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## **ENVIRONMENTALLY ORIENTED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS AS PART OF GREEN MARKETING STRATEGY**

### ***ABSTRACT***

*Achieving sustainable development which is undeniably the goal of every society and every community is unthinkable without significant changes in behavior and consumption patterns of individual consumers. The role of marketing in achieving sustainable development, therefore, arises from the fact that precisely marketing has the most extensive theoretical and practical knowledge related to the behavior of consumers and promoting new ideas. Carefully designed and credible environmentally oriented marketing communication has the key role therein.*

*Marketing communications as part of green marketing strategy is faced with numerous challenges. Its first task is to educate a consumer about the environmental problems which the product contributes solving and also to empower him with a solution or idea how can he, as an individual, contribute to environmental conservation. At the same time it has to take into account his personal interests, such as saving time and money, fitting into a particular social group and building the reputation and image within it. Promotion is definitely one of the most controversial areas of green marketing which is often criticized primarily because of its role in the promotion of unnecessary consumption but also because of the resources spent to convey messages to consumers and the presentation of green products as over-simplified solutions to complex environmental problems.*

*Trust and credibility are of utmost importance in environmentally oriented marketing communications. Also one of the great challenges for the marketer in green marketing is to find a suitable promotional mix that will make the desired message reach the targeted consumers and induce the desired reaction. In this sense, it is necessary to apply the integrated marketing communications concept. Besides the standard promotional elements in*

*green marketing there are also some specific forms of promotional activities such as cause related marketing and standardized eco labels as a special way of communicating with consumers which significantly contributes to the mentioned credibility of environmentally oriented messages.*

**Key words:** *Green marketing, marketing communications, sustainable development, cause related marketing, environmental labels.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades, environmental issues and sustainable development have evolved from marginal issues to a central theme of deliberation and research. Increased media attention, higher level of awareness about environmental problems under the influence of reports on various environmental disasters, the increase in activities of interest groups focused on environmental issues and stricter legislation on national and international level are the driving force behind these changes both in general society and in managing business processes. In other words, ecological orientation in business that follows the principles of sustainable development and is an indispensable part of corporate social responsibility has become an important category of business and marketing in both theory and practice.

As a discipline, marketing always runs parallel to socio-economic development, and it reflects existing socio-economic relations. Accordingly, green marketing has emerged in conditions of growing environmental awareness across all levels of society and of the rise of the segment of green consumers. In terms of time, green marketing can be placed in the period from the 1970s up to date, while conceptually it belongs to socially responsible marketing.

To achieve the objectives of green marketing it is necessary to encourage changes with a wide range of people that is, to create a critical mass, because it's mainly about the small individual contribution that, with creating a synergistic effect, leads to major changes. Carefully designed and credible environmentally oriented marketing communication has the key role therein.

Trust and credibility are of utmost importance in environmentally oriented marketing communications. Also one of the great challenges for the marketer in green marketing is to find a suitable promotional mix that will make the desired message reach the targeted consumers and induce the desired reaction. In this sense, it is necessary to apply the integrated marketing

communications concept. Besides the standard promotional elements in green marketing there are also some specific forms of promotional activities such as cause related marketing and standardized eco-labels as a special way of communicating with consumers which significantly contributes to the mentioned credibility of environmentally oriented messages.

This paper assumes that the social desirability of encouraging and stimulating environmental responsibility of individuals in the role of consumers is unquestionable, as well as that changes in attitudes and beliefs toward environmental responsibility depend on the quality of educational programs and communication strategies applied by different stakeholders in this process. Therefore this paper discusses the fundamental issues of environmentally oriented marketing communication and aims to explain the underlying concepts and assumptions as well as major challenges that this communications faces.

## **2. GREEN MARKETING**

In the extensive literature arising from marketing theory and practice over the last four decades, we can find several terms synonymous to nowadays widely accepted term: green marketing (Ottman, 1998, Wasik, 1996, Grant, 2007, Dahlstrom, 2010). Most often used is sustainable marketing (Fuller, 1999) or sustainability marketing (Belz, Peattie, 2009). Furthermore, often used terms are: environmental marketing (Polonsky, Mintu – Wimsatt, 1997) and ecological marketing (Henion, 1976) and its abbreviated version: eco-marketing. Different authors use different terms on arbitrary basis and there is no clear evolution of the term.

