

A Big, Green, Reluctant Hug For Retailing's 800-lb. Gorilla



DENISE LEE YOHN
brand consultant

OK, so it was just a matter of time. The company whose 2,300 supercenters take up at least 46,000 acres of earth, whose 117 square miles of asphalt parking lots add up to the size of Tampa, Fla., and who in 2004 faced fines for violating environmental laws in nine states, has donned its Hannah Montana hairshirt (we're kidding) and found green religion (we're not.) When the Mart began its tentative tree-hugging back in '06, some had doubts. But the retailer's latest campaign has made converts out of its staunchest skeptics. Denise Lee Yohn is one of them. Former vp of corporate marketing at Sony, Yohn now runs her own consultancy (www.deniseleeyohn.com), counting among her clients Nautica and Land Rover. Below, her appraisal of Wal-Mart's latest bit of land roving.

TV



Plain Janes: Wal-Mart's TV spots feature everyday people talking about earth-friendly brands. Kudos to the site scout for all those lush green settings.

AS MUCH AS I REALLY DON'T WANT TO ADMIT IT, I LIKE WAL-MART'S NEW GREEN CAMPAIGN.

With Earth Day now nearly as commercialized as Christmas, I hesitate to congratulate any brand that's jumping on the green bandwagon—especially when it's the 800-lb. gorilla of retail.

But Wal-Mart's new creative package, via The Martin Agency, is likeable. It's also smart.

The strategy is successful on three levels. It does a great job of promoting the featured brands. It speaks convincingly to the target audience. It also has the power to improve Wal-Mart's public image (which might just be tougher than saving the planet).

First, the featured brands. Each TV spot features a girl-next-door type talking about the eco-friendly nature of a product sold at Wal-

Mart; Sun Chips, PUR water filters and GE fluorescent bulbs are just a few of the campaign's beneficiaries. Each product's claim to greenness serves up a key differentiator in a memorable way—so much so, in fact, that viewers might mistake the spot as being a commercial for the product itself instead of one for the place that sells it.

So, how's that a good thing for Wal-Mart? Well, remember back when Target first launched its own campaign that featured high-impact visuals of everyday products? Some marketers marveled at how a big-box retailer was willing to surrender the spotlight to a brand on its shelves. But it worked. Wal-Mart has now achieved the same feat in a leafy-green context. It's made green brands look good, and made itself look good for selling them.

The spots also connect well with their target audience, which some demographers have termed Wal-Mart Moms. Politicians may be wrestling with how to talk to fiscally prudent, socially savvy yet traditional women, but Wal-Mart seems to have figured it out. The mega retailer knows its customers value taking care of self and family first. That's not to say they don't care about the environment; it's just that they're more likely to respond to an appeal that speaks to what's meaningful and personally relevant today before they can relate to a bigger, longer-term call to arms. "Budget friendly prices. Earth friendly products," say the spots. Translation: Family today, planet tomorrow.

The 16-page magazine inserts features print executions that are even plainer. Smart move. A nod to Martin and Wal-Mart for resisting the urge to make the kind of grandiose, self-absorbed statements littering the airwaves this Earth Month.

Finally, the campaign proves that Wal-Mart's sheer size is a good thing for the environment. How's that? If Wal-Mart can galvanize its regular shopper base into green

Print

Can an inexpensive little plant make a big difference in the world?



Break it down: This ad for biodegradable pots is one of the campaign's 16 full-page print ads.

purchasing and eco-friendly habits, it's succeeded in reducing the ecological footprint of 200 million people. Martin created not one but three microsities to educate the audience on the collective power of Wal-Mart shoppers in the fight to save the planet. This might be the single most effective retort that Wal-Mart can muster against its many critics.

So there, I've said it: Wal-Mart's got a good thing going. As a consumer, of course, I know that at the end of the day, Bentonville Headquarters' No. 1 objective is still to get me into one of its megacenters. But as a marketer, I admire this latest effort. And as a full-time Planet Earth resident, well, I guess I have to admire it, too. feedback@brandweek.com

Wal-Mart's resisted the urge to use the usual grandiose, self-absorbed ecospeak.

Web



Micro-mission: One of three microsities to 'educate' people about Wal-Mart's eco-conscience.