

Understanding the different types of ethical consumer



Ethical Marketing & The New Consumer

by Chris Arnold

There are many kinds of ethical consumers and many reasons why people make ethical choices. Some are personal, some social and some political. From the need to fulfill deep set emotional needs to just being seen to be green, there really is no one type. Either way, more and more consumer are including ethical values within their decision making process.

Add to that the broader picture of ethics, over just green, and it becomes a more complicated area to navigate than many first realise. But get it right and you can win both hearts, minds and sales. Get it wrong, most do (especially the big corporates), and you can lose your reputation. Honesty and values is something few brands can ignore these days

POLITICS, RELIGION AND ETHICS

What's your idea of an eco-ethical consumer? An aged hippy, dressed in hemp clothes riding a bike in sandals? Or some activist camping out by Heathrow airport? Or a rich businessman using his wealth to make a real difference? We all have an image but I doubt it's anything like the real thing.

What divides us are our beliefs, the new religion & politics are ethics. But ethics has also got mixed up in politics and religion which is what makes it so hard to create marketing stereotypes. Marketing especially like simple definitions like A,B,C1 (even if they are irrelevant and absurd). Understanding and defining the ethical, or new consumer, means taking a new approach. In short, you really have to define according to your market.

THE MANY SHADES OF GREENS

With a growing number of research projects covering this area there has been a growing number of definitions. The GfK Roper Green Gauge Report is probably one of the more famous definitions of greens. It divides green Americans into five groups. (Note that this are just greens so doesn't cover the broader groups of ethics.)

True Blue Greens: These are environmental leaders and activists and are more likely to do the green walk not just the green talk. This group represents almost one third of the population. (Nearly half turn to environmental groups as their main source of green information.)

Green Back Greens: These busy people do not have time to be completely green and not likely to give up comfort and convenience for the

environment, but willing to buy green products. Like offsetting, makes for easy green. This group represents 10% of the population. (Nearly half get information on green issues from newspapers.)

Sprouts: These are your environmental “fence sitters” who buy green only if it meets their needs. This group represents just over one quarter of the population. (One third cite newspapers as their main source of green information.)

Grouzers: Generally unmotivated, uninvolved and disinterested in green issues. They think individual behaviour cannot improve the environment, so why bother. This group represents 15% of the population. (Newspapers again serve as their major information source on green issues.)

Apathetics: Don’t really care at all. Little concern for the environment so take little action and believe environmental indifference is the mainstream. This group represents about a fifth of the population. (TV programs are their main source of environmental information.)

The **Green Brands 2.0** report defines people as **Bright Greens, Green Motivated, Green Hypocrites and Green Ignorants**. One that’s been added since is **Day Green Believer**.

There are many similar groups but they all fall down on one simple fact, it’s not all about green. And defining people as shades of green assumes we all agree what a green is in the first place. It also excludes many other factors critical to marketing – disposable income, psychology, status, family types, etc.

Personally we prefer to build up a new group for each client. If your consumer insight is good (if it isn’t don’t waste a penny on marketing until it is) you should be able to profile your customer types.

THE NEW CONSUMER – ETHICAL TYPES

Below is an example of a group we developed for one client, and works for many in FMCG.

Eco warrior



This group can be very angry (radicals and revolutionaries) or just very passionate. They live it, breathe it and will be the first to sign a petition or join a protest. They see ethics as a political or social comment, as a lifestyle or even a religion. As part of their identity they feel the need to make a social statement. However, they spend little because they have little money and money is sometimes a negative because they hate companies that make fat profits. Which is a reason they won't shop at big brand supermarkets.

This group also includes **Freegans** (referred to as tramps with ethics in one blog) who spend nothing as they live off what we throw away. Not worth marketing to as they either have discovered you anyway or because they can't afford what you sell.

Ethical Idealists



This group believes it's right, sees it like a soft religion, a more spiritual enlighten lifestyle. They know their stuff and like to preach their ethics and want to convert others. More than likely have a blog or use social networking to spread the word and connect with like minds. First to complain about greenwash ads. Likely to read the Guardian, Ecology magazine and visits all the ethical websites. As a group they can be your best advocates or your worse enemy. They see through spin and will dig deep. When marketing to this group you need to be very honest, if not they will expose you.



Image BBC

Good Lifers

Just think of Tom and Barbara in the BBC sitcom The Good Life. According to MINTEL, one in four adults are 'Good Lifers' embracing this thriftier self sustainable way of living.

This is your romantic type who like to get back to nature, love organics, fair trade and anything natural. They are big on sustainability, recycling and reuse. They have a rain water barrel, compost heap, vegetable patch (or allotment). They are big on community and like to support local endeavours as well as buying local. Probably empty nesters, mainly over 40. Not always fond of the big bully brands – they love traditional, small, anti-preneurial or Blackspot brands. To sell to this group you need to focus on the more romantic side of ethics (natural, traditional, Fairtrade, ethnic) and avoid the corporate look.