We can conclude that there is no generally accepted definition of green marketing which is often the case when it comes to subject matters that have a wide coverage and interdisciplinary approach. A number of authors and institutions contribute to the attempt to define the idea and meaning of the concept and its components. Some are thereby concentrating on the differences in relation to classical marketing, while others use the basic principles of the concept of sustainable development, which is in the basis of the idea.

The first definition by the American Marketing Association comes from their workshop on the topic of environmental marketing in 1975, namely as: "The study of positive and negative aspects of marketing activities on pollution, energy depletion, and depletion of non-energy resources" (Borš, 2004, 65).

This workshop resulted in one of the first books on green marketing, the book "Ecological Marketing" by Henion and Kinnear (Finisterra do Paco, Raposo, 2008, 130).

Polonsky (1994) highlights three key determinants of this definition: (1) green marketing is a part of the overall marketing activities, (2) both positive and negative activities are taken into account, (3) the relatively narrow range of environmental issues is taken into account. Although this definition is a useful starting point, the author argues that green marketing should be defined more widely and suggests the following definition: "Green or environmental marketing is a set of activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchange intended to satisfy human needs or desires in a way that meeting those needs and desires causes minimal negative impact on the natural environment."

Seen as a strategy, green marketing implies cooperation between suppliers and sellers, partners as well as rivals, in order to achieve environmentally sustainable development throughout the entire value chain, while at the same time, it internally calls for the cooperation of all business functions in finding the best possible solutions for two major guiding principles: profit and long-term, positive contributions to the environment (society and the natural surrounding).

The application of green marketing calls for a pro-active approach towards both customers and other stakeholders, as well as towards the legislator. To gain all strategic advantages that green marketing has to offer requires the willingness to rethink the very foundations on which the mission, vision, strategy and goals of a business are based. This entails commitment and focus not only from top management but also from each individual within a business.

### **3. ENVIRONMENTALLY ORIENTED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS**

Multiple and multilateral benefits that derive from environmentally oriented marketing communications are unquestionable. However, marketing communications as a part of green marketing are faced with numerous challenges. Often the first task of green products promotion is to educate consumers about the environmental problems to which the product contributes solving. Then the consumer must be provided with a solution or idea how can he, as an individual, contribute to environmental conservation,

taking thereby his personal interests into account, such as saving time and money, fitting a particular social group and building the reputation and image within that group. Also marketing communication was often in the focus of criticism, primarily because of its role in the promotion of unnecessary consumption and creation of consumer society, but also because of resources spent to convey messages to consumers (especially when it comes to printed materials such as brochures, catalogs, posters etc.).

With the term environmentally oriented marketing communications, we are referring to all forms of marketing communications such as publicity, sales promotion, direct selling and public relations. The specificity of this communication is that besides presenting the product to the market and encouraging the purchase, it aims to emphasize the importance of certain environmental problems and makes a special contribution to creating a green image of the company.

Promotion is definitely one of the most controversial areas in green marketing which is often criticized mainly for presenting green products as over-simplified solutions to complex environmental problems. As a result of this, the concept of sustainable communications is formed, which is defined more broadly than the concept of green promotion. This concept strongly emphasizes the importance of the dialogue between all stakeholders, especially towards consumers, with the aim of informing and educating as well as establishing social and environmental credibility of the product and its manufacturer. It is usually attempted by communication campaigns related to the entire company and through various partnerships and strategic alliances (Peattie, 2008, 578).

Belz and Peattie (2009, 180) point out that sustainable marketing communications is the next step in the evolution of marketing communications. Namely, the conventional communication focuses on promoting consumer products and relationship marketing focuses on the communication with consumers and in particular on the attempts to learn more about the consumer. Sustainable marketing communication "opens" the economic entity standing behind the product and allows the consumer to learn about the manufacturer opening a dialogue in order to allow businesses and consumers to learn from one another.

Sustainable marketing communication thus implies a continuous, systematized dialogue on multiple levels with more communicating entities. This is an interactive communication process of the economic entity and its

stakeholders, which has a two-way flow of information (broadcasting and receiving information), and aims at mutual learning.

Based on extensive research of cognitive processes and behavior of green consumers Wagner (2003, 203-204) gave some guidance for the development of marketing communication concept for green products:

- It should strive to reduce cognitive barriers – it must be able to respond to different information needs of particular groups of consumers.
- Through layered and multi-stage approach to communications it can meet the target consumers with a wide range of information needs.
- Mix of messages should be available to consumers on a step-by-step principle - different messages can appear in phases and thus not overwhelm consumers who are in the early stages of learning, while ensuring that those who want and need more information can get them.

