

Linking CHEMunity to Sustainability

While this by itself is a standalone article, it is the third in a 3-part series that explains how one SME in the chemical recovery business embarked upon the journey to serve CHEMunity by building a sustainability framework and culture (see Chemunicator Winter Edition 2011 for Part 1 and Spring Edition 2012 for Part 2). This article describes how branding drives a company's sustainability. Should you wish to ask me any questions about our journey, please email me at ellenm@fieldchem.com

We all know that a brand should trigger recognition of what your company stands for. Ten years ago most CEO's drew a blank stare when asked for a description of their sustainability commitment. Today, the term sustainability is over used and over claimed. As a company in the cleantech space, our brand goals include being seen as a responsible leader in chemical recovery, committed to sustainability and helping our customers meet their sustainability commitments. I am not suggesting we have achieved these goals. In fact, they will never be achieved as sustainability is a pursuit - not an end point.

Ensuring that our brand triggered the recognition we sought, demanded a review of what it had stood for as well as an analysis of what we had to do differently to deliver on brand goals.

BRAND GOAL - WHAT WE DO

Like most companies, we sought differentiation over our competitors. In the early days of chemical recycling, differentiation was in the word "quality". Brand value was in being recognized as the consistent producer of quality recycled chemicals. To create that value we focused on our people, our technology and management systems. That internal focus translated to better human resource management, capital investments and a commitment to ISO 9001, the international standard for quality. Of course all CACD members recognize that the Exxon disaster sent companies in the chemical industry clamoring to rebrand as a "responsible" company and to take actions to earn CHEMunity trust.

BRAND GOAL – HOW WE DO IT

Still committed to market differentiation, we added a brand goal - to be seen as a trusted, responsible leader in our business and a producer of quality products. We established and registered the tag line Cradle to Cradle® Care of Chemicals. We increased training and invested in new technologies, became registered to ISO 14001, became verified to Responsible Care® and Responsible Distribution®. We aligned action with our brand goals. We constantly asked how our credentials could add to our bottom line. Here is an innovative example of how they did. We highlighted our credentials when we asked the MOE to grant manifest exemption on certain areas of our waste streams – to reward our credentials – not our company – to incent others in our business to make the same investments. The exemption gave us an impressive differentiator in the market place.

Actions to deliver on brand promises for responsible management and quality were necessary for our own sustainability, but represent the tip of the sustainability iceberg. Having a brand recognized as a commitment to the well being of future generations calls for different thinking – different talents and technologies still under construction.

BRANDING – NOW AND TOMORROW

Companies recognize the market demand for green and societal considerations. And that recognition is causing confusion as companies make unsupported claims - a practice now being called "green washing". Regrettably, at present there is no globally recognized credential that verifies a company's sustainability claims. But the sustainable companies will be the ones whose brands are trusted. Experience has taught us that trust will come from the ability to provide evidence that substantiates one's claims.

For example, our biggest competitor is the fuel blending industry where chemicals we can recycle are used as a fuel. At a common sense level, it would seem logical to assume that recycling spent chemicals rather

than burning them is a better choice for the environment. However, the benefit of having an academic study support the common sense has been meaningful. Likewise, having access to credible life cycle analyses information are influential to sell product or select vendors.

Knowing you can evidence claims can also help your customers. Use of your product or service may strengthen their advocacy efforts – increase shareholder satisfaction or add to a carbon tax credit application. Having a brand denote "we can prove it" will help separate your company from companies that make unsupported claims.



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Under a different meaning of "we can prove it" we have also positioned our brand to denote a commitment to innovation. We provide infrastructural support to a cluster of companies in the environmental industry. Providing them space for pilot plants or offices has contributed to bottom line results and created investment opportunities in complementary businesses. Other examples of our commitment to innovation relate to product creation, the addition of new technologies and separation

techniques and how we access talent. Aligning brand goals with action gave us the confidence to change our tag line to "the Science of Sustainability™".

The today and tomorrow for our company includes better use of our website and social media. A company committed to sustainability is one that reaches out to connect - to get information, to share information - to be seen as a credible company committed to People, Planet and Profit. And while we have made progress in this area, there is much to be done.

Environmentally, the world is one CHEMunity and when bad news and good news can go viral in minutes, we need our brand to be recognized as one that is taking measures today to look after the needs of those yet to be born.

SUMMARY

In these 3 articles I have discussed how one SME in the chemical recovery business embarked upon the journey to build a framework and create a culture to drive our sustainability. Our framework includes:

- Policies and systems to manage a triple bottom line
- A fully integrated management system that meets the standards of globally recognized credentials
- Systems to promote and reward innovation
- Use of social media
- Our Brand

I will be delighted to answer any questions you have. Wishing you good fortune in your commitment to CHEMunity.



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