

Cleaning Breakthroughs

Multinationals and smaller household cleaning companies have made big breakthroughs in product formulations that are more environmentally-friendly than ever.

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YOU'D THINK that with H1N1 virus in the news these days, marketers would be focused on the germ-killing capabilities of their household cleaning products. But the truth is, H1N1 like MRSA and SARS before it, is a relatively easy pathogen to kill—any disinfectant on the market already does the job. So while politicians and the medical community fret about the threat of a slightly more potent flu bug like H1N1, marketers large and small are focused on the big picture, which these days means rolling out environmentally friendly cleaners, dish detergents and even—drum roll please—disinfectants.

Sales of green cleaning products are growing 30% a year and reached nearly \$65 million in 2008, according to a study published by Mintel earlier this year. But by 2013, Mintel projects green cleaning sales will reach \$623 million, rising from a 3% share in 2008 to a 30% share in 2013, due to the fact that 33% of U.S. consumers don't want to bring harsh chemicals into their home. That's light years ahead of the 2-3% growth that's more typical of the U.S. household cleaning product category.

"It's been our experience that access to and availability of green cleaners is a big driver," noted John Murphy, senior vice president-sales, Seventh Generation, Burlington, VT. "People want to make positive changes in their lives. Buying green cleaners is one way to do that and having them priced affordably has helped the category grow."

Like Murphy, executives at Method Home, San Francisco, have noticed that more consumers and competitors are getting in on the green cleaning trend.

"We love that more companies are joining the fight against toxic and caustic products in the home by offering new solutions

and educating consumers that environmentally-friendly products are an effective, healthy way to clean," said Rachel Rosenblum, a company spokesperson. "This clearly serves as validation of the Method philosophies that we have been dedicated to since the inception of our company."

Who are all these consumers interested in a greener clean? According to Seventh Generation, they're the 25-30% of wellness-seeking green enthusiasts who aspire to greater levels of health and wellness in their lives. Often, these consumers are young families with children under five years of age.

"These families are open to new ways of thinking about what they use to clean their homes and the chemicals that they bring into their homes," said Murphy.

New thinking about cleaning is even having an impact on how the housework gets divvied up. According to Carol Berning, a senior consultant at the Cincinnati Consulting Consortium, changing demographics, such as the rise of the single-person household, means that while less cleaning may be necessary, more men are tackling household chores.

"Both young and old couples tend to share household tasks more than they did in the past," explained Berning. "Men gravitate to vacuuming and emptying the dishwasher."

What does that mean for marketers of household cleaning products? Berning said companies must shape their advertising and marketing messages to avoid any connotation that housework performed by men is not masculine.

"More men have grown up in households where their mothers worked and chores were shared," she said.

Regardless of who is doing the task, consumers today are relatively happy with the performance of their cleaning products. According to the University of Michigan's American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), consumer satisfaction with household cleaning products (and personal care products) continues at a record level, with an ACSI score of 85.

Clorox improved 1% to 88, tying its all-time high and making 2009 the 13th straight

Seventh Generation's natural disinfectant line of products.

