

# Ride the Environmental Wave

## Market eco-friendly products & promote ecolabels

by: Tricia Judge, International Imaging Technology Council

This summer, the heat was on, fires raged and climate change was repeatedly cited as the cause. Although lip service has been paid to the need to purchase environmentally friendly products in the past, consumers and businesses are now demanding them. Copier/MFP and imaging supplies dealers can capitalize on these trends by marketing environmental products and promoting ecolabels like EPEAT.

On Aug. 14-16, the Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council (SPLC) held its summit in Atlanta, Georgia. Formed in 2013, the SPLC is a nonprofit organization that focuses on advancing sustainable purchasing and supply-chain practices. It brings together professionals, organizations and experts from various sectors to collaborate on promoting sustainability through procurement processes.

The SPLC is an example of a growing trend. There is a significant body of research that suggests consumers, businesses and institutional buyers prefer environmentally friendly products. This preference is driven by a combination of factors, including growing environmental awareness, concerns about climate change, health considerations and ethical concerns. Here are some key reasons and evidence:

**(1) Consumer Surveys & Studies** — Numerous surveys and studies have been conducted to assess consumer preferences for environmentally friendly products. These studies consistently show a trend toward higher demand for products that are perceived as more environmentally friendly. For example, surveys by organizations like Nielsen, Deloitte and Pew Research Center have indicated that a majority of consumers express a preference for sustainable and eco-friendly products.

**(2) Purchase Intent & Behavior** — Consumer purchasing behavior also reflects a preference for environmentally friendly products. Research has shown that consumers are more likely to choose products with eco-friendly labels, even if they come at a higher cost. A study published in the Journal of Consumer Psychology found consumers are willing to pay a premium for products with environmentally friendly attributes.

**(3) Corporate Sustainability Reports** — Many companies



release sustainability reports that highlight their efforts to reduce environmental impacts and offer environmentally friendly products. These reports often emphasize the company's commitment to sustainability as a response to consumer demand.

**(4) Market Trends** — Over the past few years, there has been a noticeable shift in the market toward more sustainable and eco-friendly products. This trend is evident across various industries, including fashion, food, personal care and electronics, including copier/MFPs and printers. Companies that position themselves as environmentally conscious often experience increased brand loyalty and positive public perception.

**(5) Social Media & Online Discussions** — Environmental issues have gained significant traction on social media platforms and online discussions. Consumers are more informed and engaged regarding environmental concerns, and they use these platforms to advocate for and share information about environmentally friendly products.

**(6) Legislation & Government Initiatives** — Governments in various countries are implementing regulations and initiatives to promote environmentally friendly products and practices. This often comes as a response to consumer demand for more sustainable options.

**(7) Generational Shift** — Younger generations, such as millennials and Generation Z, are often more attuned to environmental issues and show a stronger preference for sustainable products. As these generations become a larger portion of the consumer market, their preferences are likely to shape market dynamics even further.

**(8) Rise of Ecocertifications** — The proliferation of ecocertifications and labels such as Energy Star, USDA Organic and Fair Trade, reflect both consumer demand for environmentally friendly products and efforts by companies to meet that demand. These certifications provide consumers with a way to identify products that meet specific environmental standards. The Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) is one such environmental certification.

EPEAT is a global program that evaluates and certifies the environmental performance of electronic products and their associated manufacturing processes. It was developed to help consumers, businesses and governments make more informed purchasing decisions by identifying electronics that have reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycles.

EPEAT assesses a variety of criteria related to the design, production, energy efficiency, recyclability and other environmental aspects of electronic products. These criteria are divided into multiple tiers, such as Bronze, Silver and Gold, which reflect different levels of environmental performance. Products are evaluated in the following key categories:

**(1) Reduction/elimination of environmentally sensitive materials** — This category evaluates whether products contain hazardous materials or substances that can be harmful to the environment or human health. It encourages the use of safer alternatives and the reduction of harmful materials.

**(2) Product longevity and life-cycle extension** — EPEAT assesses whether products are designed to last longer, reducing the need for frequent replacements. This can include factors like durability, ease of repair and availability of spare parts. (The Right to Repair is also a movement with a lot of momentum behind it right now.)

**(3) Energy efficiency** — Like another ecolabel, Energy Star, energy consumption during product use and manufacturing is considered for EPEAT certification. Products that meet stringent energy efficiency standards are given higher ratings.

**(4) End-of-life management** — This category evaluates how well a product can be disassembled and recycled at the end of its life. It also considers the ease of separating components for proper disposal.

EPEAT also assesses the environmental impact of a product's packaging materials and design. The manufacturers that submit products to EPEAT are also evaluated for their environmental performance, including their commitment to sustainability and responsible practices.

To achieve EPEAT certification, manufacturers must provide evidence that their products meet the relevant criteria in each category. Independent third-party auditors review the submitted information to verify compliance. If a product meets the required criteria, it receives the corresponding EPEAT certification level (Bronze, Silver or Gold).

EPEAT criteria come up for review every decade or so. This year, the criteria for imaging equipment and consumables came up for review. The criterion committee included representatives from OEMs, the aftermarket and interested

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institutional users. The following manufacturers sent representatives to the committee: Brother, Canon, Epson, Fujifilm, HP, Konica Minolta, Kyocera, Ricoh, Sharp, Toshiba and Xerox. The aftermarket was represented by Clover Imaging and the International Imaging Technology Council (Int'l ITC). The members started working in January and only recently finalized several proposed criteria.

EPEAT benefits consumers and organizations by providing a standardized way to identify products with reduced environmental impacts. The program also encourages manufacturers to design products that are environmentally friendly, energy-efficient and longer-lasting. Recommending and highlighting EPEAT-certified products is an easy way to meet a customer's desire to buy an environmentally friendly imaging device and consumables.

Another obvious way to appease a customer's appetite for "green products" is to promote the use of remanufactured copier/MFPs, printers and cartridges. The remanufactured printer cartridge market has been growing steadily over the years, driven by factors such as cost savings, environmental concerns and advancements in remanufacturing technologies. Remanufactured cartridges are cartridges that have been collected, cleaned, refurbished and refilled with ink or toner. They once were the only alternative to brand-new OEM cartridges.

However, new-built Chinese cartridges have infiltrated the market and overtaken a large share of the lower-end market. Many of these cartridges have recently become part of a U.S. ban because some manufacturers employ slave labor, among many other issues that they present. The Int'l ITC encourages dealers to avoid these products entirely.

Selling environmental products and employing environmental marketing is not just a good idea, it may become essential. The prevailing trend has led an increasing number of companies to set sustainable goals and make achieving them requirements in their corporate cultures.

This shift is driven by various factors, including increasing consumer demand for eco-friendly products and services, growing awareness of environmental issues, regulatory pressures and the recognition of long-term business benefits associated with sustainability. Overall, the trend of companies setting sustainable goals and making them a requirement is a positive development that contributes to both environmental well-being and business success. ■

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