers and jewelers supporting green, fair trade, socially responsible business practices in the jewelry industry. He also originated The Circle Manifesto, www.circlemanifesto.com, a business model based on indigenous wisdom traditions.