

Consumers: The best force for change

by Wendy Jedlicka, CPP / Jedlicka Design, Ltd.
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Every few minutes, advertising reminds us we live in a market economy. Our buying choices have a direct impact on how industry shapes our world. And in the end, decide our collective fate.

"Hold on, I'm just thirsty, not running an oil tanker into a wildlife refuge!" If your beverage is in a plastic bottle, you're why the tanker was there.

"What can I do?"

The necessities of a market economy don't always exist neatly within the boundaries of sustainability. Sustainability says, goods should be bought, sold and produced by and for local consumers. But we live in a world where mass production is the only viable way to deliver goods we've come to enjoy as part of our quality of life. As the genie won't go quietly back in the bottle, it's unreasonable to expect all regions to produce all goods for their consumers, as true sustainability models dictate. Buying choices then become the driving force in determining how green a local market will be, its ripple through effect on a global scale, and ultimately how successfully we can shift from being blind consumption machines to being agents of positive change.

The price beyond the sticker.

Paper packaging is made from a sustainable resource, trees. But from where? A plantation or an old growth forest? Even if the wood was cultivated, trees produce less pulp per acre than higher yield annual pulp crops like Kenaf, and Hemp, and do nothing to help close an ecological and economic loop like Agripulp can.

Glass packaging comes from an abundant resource that's fairly easy to extract. Metal packaging resources like tin, steel, and aluminum are destructive to collect and refine. "Well that's easy then, I'll just buy stuff in glass," if only it were that simple. Glass packaging is heavier to transport in all phases of its lifecycle than steel, for the same uses (prepared/preserved foods). Heavier transport weight means burning more oil. Oil is not sustainable, an eco hazard waiting to happen, and when burned as fuel, adds to global warming. Plastic packaging used today in place of glass and steel because of its light weight (less transport costs), durability and clarity, as well as recyclability, is made from, oil.

Every purchase we make is a statement about how we really feel about the environment. Curbside recycling is not enough. Each of us must look for opportunities to close the loop. A great start is to purchase tree-free and recycled paper products. Having a market for the collected paper encourages the shift towards a more sustainable pulp cycle. Which has a positive impact on reversing the effects of global warming. Low end papers such as copy paper, paper towels, and toilet paper, are great opportunities to encourage the production of tree-free and recycled papers. Simply ask yourself, do I need to cut down a tree to feel clean?

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Shopping List for Positive Change:

+ Choose products/packaging that use sustainably renewable or recycled materials first

Encourage manufacturers that are doing the right thing. Make those eco choices part of their competitive advantage. Watch for new products using bioplastics (plastics made from annual crops like corn or soybeans).

+ Buy locally

Products produced locally didn't travel as far, and so burn less fuel.

+ Choose products currently recycled in YOUR area, plus look for those that close the loop.

Stay familiar with the recycling rules for your curbside program. Not all areas take all materials. Give preference to products that allow you to close the loop.

+ Use common sense.

Concentrates are better than ready to use. Do you REALLY need cheese in individually wrapped slices? If it looks wasteful, it is. Don't encourage manufacturers to produce bad products with your money.

+ Be an eco purchasing activist.

If you regularly buy a product that's overall really good, but has un-eco packaging, drop the company a letter. Tell them you'd like to keep buying their product but their un-eco packaging is making it hard for you. Support manufacturers that are proud of their eco efforts (usually printed right on their packaging with more details on their website).

At home:

- + If a friend uses a product you know a good eco alternative for, tell them!
- + Teach your kids why good buying choices and recycling are important. There are many websites to help them get involved.

At the office:

- + If your company doesn't recycle, organize a recycling pool for home pick-up.
- + Give your company's purchasing department eco-product alternatives.

Here, we'll make it easy for you:

<http://ecopackaging.net>
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