

How Green is the Mouse?

A Look at the Use of Green Marketing in Walt Disney World to

Promote Environmental Policy and Standards

by

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor, Dr. William O'Brien, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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ABSTRACT

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My project "How Green is the Mouse?" analyses the ways in which the Disney Company utilizes various green marketing strategies in an effort to appeal to the growing number of eco-conscious consumers. My study examines different strategies of green marketing and evaluates the use of these strategies in relation to discussions of the "greenwash" concept. Examples of such strategies include *green selling*, when a company continues to manufacture a pre-existing product with changes only in marketing and not policy or output, and *green partnerships*, when a company undertakes a more eco-friendly appearance simply by collaborating with a well-known environmental organization. In this study, I investigate the various methods of green marketing utilized throughout the parks and other attraction areas of Walt Disney World, located near Orlando, Florida.

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"Physical America, the land itself, should be as dear to us all as our political heritage and our treasured way of life. Its preservation and the wise conservation of its renewable resources concerns every man, woman, and child whose possession it is."

--Walt Disney

Introduction

“Environmentalism” has become one of the hottest buzz words in American culture. It is an umbrella term that can take on a variety of meanings depending on the context in which it is used. For some people, it is a cause that inspires activism to promote change that is necessary if we hope to save the world from more damage than has already been done. For others it is a lifestyle change, to be proudly displayed through purchasing recycled paper and hybrid cars. For still others the phrase is synonymous with research and innovation, planning for the future and investigating ways to make the resources we have available last for generations to come. For many marketing executives, however, environmentalism is primarily considered an effective form of advertising utilized to reach out to the American public. Many companies have utilized “green marketing” initiatives to reach out to clients; pursuing marketing strategies that put emphasis on an environmental aspect of a particular product or the company that produces it (Laufer 2003). Large corporations in particular can tap into this marketing strategy with ease, utilizing their many media outlets to initiate this advertising technique in innovative new ways.

The Disney Company is one of the largest and most successful corporations in today's market (Wasko 2001). With products in areas as diverse as movies and television to clothing lines and home apparel, Disney serves as an excellent example of a company able to utilize its many resources to initiate green marketing strategies in many different advertising arenas. Beside the many standard media outlets available to Disney executives - magazines, radio, television ads- the company has another mechanism for utilizing green marketing that many other corporations do not: theme parks. Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world (Hiaasen 1998). The resort area is host to four theme parks, two water parks, champion golf courses, restaurants, hotels, and myriad shopping plazas. Each of these places serves as an opportunity for Disney executives to utilize green marketing strategies and try to prove to consumers that their company is environmentally friendly. By examining the different types of green marketing and analyzing the use of these strategies throughout Walt Disney World, I intend to show how the Disney Company has utilized these advertising tools in its Orlando parks to reach out to the growing number of eco-conscious consumers.

American Environmental Movement

Since the earliest settlers arrived on American soil several hundred years ago, citizens of this nation have endured a long and complicated relationship with the land on which we live. From colonization to the nineteenth century, the land and its valuable resources were thought to be endless (Steinberg 2002). Since

then, however, people have been burdened with a more realistic understanding of the limited amount of natural resources that are so heavily relied upon for supporting our everyday lives. Wilderness areas that once seemed so expansive have fallen victim to “progress” and growth. Relationships between people and land have changed over the years, as Americans became increasingly aware of the burden modernization has put on natural resources and eventually began to take action against such resource depletion. As these associations with the land have changed, environmental perspectives have changed along with them (Benton and Short 1999).

European settlers arrived in America on a land of seemingly boundless resources. Wilderness was vast, and innovative new ideas were plentiful (Steinberg 2002). This combination of new ideas for expansion and innovation, coupled with the available natural resources and technological advances necessary to turn these ideas into reality, led to mass expansion efforts that often took a devastating toll on the environment. In contrast with the native peoples who had once inhabited North America exclusively, European settlers were not concerned with taking from the land only what they needed to survive. Their lifestyle replaced the “use” values of Native Americans with the “exchange” values of an emerging capitalist economy (Benton and Short 1999). “Manifest destiny” became the prominent environmental discourse among Americans, particularly those promoting westward expansion (Pratt 1927). The movement was named for the numerous men and women who felt it was their God-given right to expand settlement across America and dominate the land which they

believed had been given to them. Trees were cut down to construct railroads and prairies were replaced by farms and cities. Hunters shot more game than could be consumed, leading to diminishing populations of many animals, prominently the American buffalo and passenger pigeons (Muth and Jamison 2000).

