

## **Mainstreaming Green Behaviors Demands Massive New Approach**

**82% have Good Green Intentions but Only 16% are Dedicated to Fulfilling These Intentions**

### **New study uncovers why this Green Gap exists and how to close it**

(New York, NY – April 19, 2011) When it comes to motivating the mainstream American consumer to act, the messages and techniques offered by marketers, governments, and NGOs around sustainability have been missing the mark, according to a study released today by OgilvyEarth ([www.ogilvyearth.com](http://www.ogilvyearth.com)) a leading sustainability consultancy. The study, “Mainstream Green: Moving sustainability from niche to normal” provides new insight on how to close the Green Gap that persists between what consumers say and what they actually do around sustainable living.

“Research shows that many of the environmental messages are not just failing to close the Green Gap, but are actually cementing it by making green behavior too difficult and costly from a practical, financial, and social standpoint,” explained Graceann Bennett, Director of Strategic Planning, Ogilvy & Mather; Contributing Strategist at OgilvyEarth; and co-author of the study. “Many of the world’s leading corporations are staking their futures on the bet that sustainability will become a major driver of mainstream consumer purchase behavior. Unless they can figure out how to close the gap, there will never be a business case for green,” added Freya Williams, Co-Founder and Director of Strategy at OgilvyEarth and co-author of the study.

The study found that 82% of Americans have good green intentions but only 16% are dedicated to fulfilling these intentions, putting 66% firmly in what we’re calling the “Middle Green.” Considering green behavior on a continuum, most of the dialogue and marketing to date has focused on Super Greens on the one hand and Green Rejecters on the other. There has been limited success in motivating the masses or the Middle Green, for a number of reasons that were uncovered in the research.

In commenting on the study, Bill Becker, Executive Director of the Presidential Climate Action Project, said, “This study offers revealing new insights into how companies can reach their customers with information about green products. We’re in a time of great environmental challenges, unprecedented communication tools and a daunting array of consumer choices. Ogilvy’s study shows how to break through the clutter to motivate consumers to buy green.”

### **Green Feels Niche Rather than Normal**

Existing green marketing is either irrelevant or even alienating to most Americans. Half of Americans think the green and environmentally friendly products are marketed to “Crunchy Granola Hippies” or “Rich Elitist Snobs” rather than “Everyday Americans.”

### **High Costs of Green**

The number-one barrier Americans claimed was holding them back from more sustainable behaviors was money. “One trip to the grocery store and you would see that green products can have as much as a 100% price premium. It’s as if we’re penalizing virtuous behaviors with a defacto sustainability tax,” says Bennett. But price was far from the only thing preventing consumer behavior change. The Super Green

minority who venture into the green space do so with a relatively high social and emotional cost. This segment reveals that they feel ostracized from their neighbors, families, and friends. Meanwhile the Middle Green said they fear attracting the negative judgment of their peers if they go out on a limb to purchase green products. Until green products and services feel normal and adhere to normative pricing, the Middle Green are unlikely to embrace them.

### **Green Guilt**

Nearly half of Americans claim to feel guiltier “the more they know” about how to live a sustainable lifestyle. Super Greens feel twice the guilt as the average American. Even among the Green Middle, guilt plays a role. As it increases, these consumers want to retreat to the comfort of ignorance.

“Understanding the prevalent misuse of appeals to a sense of guilt, we can see where sustainability marketing has gone wrong,” says Williams. “People don’t need to know about the state of polar bears in the Arctic to turn off the lights — paradoxically it may be stopping them from doing so.”

### **Green is the New Pink**

The barrier to adopting sustainable behaviors is even higher for men. Fully 82% of our respondents said going green is “more feminine than masculine.” More men identified as Green Rejecters, and the ranks of the Super Greens were dominated by women. This feminization holds men back from visible green behavior like using reusable grocery bags or carrying around reusable water bottles.

