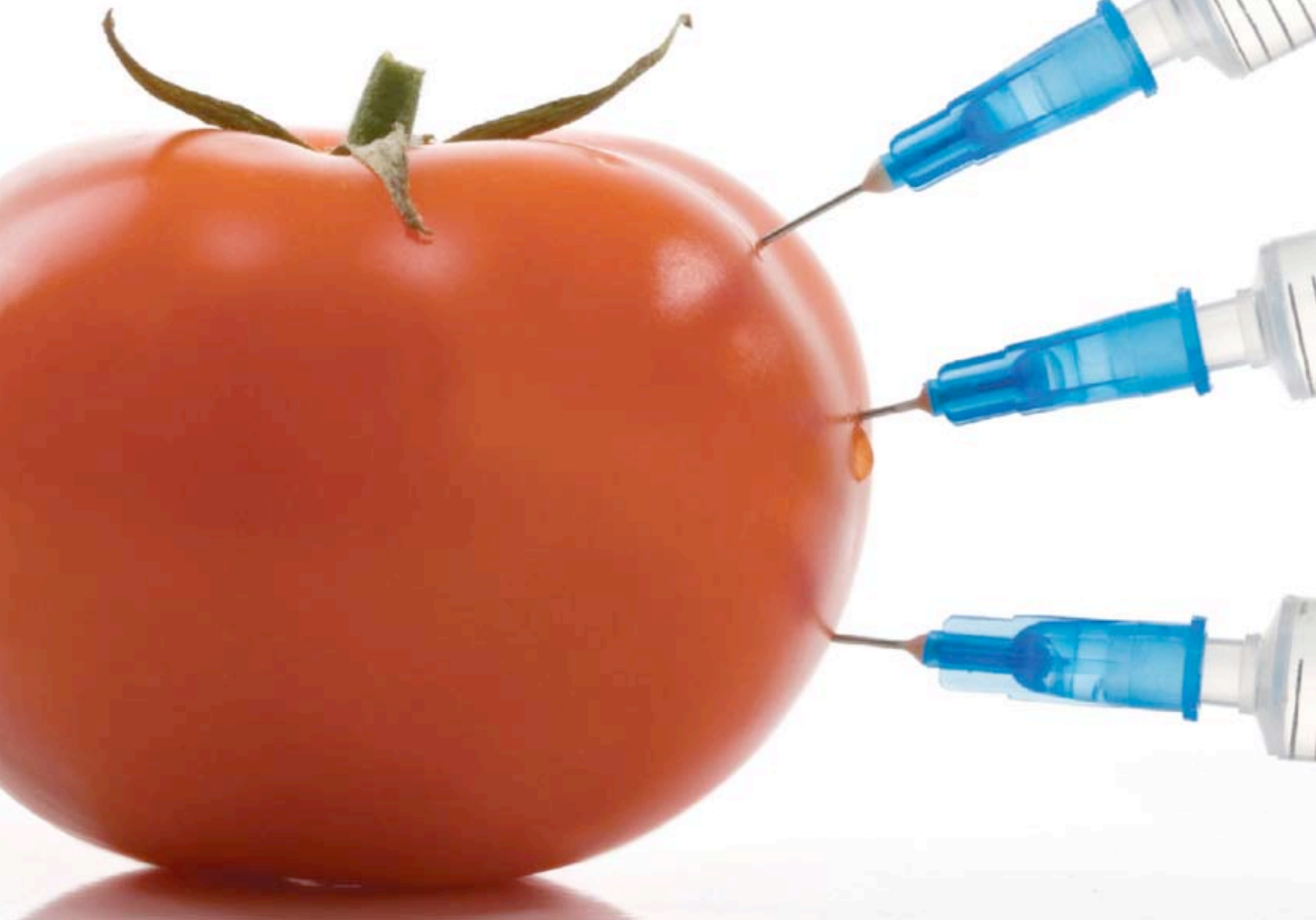


# Profiting from Eco-love



***Do's and Don'ts of Green Marketing***

***By Jenie Skoy***



Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about climate change and it's only natural for businesspeople to want to leverage the sustainable features of their products to take advantage of some of this eco-love. But before you slap an environmentally-friendly stamp on your hydroponic products, consider this advice by Jennifer Kaplan, co-founder of Greenhance.com, an organization dedicated to helping small businesses adopt green marketing strategies.

Some businesspeople are marketing their products as green simply for the sake of catching "green" revenue and not because their product is actually good for the environment. But if products or services don't actually have a sustainable edge to them, consumers get wise to it. A new name has even been coined for this phenomenon of exploiting the green movement for profit: "greenwashing," a term that describes efforts to mislead consumers about the environmental benefits of a product or service. If you want to label your product as eco-friendly, go ahead, but make sure you can back up that claim.

It's hard to win back consumer trust once it's tainted by a misleading claim.

"Consumers are already skeptical so if they smell even an ounce of disingenuousness

you can lose credibility and the loyalty of your customers," says Kaplan. She believes companies have to be careful not to overstep their product's value.

