

## Clorox Going Green?

*McKenzie Hull*

Clorox recently joined the current environmental trend by releasing a line of environmentally friendly products, known as Green Works. One such product is the Green Works line of cleaning wipes—a recent ad for which shows the pros and cons of green marketing. Clorox’s advertisement for Green Works cleaning wipes in the February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009 issue of People magazine features an outdoor scene. A bottle of Green Works cleaning wipes is situated among wildflowers in the middle of a sunny field, and positioned next to the bottle is the word “naturally.” The text above the bottle pokes fun at the plethora of cleaning products on the market, but then suggests that this environmentally friendly cleaning product is the one crucial thing that is missing from the consumer world. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a logo for the Sierra Club and an endorsement of this environmental group. In its recent ad for Green Works, Clorox promotes some laudable ideals, but it does so in some disappointing ways.

In this ad, Clorox takes a positive step by promoting environmentally friendly cleaning products and apparently supporting the environmentalist cause. In the past, cleaning products, especially those made by Clorox, have been criticized for containing harsh chemicals that harm the environment. As recently as 2007, environmentalists criticized Clorox for trying to falsely alleviate consumers’ concerns about the chemicals in Clorox products. This particular instance of public outcry came from a watchdog group known as Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility during a similar marketing campaign in which Clorox put the Red Cross logo on its products (Panepento 11). Clorox had a similar mission then as it does now: to improve its image as a company and to make people believe that its cleaning products are safe. After recognizing that it had a problem getting through to environmentally-concerned customers and chemical-wary parents, Clorox made an intelligent move and created its new line of Green Works products.

This new line of Green Works products is refreshing in a time when many companies are polluting the environment and using up the world’s resources at alarming rates. Clorox seems to be saying that it cares about the environment and is willing to deviate from its normal, familiar products in order to introduce a new, progressive product that appeals to people that are not necessarily in Clorox’s normal targeted marketing audience, which usually consists of mainly mothers. By setting the advertisement in an outdoor scene, complete with picturesque wild flowers, Clorox is trying to convey to consumers that it cares about the environment and wants to preserve nature’s beauty. At the top of the ad, Clorox boasts that its cleaning wipes are “99% natural and biodegradable.” This fact validates Clorox’s claim that it has changed and is making more environmentally-conscious products. It reassures clients that they are buying a product that will have next to no negative impact on nature. In this ad, it appears that Clorox is taking a stand to change the negative impact its products are having on the environment.

Even the nationally recognized Sierra Club, which is at the forefront of environmental movement, is endorsing Green Works. Sierra Club agreed to have its logo put at the bottom of the ad, legitimizing Green Works’ environmental claims. Consumers who see the logo will think that if the largest grassroots environmental group in the country supports this product, then it must be safe and “green” enough for them to use. Clorox also takes a noble step by writing next to the Sierra Club logo that Green Works supports the Sierra Club and its efforts to help the environment. This suggests that Clorox really supports the environmentalist cause because it is not

only trying to promote its own green product, but is also encouraging support of an organization whose sole cause is to protect nature. Clorox's new strategy of embracing the green trend and supporting the environmentalist movement is encouraging.

While the Green Works products and the general message of the ad are a positive move on behalf of Clorox, the methods employed in the ad to support the product and the ideals are problematic. Over the past several years, there has been an ever-increasing trend towards awareness about environmental issues and products that have less of a negative impact on the Earth. It appears that Clorox is just jumping on this bandwagon and trying to take advantage of an opportunity to increase its sales. Information Resources, Inc. conducted a study which found that about half of all American consumers think about at least one sustainability factor when choosing among consumer goods (Makower and Pike 26). Additionally, according to the 2008 Green Brands Survey by ImagePower, the amount of green products and services consumers buy is expected to double within a year. This would bring the total spent on green products and services to about \$500 billion per year (Makower and Pike 26). Clorox clearly recognized the popularity of this movement and the potential to make money off of it, and decided to capitalize on the opportunity by creating the Green Works brand.

Clorox tries to use this ad to propel itself to the forefront of the green cleaning product industry. It attempts to convince consumers that Green Works is the one and only truly green cleaning product on the market. The writing at the top of the ad says, "Just what the world needs, another cleaning product," which is making fun of the vast array of options available and is sympathizing with the consumer's plight of trying to choose one product. Then, Clorox boldly suggests that in fact, one product has been missing from the market. The sun above the field is illuminating the Green Works bottle as if it is a beacon of eco-friendly hope in the otherwise dark, harmful consumer world. The writing tells consumers that they have been deprived of a 99% natural and biodegradable product that still has the power of other Clorox products, but reassures the consumers by telling them that Clorox is here to save the day with Green Works. In fact, this supposed void in the market has not existed for at least 20 years.

Seventh Generation, a pioneer company, started creating all-natural green products in the 1980s and was the top provider of these products up until 2008, when Clorox entered the market (Wong 8). Better World Shopper is a website that ranks companies all around the world based on their responsibility when it comes to social issues, including the environment. Under the cleaning products category, Seventh Generation receives an A+, which means that the company is a social and environmental leader among cleaning products. Clorox, on the other hand, received an F, which means that the company has one of "the worst social and environmental records in the industry" (Jones). Seventh Generation products are 100% non-toxic, while Clorox says only that it is trying to use as little toxic chemicals as possible, but still admits that some are in its products. Despite Seventh Generation's historical commitment to the environment and devotion to providing completely non-toxic products, Green Works surpassed Seventh Generation's sales during 2008 in four of the five product categories that they both produce (Wong 8). Clorox would rather have a product that is profitable than a product that is truly green. Upon this further inspection of the ad and the company, it begins to appear that Clorox is not really concerned with helping the environment, but just with helping to sell its product.

