

Building the bridge between PR and the bottom line.

# PR News

June 7, 2010

[prnewsonline.com](http://prnewsonline.com)

Issue 23 Vol. 66

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# Digital Media Destination and Internal Environmental Experts Boost Office Depot's Green Initiative

**Company:** Office Depot  
**Timeframe:** 2006-Present

Business supply mega-chain **Office Depot** launched a green initiative back in 2003, initially created in response to two key buyer segments that tended to base their purchases on environmental factors: government and universities.

But in a market of growing environmental awareness, the company soon saw the benefits of expanding the initiative beyond its sales-targeted roots. That same year it hired its first dedicated environmental strategy director, Yalmaz Siddiqui, who developed a company-wide strategy (and slogan) to “buy green, be green and sell green.” This strategy is supported by two additional elements, says Siddiqui:

- An effort to create the busi-

ness case internally (i.e. establish “why green” for the internal management and staff).

- An effort communicate their efforts to protect and promote the brand (i.e. “tell green” to internal and external stakeholders).

In order to raise awareness about the initiative, and to gain credibility as a company serious about environmental standards, Office Depot charged its PR team to launch a dedicated campaign in 2006. “Communicating via the PR campaign helps the company get public recognition for our leadership efforts, and also pushes Office Depot associates to want to be part of a positive public story,” Siddiqui explains. “The more PR we get for our environmental programs, the more our internal



Photo courtesy Office Depot

Office Depot's push to promote its green image through the “Going Green, Saves Green” campaign extends all the way to the parking lot.

## HOW TO INSPIRE EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN A COMPANY'S GREEN INITIATIVE

**Office Depot's** dedication to its green initiative is evidenced by its environmental-centric internal staff, headed by director of environmental strategy, Yalmaz Siddiqui. Still, he says, having a specialty division is not enough to build a successful initiative. “Notwithstanding our strategic focus on having green programs owned by core business functions, some functional areas still believe that if an idea is related to green, it must be owned by the small, central environmental team. The biggest challenge is persuading *all* internal functions that green can help them meet their goals, and therefore needs to be owned by the individual function/business unit in order to be successful,” Siddiqui says. He offers four main recommendations to get internal staff motivated:

1. Make green part of everyone's business by engaging different functional areas and showing them how green thinking will align to their own objectives.
2. Think first about “who” to engage rather than “what” you want to do.
3. Think about the benefits green can bring to different functional areas, and inspire green actions that will benefit those functional areas.
4. Recognize leadership by rewarding and publicizing success.

functions want to create environmental programs.”

The campaign, “Going Green, Saves Green,” led by Mindy Kramer, supervisor of PR at Office Depot, focused on media outreach in a way that would hit consumers as well as business buyers. “We specifically wanted to bring the dialogue on going greener to a much wider audience,” Kramer says.

The campaign also had to be precise about its language in order to counter a commonly held perception, according to Melissa Perlman, who managed the campaign. “The ongoing challenge over the last couple of years is the myth that using or purchasing green supplies is more expensive,” she says. “Our biggest challenge has been proving to customers, businesses and the media that it's not necessarily more expensive. There's really a continuum when it comes to cost.”

The Office Depot team developed a program with the following objectives:

- Generate top-tier media

attention for Office Depot, emphasizing the company's environmental commitments.

- Support the green products and promote the green services they offer.
- Remind customers that they don't need to spend a lot of green to go green.
- Reinforce Office Depot's environmental leadership and status as a respected green authority, both inside and outside the office supply space.
- Use the green message to break away from competition in a crowded marketplace.

The PR team decided that a key component of the campaign would be a centralized Internet press kit—a source of updates on the company's green progress and filled with environmental facts—from which they would launch press releases and social media initiatives.

### ► ORGANIC OUTREACH

The team then developed the press kit, which utilized the following features:

- Press releases on all relevant updates, all containing links to the dedicated online press kit site.
- Search functions that enabled users to find relevant information.
- Green tips from environmental director Siddiqui's, which would promote his status as an expert.
- A "social media press kit" version, aligned with the company's Facebook page.

#### ► TARGETED OUTREACH

The PR team had to be careful to target a range of media that would reach both consumers and businesses. "Of course we go for business trades and online business magazines, because 80% of our customers are small businesses," says Perlman. "Also, we target environmental trades in order to build status and leadership—to become an environmental leader."

#### ► GREEN GUIDELINES

They distributed an "Environmental Overview" document, which provided information on company's entire policy. "This document became more than a PR hand-out—[it was] a great piece of literature for our sales reps—giving them proof-in-hand of Office Depot's green status," Perlman says.

#### ► ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERTS

To enhance the company's environmental legitimacy, the team launched a testimonial video campaign showcasing internal experts. The videos featured VPs from different departments involved in the green initiative—the head

of construction who led environmentally favorable remodeling efforts, for example.

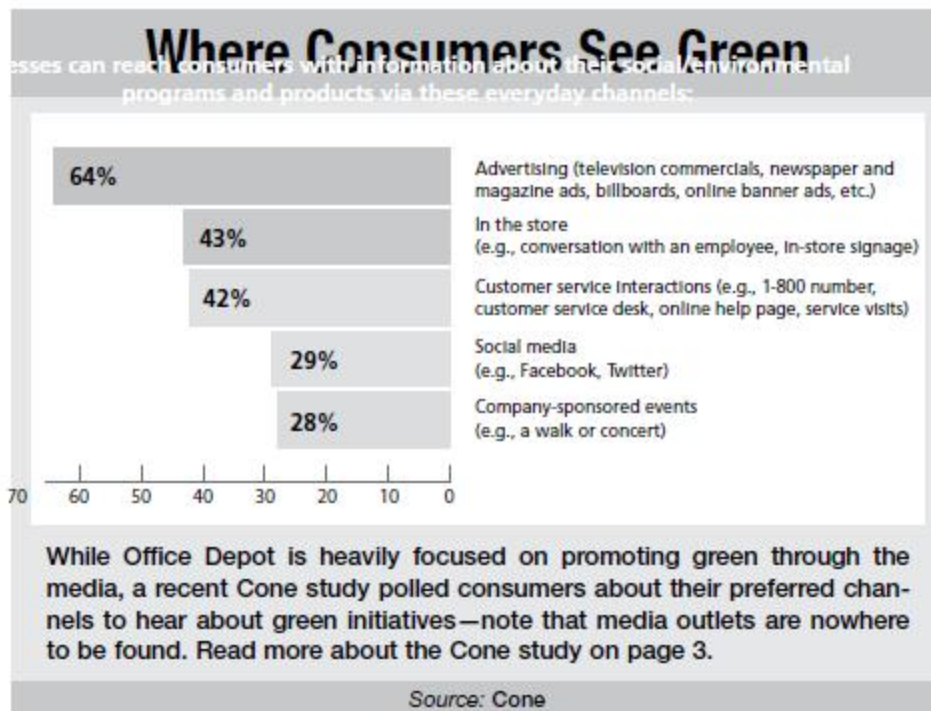
"We have many heroes within our company that have made sustainability their own responsibility within their business unit," Perlman says. These videos were then displayed on the online press kit site and shown in the public areas of the company's Delray Beach, Fla., headquarters.

#### ► EARTH DAY IS EVERY DAY

The team has found that a way to break away from the environmental pack is to hit the press hard in "environmental off-hours." They do rev up on obligatory days like Earth Day, but generally keep their output to one or two press releases a month. "We try to keep content evergreen," says Perlman. "The field gets crowded when everyone focuses on the major environmental days, so we get out there and promote our products and services year-round." Perlman adds that the consistent outreach shows that Office Depot is committed to sustainability, and is not just greenwashing.

#### GREEN RESULTS

The PR team uses Cision measurement software to track the media coverage. "We spend a lot of time making sure we're getting all the clips—and then we distribute them to our stakeholders internally," Perlman says. "It's important to reward our employees by showing them what attention



we're receiving externally. There's something about being on TV that still gets our business associates excited."

The team estimates a total ad equivalency so far of \$22 million. The online press kit alone has received more than 50,000 unique visitors since it launched.

The kit and the awareness it generates has led to mentions in industry b2bs like *Chain Store Age*, *Retail Merchandiser* and *NYSE Magazine*; local press such as *South Florida Business Journal*, *Miami Herald*, *Boca Raton Magazine*; and also environmental-focused publications like *Green Business Quarterly*.

Perlman judges that the program has been successful by the fact that the word "campaign" has not come up a lot in the press. "We've gotten more coverage, not so much on the campaign, but on products and services we're offering or what we as a company are doing—legit cov-

erage that's been really beneficial," she says.

The campaign has also met the goals of the company's environmental strategy. "While it has been challenging to engage some functional areas within the business to go greener, the PR campaign has been instrumental in driving interest, engagement, and new initiatives in a wide range of areas notably construction, supply chain and merchandising," says Siddiqui. "In showcasing environmental leadership by certain executives and managers in our business, we have encouraged other executives and managers to go greener in their areas," Siddiqui says. PRN

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*Editor's note:* Just a reminder that we have a must-attend event coming up, the PR News Media Relations Forum, set for Thursday, June 17 at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. Learn about new media relations trends and best practices from the experts. Go to PRNewsOnline.com for details on all of our events.