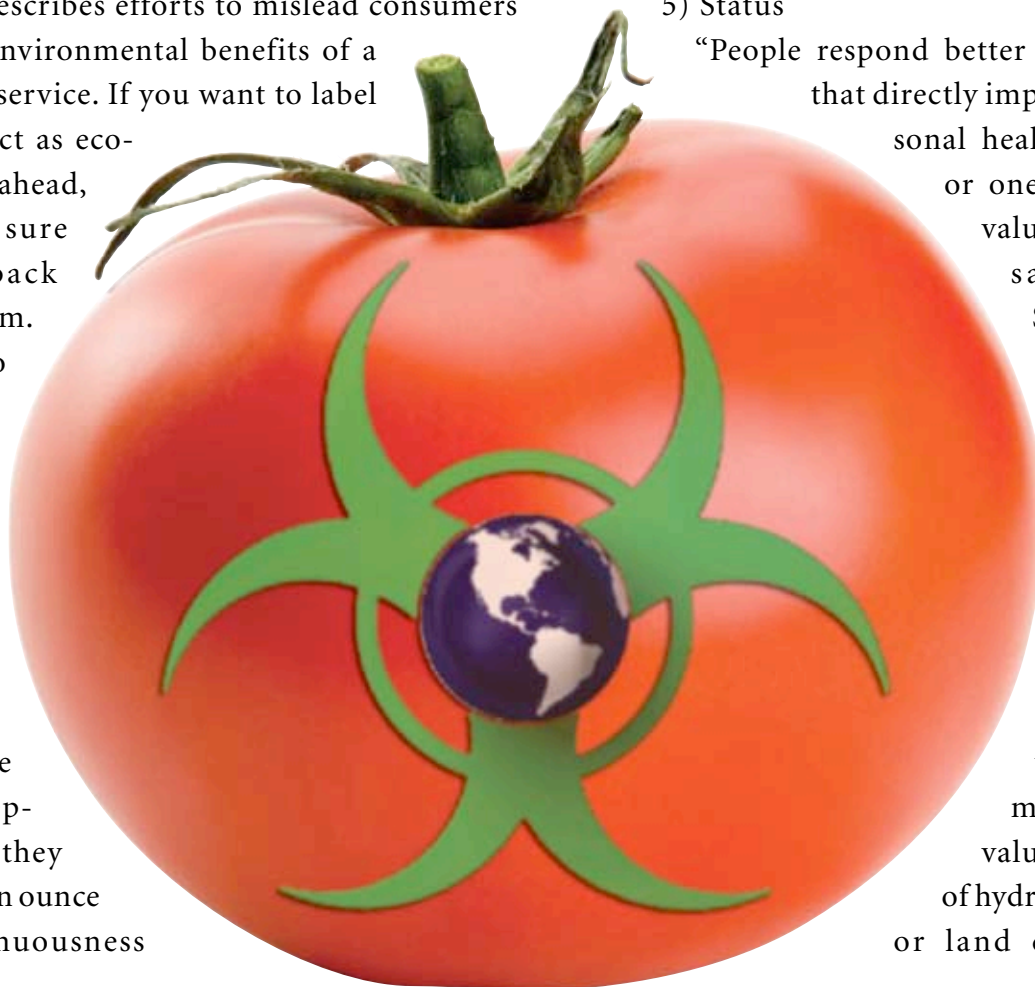
So how can your company carve a niche in this growing green market?

First and foremost, Kaplan says your product needs to have more than just "green" footing to stand, it also needs to meet a core customer value. She believes there's only a fraction of people who are "green" fanatics—who will buy something simply because it's sustainable. The bulk of consumers buying green will only do so if there's "something in it for them," or if it meets one of these values:

- 1) Health and safety
- 2) Efficiency and cost-savings
- 3) Improved performance
- 4) Convenience
- 5) Status

"People respond better to something that directly impacts their personal health and safety or one of the other values on the list," says Kaplan.

She believes that smart marketers will bundle green product features with the aspects that have inherent value to create more consumer value. So, in terms of hydroponics, water or land conservation



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alone may not be enough of an appeal, but bundling that feature with improved performance or better taste, cost efficiency and/or increased nutritional value might do the trick to attract customers.

In the same way, billing a household cleaner as “non-toxic” is less appealing to customers than touting the “no strong fumes” quality of it, since

Kaplan, it should generally be willing to “walk the walk” or transform part of their operation to reflect a holistic approach to being eco-conscious: like implementing energy efficient lights, buying into windpower or getting solar panels installed, etc.

A retailer can also devote a portion of the store

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that's a more personal quality. Another example would be energy-efficient light bulbs; when first launched they were bulky and much more expensive than the regular bulbs. Consumers didn't buy them until after Philips re-introduced the bulbs under a different name and touted their longevity and a cost savings over the lifetime of the bulb.

If a company wants to bill itself as green, says

to green products which is what Home Depot did with their “eco options” program, says Kaplan. The program sells some 2,500 products considered environmentally friendly.

So feel-free to take advantage of the eco-love, but be sure that your product has a truly authentic “green” value and that it also fundamentally meets the needs of your consumers.