

## **Have you planted any trees lately?**

***Loyalty isn't just about price but also about emotion. But how important a role does a corporate ecological conscience play in building true customer loyalty?***

by Brian Woolf (August 31, 2008)

Loyalty is not all about price. It soars when retailers link emotionally to their customers through, for example, individual recognition or listening to their suggestions and then implementing them. Emotion is the true cement that bonds customers to their preferred retailers.

So I was intrigued by a new emotional path being built that will be very attractive to those who believe that corporations can, and should, play a part in making our world a better place to live in. Corporations, for example, who not only care about planting more trees to make our environment more eco-friendly but also provide a way for their customers to participate.

Imagine if you could add to your loyalty program the opportunity for customers to not just express their concern for our environment but do something about it.

Well, you now can. The idea is the brainchild of Kent Ragen. His company, EcoUnit ([www.ecounit.com](http://www.ecounit.com)), provides a way for customers to earn credits for environmentally positive actions and then use those credits in ways that make the world a greener place. (Perhaps Kent will become known as the person who triggered the greening of loyalty programs movement!)

### **How does it work?**

Quite simply. A retailer offers recognition (in the form of points or credits) when its environmentally-conscious customers bring their own reusable shopping bags rather use the store's plastic bags or when they buy those items around the store that are designated as environmentally friendly. These may be, for example, items grown locally (fewer pesticides

and less transportation), Compact Florescent Light bulbs (CFL's), or bulk foods (less packaging). Even online shopping and delivery (efficiency) can qualify.

Each environmentally-friendly action earns a specified eco-credit which is added to the eco-account (a subset of your loyalty program database) of each concerned customer. After their credits accumulate, customers choose how they will to use their earned credits to make our environment healthier. For example, one current option includes having a tree planted (thereby reducing the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere) for just 50 EcoUnit credits.

The average American emits 21 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere each year. Currently, the program is set up so that 250 EcoUnit credits can offset one ton of carbon dioxide. Therefore, any caring customer who earns 5,250 EcoUnit credits can become carbon neutral. Now that's a 21st century idea!

The 2008 BBMG Conscious Consumer Report found that nearly nine in ten Americans say the words "conscious consumer" describe them well and that they are more likely to buy from companies that manufacture energy efficient products, promote health and safety benefits, and commit to environmentally friendly practices. Our customers seem ready. Are we retailers ready?

Everyone wins with this program. The customer becomes even more environmentally conscious. The retailer enables the customer to do so and, in so doing, builds a stronger bond with her. And our world becomes environmentally healthier.

It's an idea worth thinking about.

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## **About the author...**

Brian Woolf is a global leader in loyalty marketing and has written three definitive works on the subject, *Measured Marketing: A Tool to Shape Food Store Strategy*, *Customer Specific Marketing*, and *Loyalty Marketing: The Second Act*. He devotes his time to helping retailers develop, critique and strengthen their loyalty programs.

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