

Feeling green? Don't puke.

People are getting sick. A wave of green fatigue, eco exhaustion and environmental anxiety is spreading among consumers. Overwhelmed by choices, disgusted by corporate hype and living with fear their efforts will never be enough, people are tuning out, say the experts.

Media to Blame?

One could argue that the media industry is just getting sick of its own reporting – who hasn't done a "green" issue? – and looking for the next trend. The Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) reported in June that the press has moved from "environmental exigency to exhaustion." From The New York Times to Wired magazine, reporters are talking up the weary consumer.

What's Real.

It's not all hype. Green washing is happening left and right.. Over-the-top claims by companies jumping on the "Eco" band wagon are being met with suspicion and eroding consumer trust. Then, sadly, when true progress is made by companies pushing the boundaries, such as Patagonia and its Footprint Chronicles, little is mentioned in the mainstream press.

There also is growing uncertainty about the effectiveness of personal actions, despite the truest of intentions. People are so bombarded by "helpful" advice that they're becoming consumed with anxiety over making the right decision. Local or organic? Carpool or green tags? Bath or shower? The choices are endless. And just when you think you're making the right one, such as using Nalgene for refillable water bottles, you find out that's not right either. Now you've got another thing to worry about: BPA.

A Remedy

For the media industry, CJR is recommending that journalists "avoid the flimflammy of 'green consumerism' (itself, an oxymoron) unless there is a truly useful discovery or breakthrough to report." Perhaps that would assuage some of the eco-anxiety out there, and allow readers to think about more meaningful ways to help their planet."

Good advice. Are you listening? What is breakthrough is news. Everything else is just interesting. Or even expected of you.

5 Tips to Avoid Eco Fatigue

1. Be remarkable. You can make the "greenest" product on the planet, but unless it solves a significant consumer problem, works or tastes better than anything in the market and offers a good value in ratio to price, consumers won't buy it.
2. Be green because it's something you value, not as a marketing gimmick. Can coal really market the industry as green and clean? What is Kermit the Frog doing with the Ford Escape? People smell falsehoods and you go from bad to worse.
3. Don't be bashful. A lot of truly "green" companies are afraid to speak up because it feels too self righteous. Consumers actually appreciate your efforts, no matter the size, as long as they're earnest and a step in the right direction. The amplification of your message can increase with your commitments.
4. Make it fun and engaging. Green doesn't have to be staid. The average consumer doesn't even know that "hip" home cleaning products (is that an

oxymoron?) made by Method Home are even green. And that's entirely the point. This fast growing brand wants consumers to love their product first – because they're well designed, smell beautiful and work well. They're also planet friendly. Method's attitude is: why wouldn't they be?

5. Partner with an established nonprofit. When Kettle Foods wanted to add a cause element to its new Backyard Barbecue flavor, it immediately thought of wildlife habitat protection because it's something they do in their own backyard. To inspire consumers to apply the same principals at home, they partnered with a respected nonprofit, the National Wildlife Foundation. Then they encouraged people to get involved by creating their own backyard wildlife habitats. Who wouldn't want a bag of free chips as thanks for attracting local birds?
6. Invite consumers to join you. A flushable diaper doesn't sound like a product that would inspire a cult following, but gDiapers realized early on that its core consumers were a vocal bunch. So they empowered them. By creating gMums and gDads, the company arms independent, trusted "spokespeople" with free product and the tools they need to spread the word. Doesn't get much better than that.
7. Move beyond green. Green is a fad. Sustainability is continual improvement. If you're only looking at energy consumption, you're just scratching the tip of the iceberg. Businesses that endorse a "triple bottom line" approach – Organic Valley Farms, New Belgium, and Clif Bar to name a few – also address their social and community impacts. Environment is the third leg of the stool, but without the other two, you wouldn't have a place to sit.