### **There’s a Big Opportunity for Mainstream Brands**

When asked if they would rather purchase the environmentally responsible product from a familiar brand or purchase a product from a company who specializes in being green, 73% of Americans opted for the known, mainstream brand. A history of poor performance — or at least the perception of it — among lesser-known brands prevents consumers from taking the leap. “You would think the Seventh Generations of the world would have the clear advantage, but what excites us is how much potential the Proctors and Unilevers also have in this space because consumers are comfortable with their brands and trust they’ll perform,” says Williams.

### **The Complexity of Carbon Calculus**

Is it worse to use cloth or disposable diapers? The vast majority (82%) of Americans cannot even begin to calculate their carbon footprint. This fact could be why 70% of Americans would rather cure cancer than fix the environment; they need messages to be personal, positive, and plausible — which the environment as of now is not.

### **Closing the Green Gap**

To close the Green Gap, the study found, leading organizations should find ways to normalize sustainable behaviors. The twelve recommendations provided include:



- **Make it Normal:** The great Middle Green is not looking to set themselves apart from everyone else. They want to fit in. When it comes to driving mass behavior change, marketers need to restrain the urge to make going green feel cool or different, and instead make it normal.
- **Eliminate the Sustainability Tax:** The high prices of many of the greener products suggest an attempt to limit or discourage more sustainable choices. Eliminating the price barrier eliminates the notion that green products are not for normal citizens.
- **Make Eco-friendly Male Ego-friendly:** Sustainability must strike a chord with male consumers by considering what works in traditional marketing. For example, automotive brands with alternative fuel vehicles are finding success by sticking to what has been shown to work — sleek ads with an emphasis on speed and design.
- **Lose the Crunch:** Just because a product is green doesn't mean it must be packaged in burlap. For green marketing to succeed, it must be liberated from the traditional stereotypes to emphasize the most compelling personal benefits.
- **Hedonism over Altruism:** The emotional tenor of sustainable marketing to date has been focused on appeals to Americans' altruistic tendencies, but our research shows that this is to deny human nature. Wise brands are tapping into enjoyment over altruism.

“OgilvyEarth’s mission is to help brands realize the opportunity in sustainability. This report brings actionable and pragmatic insight into how we close the Green Gap and motivate mainstream consumers to act,” said Williams. “The study brings increased clarity to how we’ve been going about marketing green all wrong. We’ve been trying to spur a mass movement with niche marketing. It’s time we all agree that “normal” is neither a dirty word nor a boring strategy. Normal is mainstream; normal is popular; and above all, normal is the key to sustainability,” said Bennett.

The Mainstream Green study included global comparisons between China and the U.S., revealing that China has a more pronounced base of motivated green consumers who are hampered by broad access to sustainable products. To read more about the Chinese Green Gap or view comparisons between U.S. and China, visit [ogilvyearth.com/thoughtleadership](http://ogilvyearth.com/thoughtleadership)

### **About OgilvyEarth**

OgilvyEarth is a global sustainability practice that helps brands harness the power of sustainability through strategic planning and communications. OgilvyEarth works with visionary companies that are looking to make sustainability a growth driver for both their business and the communities they serve. OgilvyEarth is a unit of Ogilvy & Mather, a WPP company (NASDAQ: WPPGY), one of the world’s largest communications services groups. For more information, please visit [www.ogilvyearth.com](http://www.ogilvyearth.com)

### **About the Mainstream Green Study**

The research approach, being mindful that the very premise for this study is the discrepancy between people’s stated intentions and actions, went at it from every angle in order to triangulate to the truth. Ideas were inspired and fermented by expert interviews and secondary research. Ethnographies were conducted in the homes and neighborhoods of 15 subjects in three key markets: San Francisco, Chicago,



and the New York Metro area, between September 2010 and February 2011. These interviewees were representative of various lifestyles and life stages. Eighteen hundred Americans were part of a conversational quantitative research study, using MarketTools True Sample, representative of the U.S. adult population, in two phases, September 2010 and February 2011.

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