Resources were being consumed at a much faster rate than they could possibly be replenished, and still, over-consumption continued.

For many years this abuse of natural resources continued without opposition. Things began to change around the turn of the century, when some people, after seeing first-hand the damage done to this nation's natural resources, started realizing that the many benefits we enjoy from nature are not endless, and should be protected. Soon the preservation movement



Fig. 1. President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir discussed conservation efforts while visiting Yosemite National Park in 1903.

emerged, helped along greatly environmental writer, John Muir, who believed strongly that the precious natural resources of our country deserved to be cherished and saved, and preserving large expanses of natural habitat was the best way to achieve this goal (Steinberg 2002).

While many American citizens began to realize that the over-consumption taking place in our country was not healthy, many of these same people also felt that the strict preservation that some people campaigned for would be too much of a constraint on the nation's growing economy. When Theodore Roosevelt was elected our nation's twenty-sixth president in 1901, he became one of the first

well-known promoters of conservation, a movement that emphasizes maintaining natural places while also working towards sustainably using resources (Steinberg 2002). Starting in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth century the conservation and preservation movements greatly influenced the environmental perspectives of many Americans, and would continue to do so for decades to come (Benton and Short 1999).

Though environmental awareness among Americans was rising throughout the latter years of the nineteenth century, this awareness was largely confined to upper-class citizens. Many of the people who were fortunate enough to enjoy wilderness areas, and therefore understand the need to preserve and protect natural places, were those who could afford to travel to national parks and take time off work for recreation (Dunlap and Mertig 1992). This luxury hardly extended to middle- and lower-class families. Though this issue of urban environmentalism had plagued the United States since the 1800s (Foster 1999), it was not until the publication of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring in 1962 that environmental issues became topic of discussion for the average American family.

Carson's extensive research into the harmful effects of pesticides used in our country and the people who live in it largely influenced public opinion about government intervention in farming practices and eventually led to the outlawing of DDT, the most harmful and widely used pesticide at the time (Carson 1962). People began to realize that environmental issues had a direct and lasting influence on their lives, and were also being awakened to the irreparable damage

humans had already done to the environment. Carson says that “only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species, man, acquired significant power to alter the nature of this world,” and “the rapidity of change and the speed with which new situations are created follow the impetuous and heedless pace of man rather than the deliberate pace of nature” (Carson 1962). It was becoming more and more obvious that humans had been destroying this planet, and Americans began to take action.

The first Earth Day took place in 1970, and was organized by the Senator Gaylord Nelson as a means of allowing the American public to show support for the newly recognized National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which was signed into legislation in January of that same year (Nelson 1980). The event was celebrated by an estimated 20 million people as a “nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment” (Nelson 1980). For the first time, a mass grouping of Americans showed that they deeply cared for the environment, not simply so they can have and enjoy its resources in the future, but because the wild itself is deserving of the right to be protected. From that point on, environmentalism became the cause of the ordinary citizen.

As the American Environmental Movement was gaining momentum, another cultural institution was also expanding. Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida was opened to the public in 1971, just one year after Americans celebrated the first Earth Day. These two cultural phenomena were joined by another change in modern American life, a new kind of advertising strategy called green marketing.

The Disney Company

The Disney Company, which was initially founded as a small animation studio in late 1923, would grow to become one of the largest and most successful corporations worldwide (Fjellman 1992). The company was established by Walt Disney shortly after his move to Los Angeles from Kansas City in hopes of becoming a successful animator. As the months progressed he realized that his true talent was not drawing, but directing. He hired a staff of accomplished cartoonists to put onto paper the characters he envisioned. Walt also enlisted his older brother, Roy, to manage the financial business of the company, which was then referred to as the Disney Brothers Studio. Over subsequent years the studio produced a number of successful cartoons and earned praise from critics and fans alike, but Walt yearned for more. For years he had strived to revolutionize the animation industry and by the late 1920s he realized the best way to achieve this goal was to introduce sound to big-screen cartoons (Clark and Smith 1999). In November 1928, *Steamboat Willie* premiered in New York as the first cartoon in history to have synchronized sound. The feature was hugely successful, and its lead character leapt into immediate fame. A star was born: Mickey Mouse.

