

Sustainable PR

AS THE FLIGHTY EXCESS of the Reagan/Bush years gives way to an era of more stolid pragmatism, who, one may wonder, will navigate the transition for us? Silly question. Public relations experts, of course. Take the environment. "The challenge," reads a Hill and Knowlton ad touting their in-house *Green Team*, "is to make the environment a distinct bottom-line advantage." Or, as *O'Dwyer's PR Services Report* explains: "Successful PR people will be those that [sic] can blend the cold-hearted reality of 1990s economics with the 1970s touching, though somewhat naive, concern for Mother Earth."



MIKE LUCKOVICH SPY MAGAZINE

Here's how it works. In the 1970s, a company like Rockwell may have foolishly assumed it actually would have to clean up its share of 177 Individual Hazardous Substance Sites at the Rocky Flats Plant—a nuclear weapons manufacturing facility in Golden, Colorado—in order to appear environmentally friendly. Touching, but *very* naive. Later on, the company opted instead for a more economical demonstration of its deep commitment to the environment: an advertisement coupling the Rockwell logo to an Ansel Adams photo that celebrates the Earth in all its pristine glory. ("I saw that and went 'Ahhh!'" one Rockwell employee admits. "It seems kind of contradictory, but that's just my editorial opinion.")

The numbers show that 78 percent of American consumers have demonstrated a willingness to switch to products perceived as environmentally sensitive. Yet while the old, unsophisticated us may have assumed that adopting a pro-environmental posture would require a significant investment, the new, more cunning us knows that a deep green corporate hue can be had on the cheap, as simple as a fresh coat of paint. Does the name *Exxon Valdez* rub you the wrong way? Exxon's green consultants thought it might, so they've changed it to the more huggable *SeaRiver Mediterranean*. Same single-hulled oil tanker; new, swarthy mien. Look for it off a rocky coast near you.

Does auto exhaust get you down? Chrysler and General Motors would like to try to assuage your guilt when you buy your next Jeep or Geo by planting a tree in your name. Here's hoping this gesture fires your ecological drive: You'd have to plant another 733 trees on your own to make up for the actual amount of CO² emitted during your average 10-year car life.

So, you ask, what's wrong with luscious images of green, rolling hills, sparkling rivers, copper canyons? Why would anyone want to interfere with a good-hearted effort to bring a little nature back into the hectic consumer lifestyle? No reason, except that the Federal Trade Commission is a real curmudgeon when it comes to companies like GE marketing their regular old reduced-wattage light bulbs as "energy-efficient." They were required to cease the false claim. Also, no more will you find the upbeat three-arrow recycling logo on White Castle hamburger boxes, or the "chlorine-free process" claim on Mr. Coffee filters. Technically speaking, neither was accurate. And since Ciba-Geigy's Basus Flea and Tick Spray actually does *sort of* contain some ozone-destroying chemicals, the company was wise to drop the warm and sunny "ozone-friendly" label, in

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