One of the major challenges for the marketer in green marketing is to find the appropriate style, tone and appeal that will make the desired message reach the targeted consumers, and then induce the desired reaction. Various research associated with environmentally oriented ads have shown that communication is more effective if it relates to something concrete, than if it's generic. For example, a picture of a small seal will have a greater impact on people, than a chart showing in how many years the polar ice caps will melt if current CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue. People need to be given the object to which they can direct their emotions, which will then stimulate them for action.

Appeals / themes determine the general tone and direction of communication, and the specific statements determine the message and its details. Content analysis of a large sample of environmental ads conducted by Carlson, Grove and Kangun (1993, 31) offered a list of 5 types of claims:

- Claims oriented on the product
- Process-oriented claims
- Claims focused on the improvement of the image
- Claims about environmental facts
- Combination.

It should also be noted that a strong campaign slogan can leave a strong impression on the consumer leading him to accept it as part of his life philosophy and through this affect his individual decisions and behavior. Some of the famous successful green marketing slogans are:

- Save planet, save money! (Environmental Protection Authority)
- Put more money in your pocket and less waste in your bin. (P&G)
- Doing well by doing good (Patagonia).

There are also two famous quotes related to ecology, which have become part of the life philosophy and value systems of a large number of people and businesses around the world:

- If you're not a part of the solution, you're a part of the problem - Sydney J. Harris
- The ecological crisis is a crisis of morality and a true contempt towards the man - Pope John Paul II.

Considering that trust and credibility are the key concepts in environmentally oriented marketing communications, it is essential to bear in mind that communication, in addition to what the subject of green marketing wants to communicate and the message that he sends through different channels, consists also of a range of messages unconsciously sent to consumers, the media and general public (the choice of packaging, the selection of partners, vehicle fleet). If these messages are inconsistent it can lead to creation of skepticism among consumers.

The company employees certainly belong to the secondary channels of communication. They represent a credible source of word-of-mouth propaganda, which can take both positive and negative prefix. Therefore, any marketing communication in green marketing must start from within the economic entity.

In addition to the employees and consumers, targeted marketing communications groups in green marketing are often shareholders, participants of the value / supply chain, different regulators of national and international significance, and environmental organizations.

### **3.1. The credibility of eco-oriented communication and *Greenwashing***

In the last century's late eighties, there was a true inflation of environmentally oriented messages and communications that were aimed to benefit from the new hyper-trend of environmental awareness and achieve higher sales and short-term profit. However, most were not related to any real progress or efforts in the field of environmental protection. It was in many cases only the arbitrary adding of different prefixes or adjectives such as eco, bio, etc. to the product name without significant changes in the product itself. There was also massive involvement of various environmentally oriented claims and

appeals in promotional messages. These negative, and for actual environmentally oriented products, harmful practices have pointed out the necessity of introducing regulations in this area.

The first step in this direction was made in 1990, as *The Green Report 1* was released, composed by state attorneys of 10 countries, who recommended that the environmental statements should be as specific as possible, and supported by significant scientific evidence (Fuller, 1999, 228).

Based on this report, in 1992, the Federal Trade Commission issued a set of guidelines that economic subjects should follow in an attempt to ensure that their green marketing communications are clear and not leading to wrong conclusions (Polonsky, Mintu-Wimsat, 1997, 202-203).

The mentioned report and guidelines were designed to stop and reverse the obvious trend of the increasing number of arbitrary allegations and unfounded messages as well as the consequent trend of increasing consumer skepticism. This naturally represents only the first steps in regulation of these areas that are extremely fast developing and increasingly subjected to various regulations.

In relation to credibility of marketing communications is a term Greenwashing that appears equally often in the media and popular literature as well as green marketing. The term was created as a combination of the words „green“ and „whitewash“, and means to deceive the consumer and the public related to the environmental performance of products or disguise the real purpose behind the apparent environmental efforts. The term was first used by Jay Westerveld in 1986. Simply put, Greenwashing is a term used to describe the activities of the economic entity that spends more money for the promotion of his environmental actions than for the actions themselves.

