



## Newell Rubbermaid's 'green' push part of trend

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Kermit the Frog once lamented it's not easy being green.

Until a few years ago, corporate America may have sung the same tune when it came to creating products with the environment and sustainability in mind.

But these days companies like Sandy Springs-based Newell Rubbermaid are finding it harder *not* to be green.

The consumer products giant, whose brands include Shur-Line painting supplies, Goody hair care accessories and Paper Mate pens, is carving an ever-growing niche of products in the "green" business, partly to respond to growing consumer demand for environmentally-sensitive products.

The company's iconic Paper Mate brand this year launched a line of biodegradable pens and pencils. The pens' shells, made from corn-based materials, are designed to biodegrade within a year when placed in soil or compost.

In its Calphalon cookware unit, the company contracted with a third-party recycling vendor. Customers who buy new Calphalon Unison pots and pans can send old cookware to the vendor, which will break them down and melt down the recyclable materials such as aluminum.

The moves are part of the company's three-pronged green strategy, said Lisa King, Newell's vice president of insights and innovation. The company wants to create products that meet consumers' appetite for green; it's reviewing its own energy use at its manufacturing facilities; and it's forming more partnerships with other vendors that help achieve those goals.

"The best solutions are the ones that make sense in all of those ways. It helps us build a culture of sustainability into what we do over time so that you're not just doing a little thing here and a little thing there because that's where you see a lot of consumer cynicism, skepticism and fatigue over this is green that's green," King said. "We really want to build how we run our operations, how we think about new product development and how we look at or business over time."

More than jumping on the feel-good trend du jour, there's a real, bottom-line benefit for companies who focus on growing their greenness, said David Abood, an analyst at Accenture who heads the consulting firm's North America sustainability services practice.

Consumer demand is fueling the changes but so, too, are companies like Wal-Mart, the world's largest retailer, and government agencies like the U.S. General Services Administration, Abood said.

"When a Walmart says 'we're going to start tracking sustainability as a metric and criteria,' that's a real driver to (suppliers) to change," he said.

Some companies use their environmental efforts as a recruiting tool to attract candidates from leading business schools. Some schools, including the University of California at Berkeley and Case Western Reserve University,

are incorporating clean technology and life cycle classes and programs in their offerings as demand for graduates with those skills increases, he said.

"It's the ticket to the dance," Abood said. "There is real business value being driven from sustainability."

Atlanta-based Zep Inc., a maker of specialty cleaning products sold to schools, cities and restaurants, as well as through retailers, also has adopted that philosophy.

The company launched its GreenLink line of environment-oriented products a few years ago and says it's an increasingly important segment for Zep. According to Zep the products' ingredients break down faster, are less harsh or are easier on users' skin.

The company is looking at businesses whose products could build on that segment as potential acquisitions, John K. Morgan, the firm's chairman and chief executive said in an interview earlier this year.

The company doesn't break out its GreenLink brand sales, but Morgan said it's a growth part of the business.

"Green"-marketed products tend to be more expensive, but companies say demand has remained steady, even in a rocky economy.

Companies also are finding ways to use green products or manufacturing to aid in cost-cutting.

Newell's Rubbermaid division diverted more than 2,511 tons of plastic from landfills at three of factories by regrinding and recycling those materials for use in other products. The move saved the company \$3 million in new raw materials purchase costs.

At an Ohio Calphalon manufacturing plant, the company changed its process for treating its cookware with water, cutting water use by 90 percent and reducing costs by about \$200,000 a year.

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