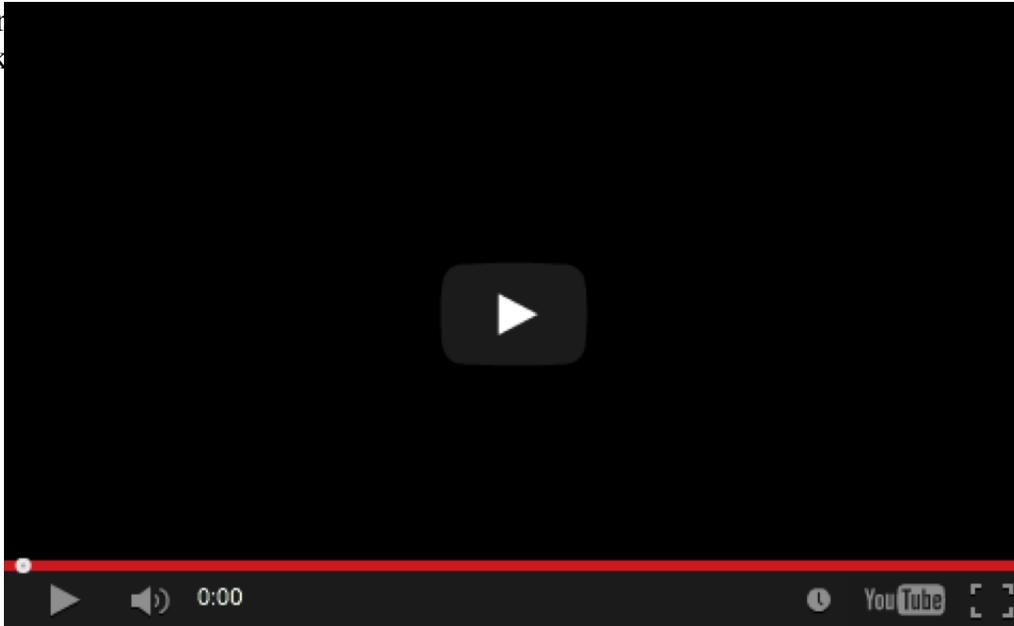


Green
Energy, the Environment and the Bottom Line

Campaigning for a Cause (and Customers)

By Liz Galst November 12, 2009 8:15 am

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In an effort to reform federal regulation governing toxic substances — and no doubt gain some marketing exposure in the process — Seventh Generation, the green household cleaning products manufacturer, recently started an ambitious campaign dubbed the Million Baby Crawl.

Through a series of Web advertisements, YouTube videos, and in-person promotions, the company invites supporters to post messages attached to virtual “crawlers” — essentially animated baby-avatars carrying personalized messages — on the campaign Web site, and to contact their representatives in Congress about soon-to-be introduced legislation that would amend the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976.

That legislation allows the Environmental Protection Agency to test for safety and restrict the more than 80,000 chemicals used in product manufacturing. But

critics like Seventh Generation's executive chairman, Jeffrey Hollender, say that in the 33 years since the law was first enacted, the agency has tested only 200 chemicals and removed only five from the market.

"The Million Baby Crawl takes a systemic and holistic approach to the problem," Mr. Hollender said.

It remains to be seen how successful the campaign will be. At the moment, fewer than 14,000 of the nation's 8.7 million under-2-year-olds are represented by campaign "crawlers."

As a marketing pitch, however, it couldn't be better timed. Seventh Generation, once the undisputed king of green cleaners, now faces stiff competition from green product lines by household cleaning giants Clorox and SC Johnson.

"As more and more players come into this market," said Gavan Fitzsimons, a Duke University professor of marketing and psychology, "it becomes more difficult for Seventh Generation to differentiate itself."

Openly championing legislation — an extremely rare move for an American company — enables Seventh Generation to show core green consumers what Mr. Hollender calls "the difference between a green company and a company that sells green products."

And, perhaps inadvertently, it nudges consumers to spend more on Seventh Generation's products than on lower-priced conventional brands, said Professor Fitzsimons, who studies the impacts of cause-related marketing on consumer psychology.

"In this economic environment, people feel they shouldn't indulge," Professor Fitzsimons said.

His studies, however, suggest that consumers are looking for excuses to splurge, and associating a product with a social cause is often just the push they need.

"Causes give people a real reason to indulge," Professor Fitzsimons added.