In 2007 the company Terra Choice has made a study named "The Six Sins of Greenwashing" which revealed that 99% of 1018 randomly selected products campaigns can be accused of committing one of the 6 sins of greenwashing:

- sin of hidden compromise
- sin of the unproven
- sin of uncertainty
- sin of irrelevance
- sin of lies
- sin of the lesser evil (Krpeljević, 2008).



The American company EnviroMedia in collaboration with the University of Oregon has established a Web site called "Greenwashing Index", which aims to help consumers understand greenwashing, how to recognize it and how to distinguish between genuine and false or misleading ads. (Ellison, 2008, 101).

### **3.2. Promotional mix**

One of the major challenges in green marketing is also to find a suitable promotional mix that will make the desired message reach the targeted consumer and induce the desired reaction. In this sense, it is necessary to apply the concept of integrated marketing communications. It is a concept that appears in communication sciences in the nineties, due to changes in the environment, the most important being market globalization, changes in the consumer demands and the massive expansion of new communication technologies and new communication media.

According to the author of the book *Integrated marketing communications*, Tanja Kesić, Ph. D. (2003, 28), the concept of integrated marketing communication includes coordinating all marketing communications activities in a way that uses a combination of communication elements in order to achieve synergy effects in creating the ads, market analysis, use of media and control of the results.

What sets sustainable integrated marketing communications apart is that decision makers must acclimate to new subject matter and expand their vistas beyond traditional channel networks to include the realm of the product system life cycle. In real terms, more potential players are involved, which exacerbates the vertical coordination challenge. Within this context, it is necessary to identify the natural expertise and promotion role of each potential player as well as those players unique to the environmental arena such as advocacy groups and trade associations (Fuller, 1999, 265).

Manufacturers of green products in communicating with their customers often rely on public relations and publicity as a way to convey their messages. The main reason is the fact that it is an easier way to win over trust, because the reporting is done by a neutral third party. In addition to being more credible, such a way to promote green products is also cost-optimal for green manufacturers, particularly because they usually target a market niche and specific consumer segments. When it comes to large business entities which target the mass market, the most frequently used combination of forms of promotion are advertisement through the mass

media to communicate the general characteristics and benefits of the product, while reporting on environmental achievements are entrusted to unpaid forms of promotion.

Publicity can also take a negative form if information on environmentally unacceptable activities of the economic entity caught media attention. It is particularly the case if the economic entity is tied to certain ecological incident. Probably the most famous example of such a case that was exposed to extreme amount of negative publicity at the global level is the case of Exxon Valdez oil tanker disaster. This is also the most frequently cited example of public relations failure in a crisis situation. Public relations play a key role in controlling the effects of negative publicity.

In green marketing it became common to use the influence of celebrities. They influence consumers who identify with them and the media which follow their every move. One of the most famous examples of the impact of celebrities on the promotion of green products is the example of American celebrities and the Toyota Prius. Numerous movie stars, singers and sports stars in America began to demonstrate to the public their choice of hybrid cars thereby promoting the goal of reducing emissions fuel consumption with more or less secondary effects on their own personal marketing.

Advertising that includes communication via mass media, is faced with many challenges when it comes to effectively promoting green / sustainable products. The point is that advertising is strongly related to conventional marketing paradigm that emphasizes demand creation and presentation of superficial characteristics of the product, rather than their substance. Therefore, it might seem wrong to marketers as well as consumers to use this form of communication for communicating sustainable characteristics of the product. Also, it is a great challenge to communicate meaningfully about the complex interplay of social, environmental, economic, technical and consumer product value from the perspective of sustainability, using the 30-second radio or television clip or one page print ad (Belz, Peattie, 2009, 182).

However that does not mean that advertising through mass media should be dismissed as a promotional tool in green marketing, but it is necessary to consider and adapt the content of communication in order to utilize all the advantages of mass media (primarily this applies to the possibility of reaching wide masses) and minimize the weaknesses (mainly lower credibility). Fuller (1999, 252-255) starts with different types of advertising and explains how they can be applied by the marketer in sustainable marketing:

- Product advertising - apply moderate implicit environmental appeals which do not overshadow the basic value of the product.
- Institutional advertising - also moderate messages which position the economic entity in the minds of recipients as environmentally sensitive.
- Advertising of business associations - aimed at the image-reorientation of certain generic materials and is usually the result of the cooperation of numerous subjects related to the particular type of resource.
- Public - service information - advertising in partnership of different organizations. The message is designed to foster awareness and provide information about certain specific environmental issues.

