

## Bio backlash

### Ensure messages match green mandate

The trend toward "environmental stewardship" has reached fever pitch but consumers want to know that companies are truly doing good for the earth, not just their pocketbooks.

Sustainability experts caution that marketers who trumpet superficial environmental initiatives will develop a green sheen.

Therefore, designers must be careful how they communicate a client's environmental efforts. While any attempt to green-up is admirable, over emphasizing this effort could be viewed as an exercise in "green washing" - when a company's ads are more substantive than their actions.

Retired packaging consultant and educator Walter Soroka of Brantford, Ont., warns that overstating a brand's sustainable practices can do serious damage. "Probably half of the activity out there is using the word sustainable as a marketing ploy. That, of course, is not the idea. In the long run, it's going to hurt them," says Soroka, who recently wrote a sustainable packaging education program for the Packaging Association of Canada.

Broadcasting your client's sudden green-ness could also invite public scrutiny of its potentially insensitive past, not to mention consumers' close examination of the company's current claim.

U.S. pharmaceuticals giant Johnson & Johnson, known for its positive ecological platform, is working to improve its packaging.

"We'll put [info] on some packages where it makes sense. In other cases, we're just going to do it because it's the right thing to do," says Chris Hacker, chief design officer at J&J. "It's the way business ought to run and those [who] choose to do that will be rewarded for it. Not because they're promoting it but because they're doing it the right way."