



# Three Reasons to Focus on Greening the Bath

With apologies to a certain frog, it's getting easier to be green. The question is 'why should the decorative plumbing and hardware professional care?'



Ana C. Lopez

There are three main reasons that green will play a more important role in future decorative plumbing and hardware sales.

First, it's the right thing to do. The Environmental

Protection Agency's Energy Star program states, "About \$4 billion is spent annually for energy costs to run drinking water and wastewater utilities. If the sector could reduce energy use by just 10% through cost-effective investments in energy efficiency, collectively it would save about \$400 million annually."

To save money and improve plumbing energy efficiency, the easiest thing to do is to reduce the amount of water used. This results in lower energy costs, because less water needs to be heated. Lower energy consumption equals greater cost savings for the user and a smaller carbon footprint.

Demographics are the second reason to understand the principles of greening. There is no doubt that most consumers favor saving water when possible, provided that water-saving fixtures and strategies do not compromise performance.

In 2008, the U.S. market for green building materials generated \$57 billion in sales, according to a study from Cleveland, OH-based Freedomia Group. Green building materials, including those used in baths and kitchens, are expected to expand by 7.2% annually to more than \$80 billion by 2013.

The study also found the highest growth areas for green products are water-efficient plumbing fixtures and fittings, energy-efficient lighting and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified lumber and wood panels. All three of these product groups are made by decorative plumbing and hardware manufacturers and sold in decorative plumbing and hardware showrooms.

There's another reason

why green will become a more significant part of a showroom's merchandise mix. Generation Y – or the millennial generation – is the next wave of your customer base. The 85 million U.S. citizens that comprise Generation Y – born between 1977 and 1996 – are larger than the current Baby Boom generation and are going to be the primary beneficiaries of their parents' wealth. Understanding Generation Y's preferences and desires, especially with regard to products, will be key to developing effective marketing strategies to attract this huge slice of the populace to your showroom.

According to a 2008 study by the Aspen Institute, Generation Y members want to make a contribution to society. They are green-conscious and use social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Craigslist and MySpace, and expect the businesses that they patronize to follow suit.

in [March through] June... Since March, Toyota has sold 40,398 of the gas-sippers." It would be hard to argue that Toyota is not going to receive an enviable long-term return on its investment.

Decorative plumbing and hardware manufacturers also are beginning to recognize the tremendous market potential represented by environmentally efficient products. They have responded by producing plumbing fixtures that use less water and energy and manufacturing door and cabinet hardware made from recycled content that does not compromise the look or ability to deliver a luxury experience in the home.

## PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

Currently, many bath professionals are not authorities on what all of this green stuff means, and are not quite sure how to incorporate it into their businesses despite green's

complicated by an anticipated paradigm shift in consumer values that is occurring now and will continue once the recession ends. Unity Marketing founder and president Pam Danziger claims in a recent trend report, *The Luxury Market After the Recession*, there is the potential for "a dramatic shift in affluent consumer consciousness away from conspicuous consumption toward a more thoughtful, reserved, careful way of shopping and buying."

Danziger adds, "Affluent consumers are defining, reassessing, and reevaluating their lives and lifestyles. Marketers will need to realign their brands with the new values that more thoughtful, careful and selective affluent shoppers hold."

Green presents that opportunity to align with new thoughtful consumer values. Showrooms can add green to their arsenal of compelling stories by acquiring the knowledge and learning the nomenclature to converse authoritatively about green.

Currently, sales professionals need to understand product styles, finish options and performance capabilities. Moving forward, this knowledge base will have to include familiarity with manufacturing processes, whether or not manufacturers have obtained third-party certifications of their products and operations to support claims of environmental efficiency, product composition and how well products contribute to human and environmental health and well-being (see related Editorial, Page 7).

You will need to know if a product can help contribute to obtaining points toward the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, whether or not the wood in the vanity that your customer covets is sustainably

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## MARKET POTENTIAL

If you still are skeptical about the potential of green, look at Toyota. Toyota first introduced its hybrid Prius in 2001. There is a continuing debate that the Prius has not made a profit, because of the reported \$1 billion in research and development costs to create the fuel cells that make the Prius green. Toyota is a lot of things, but dumb is not one of them. The company believed so much in the market potential of environmentally superior vehicles that it was willing to invest a billion dollars to develop green technology and to have a loss leader in its line – the Prius – to become the recognized market leader in hybrid vehicles.

