

Advertisers: Teens Value Environment, Buy From Socially Responsible Companies

by Erik Sass

TO SERVE A GROWING MARKET, advertisers want to gauge teen sensibilities. Want to reach this lucrative demo? Go green. **JWT's** online study discovered that more than 80% of American teenagers are concerned about the environment and the role of the United States in causing pollution, with 54% saying they are "strongly bothered" by these issues, according to the results of a new survey by global ad giant **JWT** released Monday.

The future is not all bleak, however: of 767 U.S. teens who participated in **JWT's** online study, 77% believe it's their responsibility to care for the environment, 61% said they think their generation will be more environmentally responsible than older generations, and 78% think there is still time to repair environmental damage.

The ideological leanings of teenagers are coming under increasing scrutiny from marketers that want to distance themselves from the common perception among young people that corporations are irresponsible—or even malicious. Eighty percent of teens surveyed said corporations should be held to an ethical standard of environmental conduct, and 59% said corporations should bear most of the responsibility for cleaning up the environment. Most useful: 75% said they would buy environmentally friendly products if available.

In the same vein, a 2006 study by Alloy Media and Marketing and Harris Interactive showed that college students rank social responsibility higher than celebrity endorsement as factors in their choice of consumer brands—with 33% of about 1,800 respondents saying they prefer brands known for involvement with not-for-profit causes, community activism or environment-friendly practices.

Among the specific brands mentioned by college students, Ben & Jerry's was admired for its "Lick Global Warming" campaign, while Newman's Own earned praise for donating all profits to charity. Burt's Bees, Yoplait, and the Body Shop also fared well. Twenty-four percent of respondents said they had purchased a product in the last year because it was "socially conscious."

Discussing that study, Alloy Senior Vice President for Strategic Marketing Samantha Skey remarked: "We are seeing that today's young people expect corporations to be socially responsible, and that students prefer to associate with brands that they perceive to be positive contributors to the community."

To shed the association with environmental malfeasance, big corporations are seeking to position themselves as socially and politically progressive through involvement with charitable causes and improved corporate practices. As it released the survey results, **JWT** also announced its sponsorship of **RelightNY**, an activist organization founded by 15-year-old Avery Hairston. The project aims to distribute energy-saving compact fluorescent light bulbs to low-income families. It's not all about the environment, however.

A third study from the National Consumers League and Fleishman-Hillard International Communications, also released in 2006, found that fully 76% of respondents ranked a company's employee welfare ahead of all other considerations—including environmental stewardship and corporate philanthropy.