



HOT BUTTONS:

What's Pushing Consumers to Buy?

Consumers are a finicky bunch. Tastes change and what consumers wanted yesterday may not be what they're looking for tomorrow. Read on to discover the five trends that are driving U.S. consumers to buy, and what that means for the promotional products industry.

BY AMY LUCAS

With a war in the Middle-East, a global warming crisis and hundreds of manufacturing jobs being sent overseas each month, Americans are craving control in a tumultuous world. Feeling powerless against global issues, consumers are instead seeking control in what they buy, purchasing products from companies that stand for things they believe in and that offer the things they want most.

Whether it's investing in companies that tout social responsi-

bility, choosing products that are grown organically or avoiding (at least for now) products made in China, Americans know what they want and will not settle for products or services that come close. Instead, they expect companies to meet their demands, or else they'll find a competitor that will.

What follows are five trends we've identified that are motivating consumers to buy, and how companies can gain a competitive edge by quickly responding to the product needs resulting from these shifts in buyers' tastes.

BUYING TRENDS

Trend #3:

Embrace Eco

Experts claim social responsibility and eco-friendliness are going hand in hand. That's been given a boost by Al Gore's Academy Award-winning film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. The increased awareness by consumers of global warming has caused some to buy more natural and organic products – especially from companies touting their social responsibility.

Despite consumers' best intentions, Woody cautions buyers to be aware of the difference between organic and socially responsible industries. "I think a lot of people are confusing the concepts," he says. "A company could buy organic products from a shop that has terrible working conditions and people must be aware that organic does not mean socially responsible."

New York, NY-based Anvil Knitwear Inc. (*asi/36350*) is one company taking strides to be environmentally responsible inside and out. Anthony Corsano, CEO of Anvil says "organic" is a fairly new concept, but something they chose to consider due to consumer demand and environmental obligation. Before releasing its organic tees to consumers, the USDA certifies that Anvil's cotton is naturally grown with no pesticides, then the company uses organic dyes and recycled wastes to create new products and steam energy for production. The company also recycles the water used in the dying process.

But on top of conserving the environment, Corsano says the



practices have helped cut overhead costs. "These environmentally friendly practices are really easy things to do that make so much sense if you stop and look at the pay back," he says. "Occasionally you stumble upon that one thing that may cost money in the beginning, but it clearly pays for itself in the long run." Much like people pay a higher premium for socially responsible companies, Corsano says the future of organics also depends on whether the customer is willing to pay. "Organics will continue to grow," he says. "I think environmentally friendly practices will continue to grow, and people will respect that these are fiscally sound processes that are great for the environment and great for the organization."

Rick Whitney, president of Castle Rock, CO-based Solar Advertising (*asi/88148*), has seen both sides of the promotional market – originally starting as a distributor, then becoming a supplier. Within the last year, Whitney says he's seen a surge in demand for organic lip balms and that the increase is health-related. "Awareness of healthy alternatives, like organics, allows us to influence the quality of our lives and the lives of those around us," he says.

Although Solar Advertising had the option of staying with non-organic goods, Whitney says the concept is too important to ignore. "Selling organics has benefit," he says, "and if consumers buy it, it's because they believe it's of greater benefit, too."

"I think environmentally friendly practices will continue to grow, and people will respect that these are fiscally sound processes that are great for the environment and great for the organization."

– ANTHONY CORSANO, ANVIL