

11th Annual GC3 Innovators Roundtable Session Proceedings

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SESSION VI

Effective Communication to Mainstream Green Chemistry

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Effective communication is key to helping green chemistry become mainstream. One of the five strategies in the GC3's Agenda to Mainstream Green Chemistry is to *Inform the Marketplace*, and the GC3 Retail Leadership Council and chemical manufacturer Joint Statement on Using Green Chemistry and Safer Alternatives lists communication as one of the five key areas of effort. This session looked at how to communicate about green chemistry to various audiences—consumers, within firms, and throughout the value chain—in order to drive demand for green chemistry materials and products.

Steve French, from the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI), framed the discussion by showing a series of slides with findings from consumer insight surveys that his company has been performing over the years. He stressed that, while this information is mostly from consumers, it has relevance to the entire value chain. He stated that consumers are increasingly more aware of the types of items they are trying to avoid: for example, between 2011 and 2015 there was a growth of 103% in awareness of parabens, 36% in sodium laurel sulfate, and 22% in phthalates. Consumer concern about chemicals in specific categories of products is increasing as well. Consumers also believe there is a link between chemicals in products and the rise of childhood diseases.

Effectiveness of a product and its safety are top drivers for consumer behavior; attributes around chemicals, such as low toxicity, are a secondary driver. Consumer purchases are mostly driven by information from friends and relatives and from receiving product samples, among other sources; social media ranks low as an influencer.

In the workplace, 41% of those currently employed want to know more about what their company is doing to be socially and environmentally sustainable.

Consumer decision-making starts with awareness, which transfers to a level of concern, and then leads to behavior change. It doesn't necessarily matter if a consumer understands an issue or not; if they believe it is a better choice to change their behavior, they may do so.

NMI categorizes consumers into the following categories:

- LOHAS: 22% of consumers, proactively environmental
- Naturalites: 21%, environmental strivers with some price sensitivity
- Drifters: 22%, want to be sustainable but need easy solutions
- Conventionals: 17%, are practical and conventional, looking for cost and environmental savings
- Unconcerneds: 18%, not involved with environmental issues

LOHAS purchasers drive products to the mainstream and influence others, they are most concerned with specific chemicals in products and are the early adopters. NMI calls the Naturalites, Drifters, and Conventionals the Sustainable Mainstream- this group wants to be more involved in sustainability, but there needs to be something in it for them; they feel somewhat empowered that they can make a difference.

Awareness of chemicals in products is increasing, and concern is up. Transparency is key, consumers want to know what is in their products- not just concerning chemicals, but everything.

The presentation was followed by a panel discussion with representation from a chemical company, a former bio-based chemical company start up executive, a UK-based retailer, and government.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Key Drivers for Safer Chemicals and Products:

- Understanding consumer demand is key information for chemical and product manufacturers to direct where innovation dollars go, and for building the case for new product ingredients.
- If a trusted brand gets exposed for using a chemical of concern or not being transparent, it can damage the brand.

Challenges for Implementation/Lessons Learned:

- Green chemistry is complex and hard to communicate in a simple, high level manner.
- How to find the best person to be responsible for communicating about green chemistry.
- Getting corporate executives to understand that green chemistry goes beyond chemical substitution.
- Consumers don't always understand the issues or have an understanding of basic chemistry, e.g., they want products that are "chemical-free."
- Consumers don't yet understand that chemicals are in articles as well as formulations. Because articles are not covered by REACH, it is harder to build the case within a company for getting rid of these chemicals of concern.
- Find a way to talk about issues in a way that matters to consumers or business.
- Consumers want transparency, but how that gets delivered matters.
- While it is important to be open and transparent, it is hard to communicate that improvement is not always linear- improvement in one green chemistry principle may mean lack of improvement in another.
- Lots of new ingredients enter the market: what should consumers be told about what changed and why?
- Consumers think that many of the ingredients in their products have been studied for safety by the federal government, but they haven't; this creates a cognitive dissonance when consumers find this out.
- Many aspects of behavior in our society are becoming motivated by fear – how to deal with this in terms of business in general, and chemicals in particular, is challenging.
- The disconnect between consumer focus on hazard and government focus on risk creates misunderstanding and distrust.
- Entire value chain relationships are based on trust; communicating about issues that customers care about, and to do so honestly, is key to building trust.
- The chemical industry in developing countries may not have the same commitment to the environment as those in more developed ones. The trust of the entire chemical industry can be eroded by an incident in another part of the world, including potentially hazardous counterfeit materials labeled with a mainstream company name.
- Consumers don't necessarily believe that green products work.

Helpful Actions to Advance Green Chemistry:

- Help consumers understand risk and rewards.
- Make the message simple; through focus groups, develop a message that the average person can understand and care about, while keeping the "wow" factor of new green chemistry innovations.
- Figure out how to tell our story of green chemistry well.

- Find the right vehicle for communication—back simple labels with further information that is obtainable; be transparent.
- Communicate about product benefits, not ingredients.
- Match up chemical company commitments about where they want their portfolio of products to be with what is relevant to customers; compare these metrics and figure out how to meet consumer needs across the value chain.
- Educate executives and buyers in companies about chemical issues.
- Make safer products that are better and work as well as their traditional counterparts.
- Talk about positive attributes of new products, avoid negatives and fear.
- Be open and honest.
- Create products that are less expensive and perform well to attract a large number of buyers.
- Focus within the entire value chain on product benefits- how they work and that they are safer.

Role for the GC3 in Helping to Advance Green Chemistry in This Area:

- Foster more discussion about what companies are doing to address consumer concerns, and develop metrics for ways to communicate.
- Help pool efforts to understand how to make it easier for customers to make safer choices.
- Aggregate messages that members can use throughout the value chain, create common language.
- Bring companies together in a work-group to identify key messages to tell the C-suite, B:B, purchasers, consumers.
- Crowd-source the issue—generate questions, find answers, bring people together, focusing mostly on communicating through the supply chain.
- Use information from the Presidential Green Chemistry Awards and successes to date in the supply chain to make the business case.