After his premiere in *Steamboat Willie*, Mickey Mouse was featured in a number of other cartoons, including *The Plow Boy*, *The Opry House*, and *The Jazz Fool* (Clark and Smith 1999). Soon Mickey was given his own cartoon strip, plush dolls, and eventually new sidekicks: Minnie Mouse, Pluto, Goofy, and Donald Duck. These main characters starred in numerous short cartoons and

eventually broke their way into longer features. Disney Brothers Studio and its owners were achieving world-wide fame, and soon Walt decided to undertake larger projects. Advancing technology in both the animation and sound departments allowed the studio to produce many more cartoons, and soon Mickey and his pals were no longer the only stars of the company.

Nine years after Mickey's birth, Disney again found huge success with the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. The movie's impressive premiere at Radio City Music Hall in New York City was only the beginning of its popularity. *Snow White's* success was capped in 1939 when Walt was honored with an Academy Award for the film (Clark and Smith 1999). Soon Walt realized the future success of his company lay in its ability to create more feature-length animated movies. During the early 1940s Disney found success with *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Dumbo*, and *Bambi*, all of which have since become beloved classics for many Disney fans.

The 1950s marked the premieres of several more Disney classics, including *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *Lady and the Tramp*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. By this point animation was not the only thing on Walt's mind, though. For years he had been toying with the idea of an amusement park, and in 1955 his dream to build "a family park where parents and children could have fun — together" became reality (Grover 1991). The opening of Disneyland in California brought still more success to the Disney brothers and the company to which they had devoted their lives. Its popularity among Americans residing on the West Coast sparked in Walt the idea that East Coasters needed a park of

their own. The company began work on what was then referred to only as the “Florida Project” (Foglesong 2001).

Though he played a crucial role in acquisition of the land and development of the park, Walt did not live to see its opening. Soon after his 65th birthday in 1966, Walt passed away after having battled several crippling health problems in previous months (Clark and Smith 1999). While the world mourned the loss of a man who had created so many beloved characters, his company pressed onward with the Florida Project. At its opening ceremony five years later, Roy Disney officially named the new park not Disney World, but *Walt* Disney World, as “a tribute to the philosophy and life of Walter Elias Disney... and to the talents, the dedication and the loyalty of the entire Disney organization that made Walt Disney’s dream come true” (Foglesong 2001).

Of the many philosophies of Walt Disney referenced by his brother in the Walt Disney World grand opening speech, environmentalism was prominent. During a time when few people had realized the necessity of conservation for the well-being of our planet, Walt spoke out to his many fans about the importance of conserving the valuable resources we are so privileged to enjoy. In a Public Service Announcement airing in the early 1960s, Walt says to fans:

“Hello, I’m Walt Disney. I want to say a word or two about National Wildlife Week. You’ve probably heard people talk about conservation. Well conservation isn’t just the business of a few people; it’s a matter that concerns all of us. It’s a science whose principles are written in the oldest code in the world: the laws of nature. The natural resources of our vast continent are not inexhaustible. But if we will use our riches wisely, if we

will protect our wildlife and preserve our lakes and streams, these things will last us for generations to come” (Disney).

It was clear even forty years ago, well before the trend of environmentalism became popular among most American consumers, that Walt Disney expressed care for the land and showed true interest in conservation effort, in both nationwide efforts and everyday life. As the years progressed, it became apparent that Walt was not alone in believing that conservation is necessary for our planet; this environmental mindset was sweeping the nation.

The gates to Walt Disney World in central Florida were opened to the public in 1971, just one year after environmentalists celebrated the first Earth Day and in the midst of the long-standing environmental movement by the American public. The 1970s in the United States were largely characterized by Americans’ affection for Disney characters, and also by growing concern for the planet on which we live and its diminishing resources. Do the two movements mesh together? How have decisions in development and marketing strategies on behalf of the Disney Company been influenced by the American environmental movement and trends in green marketing?

After the mass purchasing of land and construction projects of the 1960s, the years that followed were devoted to the development of new attractions, and formulating theme parks that would entice more visitors. One of the many tactics utilized by park developers was that of green marketing: making use of environmentally friendly attractions, slogans, and campaigns to attract the growing number of Americans who consider themselves eco-conscious and

earth-friendly (Steinberg 2002). Throughout the development of the many attractions, restaurants and hotels of the Walt Disney World Resort, green marketing strategies have been utilized to assure these eco-minded visitors that the parks they visit are run by an environmentally-minded corporation.