Conscientious Consumer

These people are changed by a life change moment, the most significant being a baby. When you become a parent you change a lot of attitudes. What you and your kids eat, the environment they live in and the future. By taking on the responsibility of a family they become more responsible citizens and start to feel guilty about what we are doing to the planet and people. They have

strong values, especially family values, which in turn means they care a lot about how other people are treated, so attracted by fair trade. The idea of kids or women being exploited is repellant. This group also includes the grandparents who share similar values. These people are the main customers of eco cleaners and organic baby and kids foods like Hipp, Organix and Paul Lindley's Ella's Kitchen range, one of the more innovative products in the market. To sell to this group you need to have strong aligned values, people are especially important and care for their family.

Seen to be Green

These self conscious image types see ethics and green as a trend. This year's colour is green is their level. Shallow to say the least an ill informed, they would buy an organic mix top from Primark and not know the difference from that and a truly ethical top from the online fashion retailer like Adili.



For them ethics is fashionable and apart of their image. Looking green is looking good. They were the first to buy Anyah Hindmarch's 'this is not a plastic bag'. To sell to them you need to make your ethical proposition fashionable.

Informed Consumer

We include this group because they have a different mindset from most of us. This group is clinical and factual. By contrast to us emotionally driven consumers they are cold and analytical. Facts are their language and the facts tell them we need to be more ethical. Well informed, they also include academics (the type who write books on climate change) and can bore for England on statistics about climate change and melting ice caps. They can be influential, especially with politics, academia and journalism. To sell to them you need a factual argument.

Suburban Off-setters

Without doubt one of the most important and financially attractive groups. These suburban middle class professionals have money and like to indulge in ethics. They don't want to compromise their lifestyle and pleasures but like the idea of off-setting by purchasing organic and fair trade. It makes them feel less guilty

about all the unethical stuff they buy. For them organic vegetables is about better quality and taste. Premium pricing reinforces their sense of wealth and



success. Ironically they probably drive to the supermarket in a4X4 and take longhaul holidays, but installing a wind turbine in the garden means they are good people not bad. They especially like easy ethics or easy green. To sell to this group just use the phrase 'doing your bit'.

Health & body conscious



Ethics is an extension of their healthy lifestyle. They exercise a lot, probably gym members and eat healthily. Because they care about their bodies – inside and out – so care about what they put into it – big buyers of healthy options and organics (which they see as chemical free), low fat, low calorie foods and prefer natural products. Like outdoor pursuits

so in touch with nature and the environment but less focussed on other people, being self-focused.

Ethical intent



This is a group of people – nurses, students, unemployed who would love to be more ethical but are too poor to do so.

Slobs



It's hard to find a polite name for this group. They don't care about themselves, let alone the planet. Like fattening foods, TV, football, fags, beer and take-a-ways. Have few values. Eats hamburgers, crisps and cares little for the healthy option. Despite low incomes, has lots of the latest things and buy trendy labels from discount stores and markets. However, they tend

to have strong community values. To sell to them... do you really want to?

Profiles

This is just one set of profiles you can create for a consumer brand. We strongly believe that if you don't understand your customer your marketing budget will be more waste than effectively spent. Understanding both the rational and emotional needs is equally as important. There are many myths about consumers. There are also some very out dated and irrelevant definitions like **A**, **B.C1** – theses aren't relevant to ethical consumers, and probably not relevant to any consumer type (even if the newspapers and magazines owners still use this Victoria measure of customers).

GREEN TRIBES

Camps, tribes and factions have become popular definitions of consume types, sexier than traditional descriptions. There's little doubt that a movement attracts certain types, if not a few nuts.



Anyone with teenage kids will know that at a key point they suddenly take on an identity and

join a tribe, skateboarders, surfers, rockers, goths, hippies, there's loads in schools thee days.. Ironically they think they are stating their personal identity and individualism by dressing like everyone else in the tribe. As social animals we naturally group together. Ethics has just created new tribes for consumers to relate to and join. Or worse, for the media to label consumers an celebrities.

Extreme Green



The '**Extreme Green**' include 'Froggles', Freegans' and anti-shopping crusaders. Politically orientated, and left wing, they encourage consuming less and donating to charity. Anti-capitalist, they support days like 'Buy Nothing Day' which is now celebrated in 55 countries. They link capitalism with environmental damage, maybe not with a good degree of justification – just look at what's happening with the Free Trade Agreement , or 'Free Rape Agreement' if large corporations get their way.

Sceptical Green

The '**Sceptical Green**' is a green-debunker. Some people just love to dispute things and find an opposing argument.

