strong language

SUSTAINABLE MARKETING: CROCKERTON'S CASE STUDY

So, as Tina Turner might have asked, what's marketing got to do with it? It's easy to see the benefits of sustainability to operations, HR, or finance, but marketing's role to date has been largely reactive, often limited to publishing environmental and social reports and rebuffing the accusations of greenwash that can follow.

Clearly sustainable development has a lot to gain from harnessing the creativity of business's greatest communicators. But what's in it for them? A marketing approach that rigorously explores its environmental and social impacts offers access to the growing number of ethical consumers looking beyond the label and putting their money where their values are. According to the Co-operative Bank's report 'Who are the ethical consumers?', ethical concerns are backed by over £8bn of UK consumers' money, a figure that chimes with findings by the Social Market Foundation that nearly one fifth of consumers are willing to pay more for ethical products and services.

But even if you take such surveys with a pinch of salt, it's clear that many of society's current preoccupations fall naturally under the sustainable development banner. If marketing is about understanding and responding to customer needs, emerging trends such as work/life balance, downshifting from city to country, stress, health and wellbeing and customization over mass production demonstrate how much consumers need sustainable responses from the marketing community.

And there's no greater preoccupation than food. From rising levels of obesity to GM and the state of British farming, what we eat has become a flash point for sustainable development as ethical concerns about organic food, animal welfare and farmers' livelihoods combine with personal concerns about our health. As a small indicator of a much larger trend, 2003 sales of products with the Fair Trade mark totalled over £92m, up 46% on 2002, and the great British public eat a third of a million Fairtrade bananas every day.

Crockerton's (www.crockertons.co.uk) is one food company already making the most of a sustainable marketing approach, assisted by specialist consultancy Strong Language. Based in Cardiff with plans for major expansion, Crockerton's is a delicatessen café and outside catering brand offering high quality local food in a relaxed, continental style. Sourcing a range of products from local Welsh producers and others who share the same responsible values further afield, Crockerton's offers some key insights for marketers wanting to adopt a sustainable marketing approach.

- *The sustainable message is not always enough*
  As everyone knows, wearing your heart on your sleeve can lead to tears before bedtime. Crockerton's has developed a communications strategy which encompasses, but is not limited to, its sustainable ethos, under the brand positioning of 'Nouveau Welsh'. Tapping in to the wider renewal of Welsh identity, Crockerton's contemporary tone of voice (or rather voices, since

everything's in Welsh and English) couldn't be further away from the wheedling, hair shirt guilt trips of the stereotypical greenie. Or the dragons and black chimney hats of olde Wales. With messages focused on product quality as well as lifestyle experience, Crockerton's has become a cool 'find' for Cardiff's hippest crowd, for whom sustainability comes second to fashionability.

- *Keep it mainstream (the niche market will find you anyway)*
  The key to all good marketing is to keep it accessible. Whilst there is undoubtedly a growing niche market purchasing with their values first, deliberately alienating the mainstream would be foolhardy. By opening outlets in funky areas such as Caroline Street, Cardiff's famous 'Chip Alley' takeaway mecca, Crockerton's has guaranteed high visibility and attracted customers beyond its natural constituencies of foodies and ethical consumers.

  And it's a win win situation. Selling six packs to rugby fans on match day may seem surprising for an upmarket Welsh deli, but the greater the mass appeal, the more the business thrives to pass on benefits to its local suppliers and beyond into the community. The fans may even come back for some organic antipasti.

- *Look good, do better*
  As fashion brands such as Howie's demonstrate, just because you're saving the world doesn't mean you can't wear a great Tshirt. Green marketing has traditionally relied on a hackneyed image bank of trees, globes and smiley children, a visual approach which now bores the committed and is simply ignored by the mainstream. In contrast, Crockerton's has created a modern brand identity centred around Snap, its funky crocodile icon, and its contemporary colour palette of red, black and ivory is consistently applied across signage and packaging to create maximum stand out. Even the furniture is on brand, made by local craftsman out of wood from a sustainable forest, but to a highly contemporary design.

- *Tell the truth*
  Few marketers would admit they ever bend the truth, even slightly. But recent Food Standards Agency research suggests that the use of misleading words and phrases such as 'fresh', 'pure', 'natural', 'traditional', 'original', 'authentic', 'home-made' and 'farmhouse' are rife on packaging claims, and all sectors have their equivalent grey areas.

  Crockerton's freely admits that, despite erroneous press claims, it's not a totally organic operation and not all its food is locally sourced (anyone seen a Welsh olive?). Admitting that you don't have all the answers may be an unsettling experience, but it's also a liberating one as it allows you to experiment creatively with new approaches. Then even Tina Turner might agree that you're 'simply the best'.

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