From the birth of the environmental movement in the 1970s through the current mindset of people wishing to have a positive impact on global climate crisis issues, Disney has seemingly “gone green” in a number of different ways that are each proudly displayed throughout its Florida parks. Its use of green marketing has become more prominent as the growing fad of environmentalism has continued to gain popularity. This sense of Disney’s self promotion as an environmental hero became prevalent in the development of Epcot, a park whose theme relies heavily on scientific strides toward a green future, and ultimately in the opening of Disney’s Animal Kingdom, a park with the overall theme of uniting the human and animal worlds. By using these green marketing tactics, Disney has been able to assure its many eco-conscious visitors that they are indeed making a positive impact on the world by supporting a company who is making influential strides toward a healthier environment.

New Kind of Advertising: Greenwashing

As the American environmental movement swept the nation in the late twentieth century, it impacted not only the mindset of the people living in this country but also the marketing strategies utilized by companies that rely on American consumerism to survive. Always eager to keep up with trends that

most appeal to the public, many companies began to promote their own environmentally-friendly initiatives in an attempt to draw in eco-conscious consumers. This new emphasis on a product's environmental status in advertising campaigns became known as "green marketing" (Menon and Menon 1997), and its popularity has continually soared through the years as the environmental problems of our nation cause increasing alarm in the minds of consumers. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, "much survey evidence from reputable search bodies was cited as identifying heightened environmental awareness, a growing consumer interest in green products, and a pronounced willingness to pay for green products" (Peattie and Crane 2005). Americans were willing to pay for environmental-friendliness, and companies responded to that demand.

Throughout the history of green marketing there have been some companies that utilize the tactic to show off the truly good deeds they have accomplished through policy and action, and others who take advantage of the public's trust and force a label of environmentalism that is not well deserved. This tactic of faking an environmental consciousness in advertising campaigns to appeal to consumers has been labeled "greenwashing," which is often "spurred by both public image demands and profit opportunities" (Donahue 2004). Green marketing has become apparent in several different varieties, from companies who utilize mostly images to portray their relationship with the environment to those who state their environmental policies explicitly in their ads, many

corporations have utilized one of the various types of green marketing strategies to gain a positive association between their product and the environment.

Perhaps the most famous example of a marketing campaign to feature greenwashing first appeared to the public in 1971 shortly after the first Earth Day celebration. A group of companies from varying industries came together to form the Keep America Beautiful coalition (KAB). The group ran a public service announcement stressing the importance of proper waste disposal and recycling, which featured the now- famous “Crying Indian” in its campaign; a Native American moved to tears when facing heaps of litter across American land. Ironically, the companies behind the campaign were comprised of some of the heaviest-polluters of the tobacco, solid waste and glass industries (Donahue 2004). Additionally, the KAB spent a great deal of its resources fighting against a national recycling bill, which would have put a burden on their yearly financial gains (Donahue 2004: 20). The reality of companies more concerned with their own bottom line than the condition of the environment is opposite of the image portrayed in the “Crying Indian” campaign, and thus serves as a perfect example of greenwashing.

Several strategies have been formulated by companies guilty of greenwashing to help aid their advertising endeavors and to fool consumers. Ken Peattie and Andrew Crane identify several tactics of green-seeming companies that aid in their false advertising campaigns (Peattie and Crane 2005: 361). The strategies utilize various advertising tactics, and each is slightly unique in its method of reaching consumers. Though there are several different ways of

achieving the final outcome, the goal of each of the strategies is the same: to convince consumers of a company's positive environmental impact and persuade them to purchase "green" products and services from the company.

One strategy is *Green Spinning*, in which companies go on the defensive about their environmental standards, focusing on managing their own reputations as opposed to altering company policies regarding environmental issues. Generally, the biggest problem with companies who utilize this tactic is that "public relations is but one aspect of marketing and companies basing their approach on this one element have clearly not embraced the philosophy of green marketing to any significant extent" (Peattie and Crane 2005: 363). It soon becomes apparent to anyone doing a bit of research that companies utilizing this strategy are interested more in defending themselves to the public than actually making positive change.

