

Green With Envy: Consider eco-friendly when shopping

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It brings a smile to my face to see good news about the environment as opposed to animals going extinct, chemicals all over the place and everybody and their uncles trying to build more coal-fired power plants. For instance, *Reuters* is reporting that for the first time in 20 years, Americans are driving less. Now while the number isn't incredibly huge — 0.4 percent fewer miles driven in 2007 — it remains a symbol that people are starting to change their driving habits, most likely because the expensive cost of gas, but it is still leaving a positive affect on the environment.

Also, according to *The San Jose Business Journal*, Americans are poised to spend approximately \$104 billion on green technology, but they don't know where to start. I think this is a common problem facing a lot of people, including me, because we get a lot of our information on where to spend our money from advertisements. While environmental magazines are chock-full of suggestions on where to find eco-friendly products or which businesses are contributing to aiding in environmental research, the mainstream media lacks such helpful advice.

One really great Web site is www.greenerchoices.org, an offshoot of *Consumer Reports*. It has green guides to buying appliances, electronics, cars and food, as well as calculators if you want to see how much energy certain items, such as your air conditioner, use right now. I mean, you can even find out what to do with your old vacuum cleaner — does it get any better than that?

Of course, not everyone is in the market to purchase a washer/dryer just yet. A lot of people are simply looking for household items that are more organic and natural. Seventh Generation (www.seventhgeneration.com) offers a plethora of environmentally friendly products for cleaning all different rooms and furniture in the house, and even offer paper products made from recycled materials. The Web site offers a store locator to see if there are stores that sell their products within, at most, a 20-mile radius, and if not, they are also sold online.

Some mainstream cleaning products are jumping on the bandwagon, making it easier to find them at local stores. Common household items like Clorox and Windex boast about being environmentally friendly, but investing in these companies is an investment in mainstream products as opposed to the development and growth of specifically *green* technologies.

Look at what you're buying and see where it was made. Preferably, you should buy products made in the United States to support merchandise that didn't take the amount of oil for transportation that it takes to ship things overseas. Even more so than that, buy as locally as you can. The more localized you shop, the better, such as going to the local farmer's market or buying goods straight from the person who made them from local shops.

I don't feel very comfortable addressing green-energy investment because I don't really know very much about it at this moment in time. But there are definitely companies like Starbucks that aim to be more environmentally sustainable, so supporting those with patronage or investment based on their commitment to the environment is another way to make a statement. Financial consultants can be of better help to guide you toward what has been coined "socially responsible investing." But, hey, I figured it was

important to mention those resources exist; investment is a driving force in the environmental movement.

I am excited that people are eager and are showing signs of changing their ways of consumption. While I'd suggest a reduction of consumption all together, I know people need toilet paper, so why not buy some made from recycled materials? And the fact Americans are driving less shows that we are reaching a point where it is not economically sound to continue to rely on fossil fuels as an end-all-be-all way to transport ourselves to where we need to be. The same goes for our country and transporting (especially importing) goods overseas.

In the business of supply and demand, companies will change their practices and products to be more eco-friendly if they know that's what the consumers want, and your dollar goes a long way and holds a lot of power in this sense. Being conscious and aware of the choices you have is a great asset, so you can buy items based on what you want and not just what's on the shelves.

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