Personal selling has traditionally been tied primarily to B2B marketing, industrial marketing and selling complex products such as cars. In green marketing there is a bit more emphasis on personal selling when it comes to products such as cosmetics and food because of the aforementioned complexity of the interactions between different values of product and the complexity of issues and knowledge that is necessary for the overall analysis of the product life cycle. Ecological paradigm made some of these issues even more complex, so that personal selling is often an optimal form of promotion of such products.

Sales promotion represents mostly short-term activities designed to induce certain reactions of consumers to increase sales or encourage the testing of new products. Since sales promotion mainly results in increase in material consumption (especially the offer of "buy one - get one free" because it doubles the material effect of purchases without increasing the cost to consumers), these forms of communication do not appear as the first choice for the marketer in sustainable marketing. However, sales promotion can encourage sustainable consumption by offering additional value such as the system of returning money if the product is returned after its lifetime (Belz, Peattie, 2009, 183).

Besides consumers, sales promotion activities can be directed to own or sales staff of the sales intermediary. Materials such as various brochures, CDs, DVDs, promotional materials and displays for use at the point of sale can be designed to provide information on environmental characteristics of a product and / or manufacturer or to suggest ecological awareness through the use of recycled and environmentally friendly materials.

When it comes to information on environmental aspects of products and manufacturers, environmentally-conscious consumers often address business entities directly. Visiting their website they expect to find information on the environmental policy of a specific manufacturer. Economic entities who have successfully implemented green marketing use this form of direct communication in several ways. Most commonly a free telephone number is offered, through which consumers can ask questions and consumers who express interest are sent specially prepared materials about their achievements in the field of environmental protection and sustainable development.

The role of internet and web technologies is particularly important in communication in green marketing. Internet represents a very effective medium of environmentally oriented advertising mainly due to the fact that it is often a relatively small segment of consumers (market niche) to which the message is primarily intended. Moreover, since recently we can find various Internet-applications and services which have a chance to reach out to younger consumer groups which are often difficult to reach through traditional forms of communication. In addition to Internet applications, which typically aim at initial awareness- or fundraising, today there are dozens of web-pages such as Green Shopping, Green Living, etc. which are intended to help consumers in the operationalization of their environmental commitments.

Internet and web technologies also are of great importance as a tool of Customer Relationship Management given that it represents an effective platform for bi-directional communication with consumers and therefore gathering information, creating a base of knowledge of them and the realization of the fundamental goal of CRM, which consists in building long term relationships and converting consumers into clients.

Besides the standard promotional elements in green marketing there are also some specific forms of promotional activities which will be discussed below.

### 3.2.1. Cause related marketing

Cause related marketing is a promotional activity within which businesses, NGOs and humanitarian organizations are entering a partnership to achieve mutual benefits in a way that an economic entity usually donates a percentage of revenue generated by selling a product or a certain amount of money per product sold.

There are four basic ways of application of cause related marketing:

- Sponsorship of a charity program or activity
- Application of public relations and advertising in order to raise awareness about a purpose
- Organized fundraising, including the post-purchase donations
- The so-called affinity products - such as credit cards associated with a particular charity (Grant, 2007, 117-118).

This form of action is prevalent among both large and small businesses which recognized that cause related marketing can be an extremely powerful tool to achieve marketing goals. The reason for this lies in the fact that this single strategy can simultaneously improve the reputation, strengthen the competitiveness, increase customer loyalty, bring more sales and profits, and simultaneously achieve a significant positive impact on society.

Research conducted in the UK has shown:

- 75% of executive directors expressed the belief that cause related marketing can improve company or brand reputation;
- 81% of consumers have confirmed that with the same price and quality they would rather buy a product or service related to a beneficial purpose (UNDP, 2005).

Another study found that the degree of skepticism about cause related marketing significantly decreased since the beginning of the 90s. While then 58% of consumers thought that such projects are "just for show" today only 21% of consumers keep asking questions about whether the motives are pure and honest (Ottman, 1998, 175).

Large economic entities are often the initiators of such actions. They choose the goal, form the idea and look for a partner in implementation. Small business entities often engage in various group activities involving multiple businesses in coordination of a larger economic entity or environmental organization. In recent years, supermarket chains often take the part of the organizer and include individual suppliers.

In order to maximize utility and advantages of the cause related marketing, Ottman (1998, 176-177) lists three strategies to be followed:

1. Select a goal that reflects the value of the company and which can inspire employees and customers of the company.
2. Select an organization that is able to support logistics and marketing efforts of the company.