Authentic Green

The '**Authentic Green**' was first there, green before anyone knew what it meant. People like **Prince Charles**, **Tony Juniper** (formerly of Friends of the Earth), **Bryan Meeham** (founder of Fresh & Wild), **Alex Michaelis** (green architect), **David Cameron** (Tory leader), **David Attenborough** (TV presenter) and **Zac Goldsmith**



(son of Billionaire James and editor of the Ecologist). This group may be more a cult than a tribe. Very evangelistic and well connected, sometimes seen as '**posh greens**'.

Do Good Greens



The '**Do Good Greens**' have adopted a good green lifestyle. They shop at farmers markets, calculate their food miles, recycle carefully, measure their food's carbon footprint. As modest as they try and be they are making a statement. Celebrities include **Angelina Jolie & Brad Pitt**, **Orlando Bloom** (who is

building an eco-house using recycled material), Sienna Miller (who's launched Twenty8Twelve, a carbon neutral clothing range, is an ambassador for Global Cool and has been given the Environmental Media Association Futures Award).

Hypocritical Greens



The '**Hypocritical Greens**'. These types of green get accused of 'stepping on their own carbon footprint when no-one's watching'. **Al Gore** personal electricity consumption is five times more than national American average. All those pop stars who talk about saving the planet while flying several tonnes of equipment and a crew around it. **Madonna's** trip to perform at

the Live Aid Concert cost 440 tons of CO₂. The 65,000 people who came to watch generating 59 tons of waste. **Richard Branson** talks about reducing CO₂

in the airline industry and has even offered a incentive to inventors, yet launched Virgin Galactic a space travel project that burns approx thousands of gallons of jet fuel per ride. Sting likes to support many fashionable green cause but drives a 4x4 and has three extra houses. At least the Beckhams haven't claimed to be green.



Anti-Green



The top of the '**Anti-Green**' league are the **Beckhams**, voted the most environmentally unfriendly couple on the planet, David alone travelled 250,000 air miles last year and has 15 cars, one a Hummer which he takes his kids to school in. The Russian tycoon **Roman Abramovich** flies a 180 seat Boeing 767 but then Russians are very green.

Wannanbe Greens

'**Wannanbe Greens**' are all intent, a lot of talk but little action. A token offset, like **Bon Jovi** did by paying to offset his tour. But green? Not really.

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THE OLDER CONSUMER

Although we may look to categorise the new consumer by ethics, greenness, lifestyle or other habits, we need to remember there are a lot of consumers who aren't new, aren't buying ethically and probably don't care. Either selfish, think ethics is a passing fad or simply not in the right life position to prioritise it.

The grocery think-tank, IGD, carried out a European survey and found that British shoppers are more likely to purchase ethically, with 70% of Europeans claiming to buy ethically at least some of the time and more ethically conscious shoppers considered 2 or more ethical factors when shopping. That's not a lot of items for a basket and that's 30% who don't buy ethically. Of course the others just buy 'some of the time', how vague is that?

A third of **French** shoppers are apparently dedicated ethical shoppers but less than 12% of **Spanish** are. That may make them sound less ethical but the opposite is true. The Spanish haven't corrupted their food system as the British have, so most of their food is far more natural, locally sourced and free from chemicals.

You can understand why some consumers don't trust brands enough to buy ethically, almost half of Britain's consumers do not believe claims made by high-street fashion stores about their ethical credentials. **According to Green Matters**, a research project set up by IPC Media, **80% of shoppers** do not consider ethical issues when buying clothes. In another survey, **ICM survey for Ideal Home Show**, 23% of consumers said they are bored of 'eco news' with 18% saying they exaggerate their personal efforts to combat climate change because it is fashionable. 75% do not consciously choose eco-friendly detergents and 20% do not trust green energy suppliers' claims.

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DEFINING YOUR OWN

There are many statistics out there, many conflicting. You can find many badges of convenience but they are unlikely to guide your marketing.

Defining the ethical or new consumer requires common sense, research and an open mind. You need to create your own definitions based on what you are selling and the market you're selling in. This is the best way to avoid assumptions and stereotypes. Basic needs and emotional drivers (see section of Emotivations in the book) will still apply.

It's also important to remember that the ethical consumer can change their degree of ethical purchasing based on variables like time of day, environment, context and the recent recession. They can be choosy about their vegetables one minute and buying clothes with no conscience the next. Only hard core ethical evangelists are 100%.

And in a constantly changing world, we need to constantly re-evaluate our data and insights.

Ethical Marketing & The New Consumer

is available on Amazon. (5 star rated)

Contact:

Chris Arnold

Creative Orchestra

www.creativeorchestra.com

office: 0207 272 2297 / 3778

mobile: 07778 05 66 86

chris@creativeorchestra.com

