



## MARKETING MATTERS



# Promoting Ecological Concerns

[By Aarti Nayudu]

Marketing has always been associated with money and profits. However, social and ecological concerns also occupy prominent places in some marketing plans. According to a *New York Times* report, Wal-Mart has pledged to cut the energy used by many of its products by 25 %. The message comes at a time when there is high concern for the environment on a global level.

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Wal-Mart, the report says, is already a promoter of energy-saving products like fluorescent light bulbs; the focus now would be on products such as air conditioners and televisions that consume a lot of electricity. The company's goal is to work together with its suppliers to make sure that all such products are energy efficient within a time frame of 25 years.

Understandably, the move is expected to benefit more than just Wal-Mart. The consequences will affect the corporation's entire supply chain. According to various online reports, the company plans to sell only Energy Star-rated air conditioners. "If we achieved our 25 percent goal just in the U.S., we would save enough electricity to power 3 million homes per year or the

equivalent of 10 million barrels of oil," said CEO Lee Scott in a speech to employees earlier this week. "We do not know exactly how we will get there. We do not even now if our suppliers can make things like hair dryers that use 25 percent less energy. But we do know that our approach works — to partner with suppliers, to help customers make better decisions, and to use our business model to drive out waste."

This news is sure to gladden the hearts of environmentally conscious individuals. Many advocates argue that improving the efficiency of appliances is a big step towards conserving energy. However, these highly efficient appliances also cost much more than conventional ones, making it difficult for everyone to afford them. But in his speech, Scott said that Wal-Mart is committed to selling energy-efficient products at prices low enough to make them affordable to Wal-Mart's working-class customers.

The retail giant has already had some past success in helping to save energy by reducing the use of diesel in company trucks and the electricity used in Wal-Mart stores. Happily, there are more such instances where success in business has also meant conservation of resources other than money.

For example, those who like to do their shopping online will now be able to do their bit for the environment. This is because the Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT) logo will be displayed on monitors, desktops, and laptops to inform shoppers about products that offer "green" features. An online report says that EPEAT will award bronze, silver, and gold ratings to products, depending on their energy efficiency and the sustainability of their designs. Equipment that is made from recycled and low toxicity ingredients will get high ratings.

So far, computers bought by federal departments need to be approved by the Department of Energy's Energy Star program.

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