3. Enter a partnership with an organization in which the company will receive appropriate attention - especially important for smaller companies.

Cause related marketing represents a strong and credible promotional activity, and if we know that credibility is the most difficult goal to achieve in promotion, we recognize its primary advantage. Free publicity which these programs are attracting is useful for the economic entity, but also for the ecological association. This form of partnership provides them media and advertising budget they themselves couldn't afford. We should also not forget the benefit for the whole society that becomes more sensible for a certain problem and builds positive values.

Besides these advantages, it is necessary to also take into account certain weaknesses:

- The collected sums of money for a cause are often far lower than the amount spent on advertising the campaign.
- Effective only when it is about a cause which is already popular and familiar to the public.
- It can give the impression to consumers that they have done much more than they actually have, and thus create "an alibi for conscience" (Grant, 2007, 116-119).

Grant (2007, 120) has clearly demonstrated the above mentioned by scoring cause related marketing according to three main goals:

- Commercial objectives: 7/10 - Effective promotional tactics
- Green objectives: 1/10 - A little money for a cause, but improves the profile
- Cultural objectives: 3/10 - Gives the impression that you are doing more than you actually are.

Unlike traditional advertising, cause related marketing was in its beginnings, much less exposed to criticism. But we can say that this "grace period" for this form of promotion is definitely over. More and more organizations, web portals and bloggers, are doing research and educate the public on how much more you can contribute to the environment and society if you donate money to environmental organizations, than if you do this by buying products. Their effort certainly will not be without effect. Also, it is a matter of time when the legislation will grasp this area more than it is the case today.

### 3.2.2. Eco-labels as a way of communicating with consumers

According to research, one of the the most acceptable form of communication of environmental product characteristics, is the communication through messages and labels on the packaging. This form of communication allows consumers to get information when they search for them (in the place of purchase, prior to making purchasing decisions).

Basically, an eco-label is a label which identifies overall environmental preference of a product (i.e. good or service) within a product category based on life cycle considerations. In contrast to a self-styled environmental symbol or claim developed by a manufacturer or service provider, an eco-label is awarded by an impartial third party to products that meet established environmental leadership criteria (Global Ecolabeling Network, 2004, 1).

There are very long-lasting national labeling systems, such as the German "Blue Angel", which is extensively used, and which enjoys significant consumer confidence. There are also specific systems related to specific industries or products, methods of production or business processes (such as Fair Trade labels). Product labeling can also support recycling by consumers, for example, in a way that the plastic packaging is marked according to the type which makes it easier to sort and recycle. Labeling systems also differ according to whether they are compulsory or voluntary, whether they include one or more environmental issues, according to the level of information provided and the level of verification (Peattie, 2008, 580).

The European Union in 1992 launched the program „European Eco-label“ (Figure 1) which is often called the European flower, and which promotes products which have reduced environmental impact and provide a complete, unambiguous and scientifically based information about it. Joining the system and the use of the label is (for now) on a voluntary basis.

**Figure 1**

European Eco-label

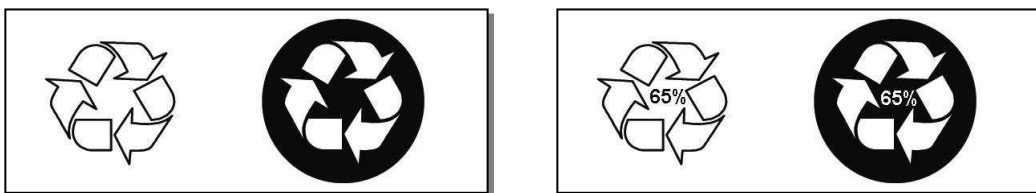


Source: Bačun, D. (2005): **Znak po znak – do europskog cvijeta**, Gospodarstvo i održivost, glasilo hrvatskog poslovnog savjeta za održivi razvoj, Vol.1, No. 4, pp. 19.

Oftently seen label is the Möbius circle (Figure 2). This symbol is used for products or packaging, which in its declaration has statements about recycling or recycled content. Three arrows indicate the three stages of recycling: Collect, recycle, reuse. If it appears in a black circle it means that recycled material is used in its production, and if it is without circle or in a circle with no color, it means that a product can be recycled. The percentage within three arrows marks the percentage of recycled content.

