

Retailers get crash course in going green

Retailers looking to go green got a crash course Thursday morning in the session, “Greening Your Store.”

The three-part session covered what both Ace and its retailers are doing to be environmentally friendly, how they’re practicing product stewardship and how they’re promoting going green in the garden.

Two members of the Ace brand management team involved with the Helpful Earth Choices division spoke about the green movement, helped identify the eco-conscious customer and shared green resources.

“It’s easier to be green now,” said Tracey Gidich-Zupke, Ace brand manager.

The movement, she said, is more of a trend than a fad because of growing environment-related health concerns, the increase in awareness of environmental problems and the fact that children are urging parents to save the planet.

Today, Gidich-Zupke said, 41 million Americans buy green products — to the tune of \$209 billion a year.

“Even with the economic downturn, this demographic still voices concern with its wallet,” she said.

Going green, however, isn’t as simple as stocking shelves with green products.

“The green consumer is smarter than that,” Gidich-Zupke said. “They want to see you walk the walk.”

Julie Duffy, associate brand manager, outlined what Ace is doing to support going green, which includes providing the Helpful Earth



Choices site on ACENET under the corporate tab’s initiatives link.

“It’s a place to see what Ace corporate is doing,” she said. “We update it regularly.”

Also on ACENET is a “getting started” tool kit, featuring a green products list, an e-newsletter, vendor and service partner lists, promotional and signage resources, and Ace reusable bag information.

A section on acehardware.com will soon tell consumers how Ace is eco-friendly.

To go green at the store level, Duffy suggested purchasing eco-friendly office materials,



Retailers and Ace team members get a crash course in green at the Thursday morning training session, “Greening Your Store.”

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continued from page 3

such as recycled paper, and installing LED or CFL light bulbs throughout the store, including exit signs. She also suggested creating a formal policy to turn off equipment when not in use and becoming a community recycling center.

“If you do that, you can be listed on Earth911.com,” she said.

Many stores are already green. Retailers have installed solar panels, set up composting spots in their lunchrooms and even constructed buildings according to the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System.

Ace corporate is also going green, she said, by recycling pallets, corrugated boxes, paper and plastic. It’s also using only unbleached paper products, like towels and napkins.

“We’re continually looking at different ways we can go green on the corporate level and save money and resources,” she said.

Product Stewardship

Jim Schrack, director of product sustainability at the Product Stewardship Institute, Inc., spoke to retailers about product stewardship initiatives around the country.

Examples include Montana’s mercury thermostat legislation, Dell Computer’s recycling of its own products, Apple Computer’s removal of toxics from its computers and Ace’s take back of CFL light bulbs.

“That’s product stewardship,” he said. “It’s taking care of products as they’re being made

and at the end of their lives.”

Schrack said a number of retailers from Ace and other companies were recently surveyed on product stewardship efforts and the results were impressive.

“We found there are a lot of benefits to the retailers,” he said. “They could see it was increasing foot traffic because they have people coming in to buy replacement parts.”

He said this fits with Ace’s motto.

“Ace is known for being helpful and people are looking for solutions,” he said. “I think this is a good role for Ace. You’ve got a good reputation.”

Schrack, an Ace customer himself, suggested tying the Ace Rewards program to take-backs.

“That would be a cool thing,” he said. “I like earning Ace points.”

To do all of this and be a successful green store, Schrack said education is critical.

“It’s something that can be done by retailers,” he said. “I also think the point here is walking the talk. This is a good way for stores to demonstrate solutions.”

Growing a Green Garden

Annie Joseph spoke about Our Water, Our World, a green gardening organization working with retail nurseries and hardware stores in California to teach customers environmentally friendly pest management.

She said Ace stores are in a position to be leaders in the green movement.

“You guys have the service and you carry the products your customers want,” she said. “This type of program could be profitable for you. It

could help members of your community feel they’re doing something to improve the environment and it lets them know you’re doing something, too.”

Joseph said it is important that store associates are trained to know what’s green and what’s not when they help customers in the garden.

“When they come in with problems, it’s our opportunity to mentor customers and guide them to things that are less polluting,” she said.

When selling an organic or Earth-friendly product, Joseph said retailers must explain how the product works so they’re not surprised if it has different results than its mainline alternative.

“It’s important to tell your customers ‘the snails and slugs are going to eat it and they’re going to go away and die. You won’t see a pile of dead slugs or snails,’” she said, as an example.

When setting up green displays, Joseph said it’s a good idea to go big.

“Make a statement,” she said. “These are opportunities for you and the consumer and it gives your store credibility. You can make a lot of money. It’s very profitable.”

It’s also important to tell customers what’s available.

“Provide your customers with a complete list of eco-friendly products,” she said.

And remember, she said, every choice matters.

“What goes out your door ends up in your community, especially when it comes to garden products,” she said. “These are things people are putting outdoors on the Earth. Whatever you do, there’s a consequence.”

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