Another ploy Clorox uses in its ad is the word “naturally,” which has a positive connotation with the environment, but is largely ambiguous in meaning, especially when it comes to being used in advertising. In 2008, the United States Food and Drug Administration decided to not legally define the word “natural” (Hoback). This means that it can be used in any advertisement without any regulations or standards governing what qualifies as “natural.” As a result, the word “natural” carries no real meaning and, as Hoback explains, “is used everywhere, on everything from food to drinks to dishwashing soap to cosmetics.” Many consumers are unaware of the uncertainty surrounding this word, so when they see that a product is called natural, they assume it means that the product is whatever they assume the definition of “natural” to be. Clorox takes advantage of this opportunity to trick consumers into believing whatever they want to believe. Green Works products are not made completely from natural resources and do have some toxic chemicals. More and more customers are trying to avoid buying products like these, but if they see “naturally” next to the bottle of Green Works in a beautiful field, they might believe that the product is more “green” than it is in reality and buy it based on false information.

An additional aspect of the ad that might give consumers false peace of mind regarding Green Works’ safety and its potential to harm the environment is the Sierra Club logo in the bottom right corner. According to Sierra Club’s website, the club has over 1.3 million members nationwide and has been advocating for environmental protection for over 100 years. Because of its prominence and history, many people respect the Sierra Club and will take it seriously when they see the Sierra Club logo on a product or advertisement. It is unclear whether the Sierra Club actually believes that Green Works is a beneficial product or is more interested in the revenue it is receiving from having its logo displayed on advertisements. Many Sierra Club members have voiced their outrage over the endorsement and some local chapters have publicly denounced Green Works (Frazier 3). This disagreement among the ranks suggests that some of the more active environmentalists in the country have doubts about how eco-friendly Green Works products really are, but the logo remains on the advertisements regardless. Most consumers are unaware of this turmoil. Consequently, they probably presume that all of the Sierra Club supports this product and that Green Works is a good green line of products.

The ad also features one other organization’s name, which is in the ad to convince consumers that Green Works products are not only green, but also trustworthy, effective products. On the Green Works bottle, there is a Clorox logo. Clorox is the company which created Green Works, but its decision to put its name on this line of products is an interesting one because normally the Clorox company is associated with toxic chemicals and harmful products. It appears that Clorox is trying to avoid what Ottman, Stafford, and Hartman refer to as “green marketing myopia.” This marketing pitfall occurs when companies try to promote an eco-friendly product, but are unable to convince consumers that the product will also perform well. These authors argue that companies must also appeal to a customer’s satisfaction with the product. Clorox is a brand that has become known for having powerful products that consumers can trust with their cleaning needs. When consumers see Clorox on new Green Works products, they will think they are getting the best of both worlds, a strong cleaning product that is also green. Clorox’s other products still use toxic chemicals in other products, but when consumers see the logo in this ad, they are supposed to only remember that Clorox product’s are powerful and assume that will hold true for its green products as well.

Arthur Weissman, president of Green Seal, a non-profit organization that certifies eco-friendly products, says that the cleaning product industry is in the midst of a “revolution” (Korn). More companies are continuing to release green cleaning products. Clorox has always been a leader in the cleaning industry, so by taking this step, it is motivating other companies to follow its lead. This is an honorable and risky move for a company that has always sold products made of strong chemicals, but it seems to be paying off very well. The next step for Clorox should be to look at companies like Seventh Generation that truly seem to put the environment first when making products and marketing strategies. Clorox should make the environment its top priority when it comes to the Green Works line. The company should focus on honest advertising techniques rather than just seeking any opportunity to make profit. Clorox has the potential to set a good example for smaller cleaning product companies that look to Clorox as a role model, and to companies in all industries that are trying to make the leap into the green market.

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**Commentary by Natalie Gross**  
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*The piece "Clorox Going Green?" is overall a well-written essay that illustrates McKenzie Hull's promise as a writer. First, the piece is effectively introduced with a concise and informative introduction. Another portion of this essay that works very well is the Hull's usage of transitions to move between different ideas. These transitions improve the piece's coherence significantly and help the reader's understanding of ideas. For example, Hull uses phrases such as "as a result," "additionally," and "also" to move from one thought to the next. Furthermore, the author's implementation of introduction and conclusion sentences at the beginning and end of each paragraph do a wonderful job of clarifying the essay's argument. One particularly notable instance in which the Hull successfully employs this tactic is with the following introductory sentence in one of her argumentative paragraphs: "Another ploy Clorox uses in its ad is the word "naturally," which has a positive connotation with the environment, but is largely ambiguous in meaning, especially when it comes to being used in advertising" (Hull 4). This introductory sentence precisely describes the argument of the paragraph, while also transitioning from the previous paragraph with the word "also." These introduction and conclusion sentences are particularly important in any paper since they help the reader easily understand the argument of each body paragraph. Thus, the primary strengths of this essay were Hull's introduction, transition usage, and introduction and conclusion sentences.*