**Figure 2**

The international label for recycling - Möbius circle



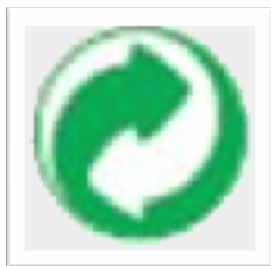
Source: Fakultet elektrotehnike i računarstva, Zagreb, **Održivi razvoj i zaštita okoliša**, nastavni materijali, [www.fer.hr/\\_download/repository/ORIZO\\_Eco\\_labeling.ppt](http://www.fer.hr/_download/repository/ORIZO_Eco_labeling.ppt), (accessed 4 February 2011).

"Green Dot" (Figure 3) represents a system of packaging waste care, which is accepted in 27 European countries. The label indicates that the manufacturer or importer has paid a fee for disposal of packaging and may be used only by those which sign a contract with a nationally licensed organization (licensed by Packaging Recovery Organization Europe).



**Figure 3**

The "Green Dot" label



Source: Turistička zajednica grada Županja, **Ekološke oznake i deklaracije**, [http://www.tz-zupanja.hr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=39](http://www.tz-zupanja.hr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=39), (accessed 29 February 2011).

The label in Figure 4 is one of the most common eco-label on the packaging. This label represents a simple message from producer to the consumer that empty product containers should be disposed of in waste bin, not in the environment. Often this sign is accompanied by the text: "Preserve the environment".

**Figure 4**

A sign about the need to preserve the environment



Source: Turistička zajednica grada Županja, **Ekološke oznake i deklaracije**, [http://www.tz-zupanja.hr/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=39](http://www.tz-zupanja.hr/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=39), (accessed 29 February 2011).

Croatia has joined a number of countries with the label "Environmentally Friendly" (Fig. 5). The system of awarding the environment protection labels in Croatia was established in 1993.

**Figure 5**

The Environmental Label - Environmentally Friendly



Source: Ministarstvo zaštite okoliša, prostornog uređenja i graditeljstva, **Prijatelj okoliša**, <http://www.mzopu.hr/doc/znPrijateljokolisa.pdf>, (accessed 4 January 2011).

Except the Environmentally Friendly label, Croatia has introduced a label “Eco-product” (Fig. 6). This label is awarded for environmental goods that are produced in accordance with the rules and regulations for organic production and which are professionally monitored and certified.

**Figure 6**

The label "Eco - product"



Source: Ministarstvo poljoprivrede, šumarstva i vodnog gospodarstva (2007): **Pravilnik o deklaraciji i označavanju ekoloških proizvoda**, [www.mps.hr/pdf/zakoni/Pravilnik\\_o\\_postupku\\_i\\_uvjetima\\_za\\_stjecanje\\_znaka\\_ekoloskog\\_proizvoda.pdf](http://www.mps.hr/pdf/zakoni/Pravilnik_o_postupku_i_uvjetima_za_stjecanje_znaka_ekoloskog_proizvoda.pdf), (accessed 18 February 2011).

It should also be pointed out that Croatia is a member of Global Ecolabelling Network, an international association for improvement, promotion and development of ecolabelling products and services.

For businesses ecological labels are a way of communication with consumers, but also a way of achieving competitive advantage. However an often underlined fact in recent years is that if this trend of the adoption of

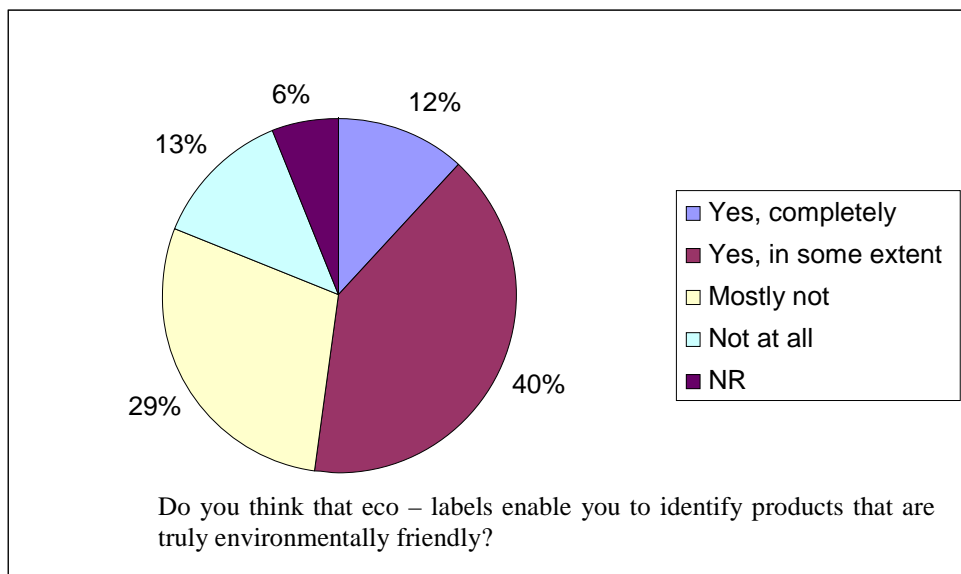
eco-labels continues, they will soon no longer represent a competitive advantage but the requirement of competitive parity or the condition for the product to be considered at all, primarily to reach distribution channels, but also to be selected by consumers.

