

Results

WEC Roundtable, hosted by Boehringer Ingelheim GmbH
October 7th and 8th 2009 in Ingelheim/Rhein, Germany:

“VERIFYING GREEN PRODUCT DESIGN AND MARKETING”

WHAT:

The need for “green products” has been debated for many years and an expanding number of companies have demonstrated their ability to produce comprehensive life cycle analysis and benefit from their product innovations. Greener products can be essential drivers for a competitive business as they reduce risks and can contribute to solving environmental and social challenges. However, what exactly are green products? And how does business stimulate their development and bring them to the market? The roundtable was structured into four parts:

- (a) Life Cycle Assessments as a tool in product innovation
- (b) Defining what is a green product
- (c) Designing green products and building a sustainable product portfolio
- (d) Consumers’ perspectives on green claims in marketing – and successful strategies to market green products

WHO:

The Roundtable was structured to provide a highly interactive process of discussion amongst 36 sustainability experts from eight countries. 64% of participants came from WEC member companies, 11% from non-member companies, and 25% from scientific bodies, NGOs and consultancies.

HOST

Boehringer Ingelheim: Dr. Thomas Zimmer, Dr. Hartmut Leidig

MODERATORS

Beiersdorf: Dr. Detlef Wiswe
Boehringer Ingelheim: Dr. Thomas Zimmer
Merck KgaA: Dr. Martin Hostalek
Thema 1: Mr. Guido Axmann
WEC: Mr. Frank Werner

SPEAKERS

BASF: Dr. Eckhard Koch
Boehringer Ingelheim: Dr. Hartmut Leidig
Center for Sustainable Design: Prof. Martin Charter
Consumer Focus: Ms. Lucy Yates
Deutsche Telekom: Dr. Heinz-Gerd Peters
Dow Chemical: Dr. David Russel
DuPont: Mr. Hans-Jürgen Huber
Erasmus Univ. Rotterdam: Prof. M. Braungart
Five Winds International: Dr. James Fava
F. Hoffmann-La Roche: Dr. Bernhard Pellascio
Grüne Köpfe Strategieberatung: Manuela Rehn
IBM: Dr. Reinhard Hoehn
Metsäliitto Group: Mr. Luc van Gestel
Pitney Bowes: Mr. Paul Westwater
Unilever: Ms. Lettemieke Mulder

MAJOR POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

- (1) **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)** is a tool that provides valuable information on product features. If LCA’s should tell how green a product is, the analysis should always include its upstream and downstream impacts, according to Five Winds International. Instead of assessing each single product, the firm recommends analysing some representative products very intensively, learn about their impact and then call it their Life Cycle Approach. Five Winds recommends the UNEP/SETAC methodology as the most valuable source of information on LCA’s¹.
- (2) Several participants recommended not to speak of **green products** as long as (all) products have environmental impacts, but prefer calling them greener products, value added products or simply quality products. From a group discussion about defining green products in different industries it became evident that the green aspect of a product can result from different features such as e.g. its breakthrough in efficiency gains, its potential as an enabler for new solutions and its biodegradable material (as long as it is produced sustainably).
- (3) Roundtable participants expressed some skepticism as to whether the “**Cradle to Cradle**” approach can be brought to scale? The concept strives for designing ecological (or more effective) products instead of focusing on efficiency gains by reducing unwanted effects in a “Cradle to Grave” framework. It was noted positively that Cradle to Cradle research has recently been successful in development some products, such as textiles, furniture and floor cover.
- (4) **Private and public sector requirements** have begun to stimulate change to sustainability standards on products. Especially successful are initiatives by (a) retail stores and their suppliers that bring greener products on the shelves and (b) cities together with the building sector that invest in green buildings. Participants from the pharmaceutical industry also named the Swedish Classification Scheme for Drugs designed in 2005 as a very successful standard and driver for product stewardship in Europe – however, it yet has to prove its power to drive product improvements.
- (5) It was agreed upon that in order to **build sustainable product portfolios** companies must apply a value chain approach. This is due to the fact that the highest impact often lies outside a company’s direct sphere of influence. This includes studying people’s behaviour and perception (e.g. informing people about how to best use a product is not enough).
- (6) From two presentations focusing on **consumer behaviour** it became evident that consumers are increasingly engaged in markets for greener products. While there is a healthy dose of consumer scepticism to green claims in marketing a new group of consumers is successfully making responsible products a value driver – these are “glamours” promoting a cool and sustainable lifestyle and adding to an older movement that values reduced consumption (post materialistic). Although these two groups have different philosophies of life they both demand green products. Together they form a global group called LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health & Sustainability) who have especially influenced the food market by buying organic.

¹ UNEP (2004): Why take a Life Cycle Approach? (available in Chinese, English, French, Spanish)