

# Going “Green”

## is more than frogs & flowers

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As I'm sure you have, I've watched the “green” movement grow from its roots in the late 60s to what seems like its current obsessed state.

Clean air and water, and sustainable buildings are important – crucial even. No one would argue that point. And according to writer Diana Verde Nieto, in an Advertising Age Magazine article, recent research shows that 79 percent of all consumers – worldwide -- prefer to buy from environmentally responsible companies.

The downside, Ms. Nieto goes on to write, is that other studies show as many as 77 percent of those consumers don't believe the environmental claims made by brands. More numbers – 64 percent want third-party verification of green claims.

As a manufacturer of products that clean, protect and maintain concrete, brick and stone architecture, I have to pay attention to numbers like those.

So do you. So do all of us in the construction industry. Because like it or not, confusing or not, the green movement is going to keep rolling, gathering momentum and getting bigger. We can either ride it into the sunset, or be steam-rolled by it.

But I am here to tell you riding that swell is harder than buying advertising with photos of frogs and flowers. Anyone can do that, which is why there's so much doubt in the market from the very customers who want most to believe.

When it comes to green, we've got to walk the walk.

As a manufacturer, I approach this problem from several perspectives. I look at it from the applicators' point of view. Sure, applicators want “green” cleaners and weather-repellents. They also need products that work. They also need products they can use in California, and other areas where local environmental regs are tougher than federal regs.

I look at it from the distributors' point of view. I have to make products they can sell, that their customers can afford to buy. I take in the regulators point of view, the point of view of design professionals, and my own employees.

You don't get far without the buy-in of the people you chose for your team. My employees care about these issues. As I write, the office staff is planning to use their lunch break to pick up trash in the business park.

And, bottom line, there's the point of view and personal standards of the guy in the mirror every morning.

Then I factor in the limits of chemistry, raw material availability and economics.

Going green isn't easy. And every construction professional faces similar challenges. So I can understand the temptation to buy a green ad and say I'm done. Unfortunately, it's just not that easy.

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I’m not saying this is the way you should tackle that marathon. But if you’re interested in one manufacturer’s approach, here it is.

First step? Honesty.

Where my products fit neatly into the green slot, I say so. If not, I don’t force them. And in every case I make sure our products back up our claims.

Next I look at how we package those products. Where we can make packaging recyclable, we are, but containers must also be durable and economical. No magic wand – that’s engineering, trial and error,

and plain old hard work to figure it out.

Then the production process -- we use water to make most of our products. Some say water is the next oil. When I look at the water bill, I have to agree.

So we’ve started programs to reclaim and reuse water that used to just go down the drain or out the vent as vapor. No magic wand there, either. We invested in equipment to capture water vapor, condense it and re-use it.

We figured out a system where the water we

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use to rinse out blending tanks can be saved and used in the same products made in those tanks.

What I’m saying is that if I look at everything involved in really “going green,” and not just paying lip service like many do – it’s a mountain. It’s a journey of a thousand miles.

But I look at what I can reasonably do, and where and when I can do it, and I proceed on that journey and on that climb one step at a time, with my team to help me.

And I’ll be honest with you and everyone else, because I have to be – I’m still climbing. I’m convinced I’m heading in the right direction.

And you know something else? I’m enjoying the journey.

If you want to read a really good book on taking your business “green” the right way, I recommend *Green to Gold: How Smart Companies Use Environmental Strategy to Innovate, Create Value, and Build Competitive Advantage* by Daniel C. Esty and Andrew S. Winston.



**Oops!** – Production Control Manager Jeff Plumlee “accidentally” scores the side of a 265-gallon Bag-in-a-box tote to test the container’s resistance to incidental contact. The Bag-in-a-box program puts PROSOCO products in containers that are 90 percent recyclable.