Concerning consumers, we can say that it is a big challenge for them to recognize, understand and deal with many different labels that cover different aspects of sustainability issues. For that reason, in Germany a special web page ([www.label-online.de](http://www.label-online.de)) was established, which provides consumers with advice and evaluation of over 300 different systems of identification of environmental and social themes (Belz, Peattie, 2009, 184).

According to research conducted in European Union, there is a significant proportion of consumers who feel that they are not able to differentiate green products based on eco-labels. (Chart 1).

**Chart 1**

Ability to identify environmentally friendly products based on eco-label



Source: European Commission (2008): **Eurobarometer: Attitudes of European citizens towards the environment**, [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm), (accessed 18 March 2011).

Practice has shown that eco-labels awarded by independent institutions contribute greatly to credibility of environmental efforts of the economic entity. In addition to attracting environmentally conscious consumers, eco-labels open many important doors in distribution channels. Since that in many countries today, the so called vendors market is present, often they are the ones who decide whether a product is available on the shelf or not and what will be its position, taking into account consumers needs and demands. Since the retailers in context of global competition are faced with a large number of products from a large number of countries, they are unable to determine the ecological (un)acceptability of a product, and therefore rely on standardized eco-labels.

We can also expect some future progress when consumers are concerned. Contemporary consumers generally lack knowledge nor pay enough attention to eco-labels so that they might have a decisive impact on their purchasing decision, but coming generations are prepared from an early age for competently decision making based on environmental criteria by the education system and various non-formal education programs. Therefore eco-labels will have a more significant role in the future

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Multiple and multilateral benefits which derive from environmentally oriented marketing communications are unquestionable. However, the marketing communications as a part of green marketing, is faced with numerous challenges. Marketing communication is often been in the focus of criticism and we can say that it represents one of the most controversial areas in green marketing, primarily because of its role in promotion of unnecessary spending and the creation of consumer society, but also because of resources spent to convey messages to consumers. Also, perhaps even more important criticism is regarding the presentation of green products as over-simplified solutions for complex environmental problems. As a result the concept of "sustainable communication" is shaped, which is defined more broadly than the concept of green promotion.

Since trust and credibility are the key concepts in environmentally oriented communications, it is essential to ensure the consistency of messages sent by an economic entity. This consistency must be achieved along different dimensions. First, in the sense of uniting the elements of the promotion mix through a common, consistent message, and second in the sense of systematic coordination of the promotion mix elements. In this way we can reduce the

possibility of skepticism among consumers and creating a much worse starting position in an already complex process of meeting the demands of consumers and generally adjusting to the demands of the environmental paradigm and the concept of sustainable development.

Different studies have found that consumers are not particularly inclined to believe environmentally-oriented messages and statements which come from businesses themselves as opposed to claims which are backed by a renowned environmental organizations and independent research institutions. Consequently, specific forms of promotional activity in green marketing was developed, such as cause related marketing and standardized eco-labels. In both cases it is a sort of partnership between one or group of businesses and independent environmental organizations which brings benefits both for organizations involved, for the society and the environment.

Apart from increasingly frequent partnerships and the creation of so-called strategic alliances in this regard, we can conclude that in the future, modern communications technology will (continue) to have major impact on environmentally oriented communications. In particular, this applies to the internet and web technologies which are an effective platform for a true dialogue with consumers allowing them to get information when they want and allowing the economic entity to gather information, to create a base of knowledge about them and build long term relationships of trust and cooperation with a common ultimate goal consisting in achieving sustainable development.

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