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## **Green – Fashion Color of the Decade**

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Up till now, most consumers have been fans of green initiatives but they have operated under two general rules that limit their acceptance of environmentally sustainable products.

1. No concession – the product must be equal to the non-green version; and,
2. Rejection of a Green “tax” – most consumers are not willing to pay more for green.

Consumers also feel that it is the responsibility of manufacturers and retailers to operate their plants and stores to be environmentally friendly and to take the lead in protecting the environment. Many consumers concede that they are still doing little on their own to support environmental sustainability.

Manufacturers that see green as an opportunity to boost margins or to pass the cost of green initiatives on to the consumer are likely to run into a stone wall. And, if green products being produced do not measure up to conventional products, they are likely to languish on the shelf.

The positive side of this picture is that most consumers will choose green products that achieve pricing and performance parity. This means that manufacturers now have an unprecedented opportunity to capture market share by investing in technology that can produce environmentally sustainable products acceptable to the consumer. While this may be costly, time is limited because the race to achieve credible greenness has begun. Those green products that can achieve parity or even superior performance without price penalty to the consumer stand to become the new market leaders.

Simultaneous cultural change that is now on the horizon will clinch the day for environmentally friendly products and services. Green is no longer just a cause but is becoming a fashion. Green products and services are a means for social approval. Want to be admired by others? Do green.

Earliest signs of this can be seen in recycling. When everyone puts out a red container of recycled newspapers, cans, glass, and plastic containers, the house on the block that does not put out red on Monday morning is an outlier. We are also at the beginning of a change in values that have driven car manufacturing for nearly a century. Small is becoming big as consumers think about replacing aging cars with small fuel efficient models. Mini Cooper, a small snazzy sedan, is growing in popularity even though its fuel

consumption is still lackluster. Smart car, a popular two-seater from Europe, is beginning to migrate to the U.S.

People who buy green are seen as being ahead of the curve. “Green is in” increasingly is in the economic interest of industry and retailers to serve. As this competition grows, products and services strive to out-green each other to sustain and to grow their business.

Because green also is a cause that most consumer believe in – saving the environment and planet – the fashion energy that green develops is likely to endure as a sweeping cultural change. It took nearly forty years to stigmatize tobacco users. When the U.S. surgeon general announced health hazards of tobacco in 1954, smoking was glamorous, socially approved, and erotically charged. Today, smokers have become subjects of scorn. They are more likely to be seen as victims than leaders.

Popular discussion about environmental sustainability began to emerge in the 1970s. We are now at a turning point in which lip service given to green is becoming an economic imperative. As consumers shift their purchasing to parity green products and services, government, as well, will catch up and do its part to support and incentivize a green economy.

Overseas manufacturers including China will be compelled to participate in the development of green products as the fashion in the U.S. becomes green. And, as more of our exports become green, America will be a catalyst that encourages the demand for green globally.

There has been much reason for discouragement about the slow pace at which industry and government is addressing the imminent danger of global warming, environmental sustainability, and dependence on fossil fuels. The slow pace now stands to increase, perhaps exponentially, as the purchase and use of green by consumers become symbols of social approval. When product parity is achieved, the conspicuous consumption of green may go a long way toward rescuing our planet.

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