*Los Angeles Times* writer Ken Bensinger reported, "When it debuted in March, Honda Motor Corp.'s retooled Insight hybrid looked to be the first serious challenger to the Prius." He added: "Throughout the country, Americans bought 2,079 Insights

tremendous upside potential.

The Decorative Plumbing & Hardware Association (DPHA) will offer assistance. The organization is currently finalizing its Greening the Bath training manual for showroom professionals.

Another reason to become green is the need to tell new and different compelling stories. For the past two decades, showrooms have been able to attract consumer interest based on their unique and novel merchandise mix. Customers would walk into a showroom and be wowed by the style, design and technological advances of high-performing shower systems, intricately detailed door hardware and magnificent bath furniture.

Guess what? Your architects, designers and homeowners have been looking at beautiful product since the early '80s. The market has come to expect expertly designed and beautiful merchandise.

The challenge to tell new compelling stories is further

harvested and FSC-certified or if the recycling content claimed by a manufacturer has been confirmed by an independent third party.

"It is a misconception that to have a green bathroom, you have to sacrifice design or performance," claims Patti Whelan, manager of Birdsall Bath Design in North Plainfield, NJ. "Nothing could be further from the truth," Whelan says.

Birdsall Bath Design is the first USGBC's LEED certified showroom in the nation. The decision to build an environmentally sustainable showroom (that includes a reserved parking space in front for hybrid vehicles) was based on doing the right thing.

Whelan explains, "Green was not the first thing we discussed when we considered creating a new high-end, luxury showroom. We felt that there was a market need for a showroom whose look and design matched the quality of products that we wanted to sell. I started to hear about LEED and it seemed obvious that LEED was the only way to go. When I proposed the concept of a green showroom to company president Mike Murphy, he automatically gave the idea a big thumbs up."

### THE GREEN BATHROOM

The challenge with all of this green stuff is that there are no standard definitions. In an ideal world, green would be determined by conducting an environmental life-cycle analysis. This involves determining the environmental impact of a product in all stages of its life cycle.

However, life-cycle assessments often result in apples-to-oranges comparisons. In the manufacturing of a high-efficiency toilet, you would be required to compare the resource requirements, to the manufacturing impact, to the effect the end product has on indoor air quality and the impact of disposing of the product when it no longer works.

As a result, there are trade-offs. Many products used in home building and commercial construction may not be considered green, however, they can be used in a manner that helps reduce their overall environmental impact. The processes used to manufacture a high-efficiency faucet may not be green, however, the fixture's ability to deliver 1.5 gallons of water per minute or less versus the standard 2.2 gallons per minute makes the product green. Greening

a bathroom requires specifying products for a specific design that have the least impact on the overall environment and maximize the efficiency of the space.

"Showrooms are filled with green products," Whelan says, "however, their eco-benefits are not always the first thing that comes to mind when presenting them to customers." Many manufacturers are producing products from recycled content or using processes that reduce or eliminate almost all waste. Because water efficiency equates to energy savings, products such as high-efficiency and dual-flush toilets, low-flow showerheads and body sprays, electronic faucets and 1.5 gallon per minute faucets use less water than their conventional counterparts.

While many products in a showroom provide environmental benefits, there also is a need to avoid green wash. Whelan explains, "A representative pitching a new line claimed a towel bar made from 99% recycled content was LEED certified." But USGBC does not certify products. Its program is for buildings and is based on points. A certain number of points can be obtained based on the percentage of construction costs of materials made from recycled content. The cost of a towel bar as percentage of construction costs is miniscule.

Nonetheless, even though the towel bar won't have a major impact on whether or not a home or commercial property earns enough points for LEED certification, the recycled content of the towel bar and the eco-friendly processes used to manufacture it provide another story to tell that will resonate positively with your customer base.

Greening the bath is an exciting opportunity for showrooms that want to stay ahead of their competition, and to help customers build not only a bath of their dreams, but also one that limits the impact on the environment.

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