

ISSA Today

Do We Sell Green Products or a Green Concept? By Mike Sawchuk

Let's pretend for a couple of minutes that we are not in the janitor industry but instead the fire prevention and protection industry. We are distributors marketing fire alarm, detection, and monitoring systems as well as sprinklers, fire extinguishers, and a



host of other fire safety-related products to all types of end customers—from small shops to small and large office buildings. Just as in the janitor industry, we make appointments with our prospects. We are punctual, knowledgeable about our products and industry, and calmly discuss how our product line can help the customer.

However, do you know what will typically be our first and key hurdle to overcome when marketing these products?

Distributors selling fire prevention/protection equipment say the first question they often hear from a new prospect is: “How is a fire going to start here?”

Many customers have never had a fire in their facilities. As a result, they have a solidly entrenched belief that a fire in their facility is very unlikely and, even if one should occur, the

local fire department is at the ready and will take care of the situation. What the customer does not realize is that fires happen. In fact, they occur very frequently. There are more than 150 workplace fires in the United States *every day*. And, facility fires are the third leading cause of accidental deaths in this country—killing an average of approximately 100 people per week.

Still, people believe fires are infrequent and the best way to overcome this hurdle, which may be the only way to deal with the situation since even statistical documentation can prove futile, is to sell the “concept” of fire protection and prevention equipment. Selling a concept does not focus on the actual products per se, but on the “idea” of promoting safety and protecting lives. Selling a concept can be challenging, but the initial goal is to plant the seed so that the customer takes fire protection more seriously.



Interestingly, there are a lot of similarities between selling Green cleaning products and marketing fire prevention/protection equipment. In order to effectively sell Green products, we have to first sell the client on the Green concept: the many benefits that can be derived from environmentally preferable cleaning products. This is far different than selling traditional cleaning products, which will be highlighted later in this article.

And, just as in our fire example above, this may take time and initial client meetings may result in little more than planting Green seeds. However, once distributors realize

they can be very effective marketing Green cleaning products by selling a concept, they are more likely to be successful over time.

Before Selling the Concept...Some Reality

Before exploring how to market the Green concept, there are some very real, yet very basic questions we must ask ourselves. First and foremost, do you believe Green cleaning is a fad? My experience traveling all over North America is that there are areas in Canada and the United States where Green cleaning is very strong and growing stronger. These are typically cities, states, and provinces on the East and West coasts of the U.S. and the southern and western parts of Canada.

However, in certain sections of Canada and the U.S., the reality is that Green cleaning has still generated very limited interest and is often viewed as little more than a passing fad. This belief is not only held by end customers, but many local jansan distributors also view Green as a temporary trend.

If this resistance is popular in your community, then selling the Green concept simply is not necessary...at least for now. However, studies indicate Green cleaning will eventually spread to all regions of North America. As the price and performance of environmentally preferable products continue to improve, there simply will be little reason for end customers to select older, conventional cleaning products, even if they are not sold on the benefits of Green cleaning.

How to Green Concept Sell

Typically, when end customers are deciding between different brands of conventional cleaning products, their key deciders and possibly only considerations are price, performance, and features. They look for the most cost

competitive products, especially right now, that perform satisfactorily with enough features and benefits to meet their cleaning objectives. This has worked well for marketing conventional cleaning products. But, this tactic will likely prove relatively ineffective selling Green products, especially to clients who are still skeptical or unsure of what Green cleaning is all about and if they really want or need it.

Instead, selling the Green concept involves five key practices or components. These are:

1. Sell the benefits of Green cleaning and Green cleaning products. Customers need to understand why they should go Green. There are scores of studies now that prove environmentally preferable products can reduce student and worker illness and absenteeism. Test scores have improved in schools where Green cleaning has been implemented, allergies and allergic reactions have been reduced, and indoor air quality is typically better. These proven benefits are key to selling the Green concept. Although the message may not resonate as powerful and lead to sales with all customers, the fact that Green cleaning products are made from sustainable sources can bolster Green concept selling as well.
2. Why certification. Would you see a doctor that had not been state certified? Certification of cleaning products by independent, third-party organizations insures the product has met specific guidelines and standards qualifying it to be called Green certified.
3. Price and performance. These are the key issues when selling conventional cleaning products, and not much different when selling today's Green products. Once

the client is convinced that selecting Green certified environmentally preferable products will benefit the health of their facility as well as the environment, the next issues, and rightly so, are: do the products perform and how do they compare in price? Overall, the environmentally preferable products produced today have improved significantly in performance compared to previous offerings. And as production of these products has escalated, costs have become much more competitive.

4. Accept the fact that Green cleaning really is a jigsaw puzzle. Switching to Green cleaning is a multi-faceted experience—from product selection to application. But just like starting a jigsaw puzzle, we have to start somewhere. Green cleaning is, after all, a journey and not a destination. Some clients may start their Green journey by selecting Green-certified paper products and then, once satisfied, move on to environmentally responsible trash liners, as examples. Key here: the distributor must be patient and continue promoting the concept of Green cleaning by discussing its many health and environmental benefits.
5. Become Green experts. Eventually, even in areas where there has been little interest in Green cleaning or worse, it is viewed as a fad, customers will become interested in or even be required to implement a Green cleaning system. This is often the result of legislation requiring educational facilities to be cleaned using environmentally preferable cleaning products and equipment. When this happens, school officials will seek out a local Green expert, usually a jansan distributor. If the distributor has stayed up-to-date regarding Green cleaning and Green technologies, the

end customer will find the supplier to be an invaluable resource, which builds customer loyalty that can last for years

In many ways, jansan distributors have it easier than those that sell fire protection and prevention equipment. For instance, jansan distributors can offer proof that Green products help protect health and the environment, which helps promote the Green concept. On the other hand, the fire equipment distributor typically must work with clients that are not only skeptical about a fire occurring in their facilities, but are also willing to gamble that a fire could ever occur.

Whether you're in a community that supports Green cleaning or not, in addition to the products, you must remember to sell the Green cleaning concept. Allow sufficient time for this concept to resonate and prepare to become a Green knowledge source for current customers and prospects. Distributors that market Green cleaning products now have time on their side and can use this time to distance themselves from their competition and grow market share.

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