

Getting Your Green Out: The Blogosphere and Beyond

By Molly Logan Anderson

While the green movement can be overwhelming for consumers, it is equally overwhelming for businesses. The familiarity of the corporate conversation has changed—meetings are now dotted with such words and phrases as “sustainability”, “carbon offsetting” and “social responsibility.” Companies large and small are working to authentically connect with today’s eco-conscious consumer and toward that goal, if a company hasn’t added the “blogosphere” to its marketing dialogue before, it will certainly make its debut during green marketing discussions.

The blogosphere has been a major player in moving “green” beyond niche and into the mainstream minds of today’s consumers—and it appears to be a trend that is affecting businesses as well. According to Technorati Charts, the average number of daily references to “green marketing” in the blogosphere as doubled since 2006. But the traditional marketing strategies that may have worked across media channels before just may not work as well in this Web 2.0 world. “What we have learned from our conference speakers, sponsors and presenters is just how different the blogosphere operates,” states Nan McCann, president of PME® Enterprises, LLC, producers of Good And Green-The Green Marketing Conference. “Brands need to consider many things, from what blogs are best aligned with their chosen causes or products to how to best deal with their selected green bloggers who are an ethically driven group. Failing to dig deep into the blogging community could do more harm than good for a company’s green initiatives.”

A Community’s Influence

Blogging and social networking have helped the green movement move into the mainstream due to the influential position bloggers have taken as indicated by David Wigder, senior vice president of Digitas and 2007 Good And Green speaker. “Bloggers are emerging as key influencers online. Today, many blogging sites compete with traditional news sources for breaking stories and eyeballs,” says Wigder. “Moreover, many consumers may trust bloggers more than established news organizations simply because bloggers are unaffiliated – and are perceived as posting articles because they have a passion for green as a cause rather than to generate a profit.”

Not only do today’s green bloggers disseminate information, but available blogs are so diversified that readers can find a blog written by someone who holds the same green passions that they do. “...bloggers take different points of view on green – which enables the blogging community as a whole to appeal to a broad range of individuals and interests,” says Wigder. Elisa Camahort Page, co-founder and COO of BlogHer, an online community creating opportunities for women who blog, agrees, “The green blogosphere gives its readers more choices when searching for information and opportunities for activism. People are able to find bloggers that care about going green in the same way that they care about it.” Camahort Page continues, “There are a lot of different ways to go green. Blogging helps the people that care about those individual causes raise their voices and be heard. It also facilitates congregation and eventually participation.”

Participation is Everything

“Not only can interested readers find blogs that help them get informed about issues they care about, but blogging provides a way for those interested parties to participate and share how they are doing it. The participatory nature of blogging is attractive because it is active,” says Camahort Page. Experts agree that this participatory aspect is what really builds a bloggers community and makes it so valuable—both to readers and to marketers.

“Becoming part of the online conversation is about creating credible, relevant content and authentically participating in online communities,” says Muhammad Saleem, professional green digger and editor for Pronet Advertising and 2007 Good And Green speaker. “While content is certainly king, in social media, community is just as royal.”

Bloggers are always thinking about their audience and what they care about—and marketers should think that way as well. “The number one complaint from bloggers is when they feel they are part of a marketer’s ‘canned approach’,” says Camahort Page. “As a blogger, I’m thinking ‘what is in this for my readers, what will they think of it, does it fit into my ethos? Is this product or service new, innovative, or unique?’” Camahort Page, along with other green bloggers, realizes there are “for-profit organizations doing cool things” and works to make sure those are the companies that she connects with her audience.

Green Expansion

When a brand wants to expand into the green blogosphere, the first step is research. “Start by reading blogs – not what you’ve heard is the A-list of blogs – but build your own A-list, thirty or forty blogs that are relevant to what you do,” says Camahort Page. “Would they care about your products? Do they have an audience that might care about what you’re doing?” In essence, while many of the traditional marketing rules do not apply to social media strategies, one marketing fundamental still holds true: find your target audience. With the huge diversity in green blogs from all-encompassing sites like Treehugger.com, to “regular people” sites like TheDailyGreen.com and niche sites such as myrecycledbags.com, identifying the target market is priority one and allows you to save time and money while reaching consumers more quickly.

So much can be learned by becoming a regular reader of the blogs on a hand-picked A-List. “Green bloggers are a pretty ethos-driven bunch,” says Camahort Page. “For example, if you read me for awhile, you’ll figure out I’m a vegan, which means you won’t do well pitching organic beef or recycled leather products. Green bloggers pretty much wear it on their sleeves. Make sure you know what they’re wearing before attempting to reach out.”

Honesty is the best policy when engaging green bloggers and their audiences. It goes without saying that if you’re a product representative, always identify yourself as such. Sneaking in manipulative statements via the comments section will almost always give you away, especially to a tech-savvy blogger and his or her community. And, be certain to stand behind your product and its philosophy. “One thing that we need to be aware of is that the consumer is really good at noticing and exposing inconsistencies. Green is not a marketing gimmick,” comments Saleem. “You have to believe in the principle to truly be a part of the movement. Different brands will apply it differently, but if you believe it and live it, your acceptance of it will be seen as authentic.”

The relationship to the green movement is a complicated and personal one for its members. Nothing less than an authentic presence will do and brands will be scrutinized to rule out the bad apples. “It is important to recognize that consumers may relate to green as both a product and a cause. As such, when brands tap into the green movement, they should do so in a way that is perceived as credible in order to mitigate the risk of greenwashing,” says Wigder.

“Green bloggers and their audiences know the difference between jumping on the bandwagon and driving it,” says McCann. “Brands should take that into consideration when forging ahead with their green initiatives.”

Bloggng and Beyond

While the blogosphere is the leader of the Web 2.0 green movement, brands are discovering other ways to keep their online consumers engaged with their brands.

Believing that direct connections with its customers and stakeholders was the best way to understand and serve them, Dell recently launched IdeaStorm, a comprehensive site comprised of ideas, blogs, videos and forums all part of the bigger conversation between Dell and its customers. General Motors recently invited its customers to an open dialogue with its GM Flagship division and actions that it is taking to reduce its environmental impact. GM is also a platinum sponsor of the 2008 BlogHer conference, continuing to support the organization as the sponsor helping to assist in the development of a “greener” BlogHer.

Experts feel “Web 2.0” and “social media” will soon be a regular part of our marketing conversations just as “sustainability” and “carbon offsets” will find a comfortable place within all business plans. Blogs are just a starting point and learning to work within their landscape could lead to future green marketing success. “Really, the rules for properly engaging today’s bloggers with your brand hold true for all of your green marketing strategies,” says McCann. “As we heard during Good And Green, the smart, savvy eco-conscious consumers are demanding brands to be authentic and transparent with all of their messages.”

Each week M2Moms®, M2W® and Good And Green E-ssentials bring you important stories on the latest trends, brands, methods and ideas for marketing-to-moms, marketing-to-women, and green marketing. They're your weekly updates to the M2Moms®, M2W® and Good And Green conference communities of contacts, sources and resources, to help you increase share and maximize your marketing ROI. M2Moms® The Marketing To Moms Conference; www.m2moms.com M2W® The Marketing To Women Conference, www.m2w.biz; Good And Green – The Green Marketing Conference www.goodandgreen.biz. PME®, PME-EVENTS, PME ENTERPRISES, M2Moms® and M2W® are trademarks and servicemarks of PME® Enterprises, LLC. Copyright © 2008 PME® Enterprises, LLC. All Rights Reserved.