Some companies, desperately grasping at the eco-friendly consumer groups, utilize a method of green marketing termed *Compliance Marketing*. This tactic is used by companies "whose environmental initiatives do not go beyond responding to regulation" (Peattie and Crane 2005). Consumers are not often familiar with environmental legislation enforced upon these companies, and often do not recognize that many firms are bragging about positive environmental actions that they were forced to take. These organizations consider themselves green simply by complying with the law. "Clearly, compliance marketing is green marketing in a very conservative guise – the firm seeks to travel the path of least change and will only go beyond compliance when there is a very real expectation

of imminent legislature” (Peattie and Crane 2005: 364). This type of marketing has been particularly visible among car companies, whose products must meet certain mileage standards set in place by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has recently required that all cars meet the minimum fuel efficiency of 35 miles per gallon by 2020 (EPA 2007). Though this higher mileage is a legal requirement for all car companies, this feature is still marketed as a selling point for buyers and leaves consumers with a positive environmental image of the car company. Once again, this greenwashing guise becomes apparent to any consumer willing to do a bit of research. However, not many people find themselves able to spend time looking into which companies truly make a positive environmental difference and which are simply following legal guidelines and trying to appease the eco-conscious American public.

In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for consumers to decipher which companies are truly committing good environmental deeds and which have just hired clever advertising agencies to make it seem as though they have. “Hence, today’s consumers are required to be increasingly conscious of ecological issues and corporate alliances, or they risk unknowingly supporting greenwashers” (Donahue 2004: 20). However, not all instances of green marketing can immediately be labeled as greenwashing; many companies truly are working to create a positive environmental impact and utilize green marketing to share their good deeds with consumers.

In modern society, it has become equally important to boast about good deeds as to do them in the first place, and certainly any organization fighting to

make a positive difference is eager to share their work with the American public. Because the true do-gooders and imposters have become seemingly indistinguishable to the public eye, many major corporations have taken green marketing to heightened levels. Print ads and television commercials are no longer sufficient displays of environmental showmanship. The intensity of green marketing has increased as environmentalism continues to be a popular trend among consumers, and this becomes apparent when analyzing the measures taken by companies to convince the American public of their good environmental deeds.

Throughout the course of my study I have investigated several different green marketing strategies. Aside from green spinning and compliance marketing, there are several other eco-advertising alternatives utilized by the Disney Company throughout the parks and resorts of Walt Disney World in Central Florida to promote the company's own environmental policies and standards among park guests. "Green selling," "green harvesting" and partnerships are green marketing strategies investigated by Peattie and Crane that I will use in my analysis of the Disney Company. By recognizing the use of these advertising tactics and comparing the qualities of the general strategy to the specific instances in Walt Disney World, I first establish the presence of green marketing and then interpret each strategy's effect on environmentally conscious visitors. Finally, I compare the atmosphere of environmentalism created by green marketing tactics to the actual policies and actions of the

Disney Company to determine whether or not these green marketing uses serve as another example of a major corporation greenwashing the American public.

Throughout my investigation, I have drawn not only from written sources but also from my own experiences visiting Walt Disney World. The descriptions and photos of rides, restaurants and hotels utilized for my study come from my own personal visits to Walt Disney World unless otherwise stated.

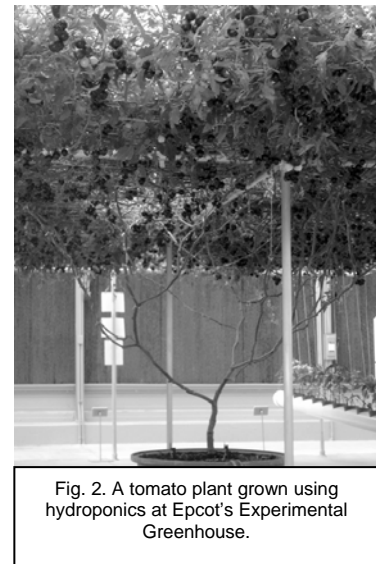
Green Marketing Strategy: *Green Selling*

The first Walt Disney World park to truly utilize green marketing strategies was Epcot. The park was opened to the public in 1982, over ten years after Magic Kingdom's grand opening, when attendance at Walt Disney World proved that its one park could hardly contain the growing number of daily guests (Clark and Smith 1999). Before his death, Walt had planned in detail his ideas for a utopian community to be called the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) (Fjellman 1992). Unlike in the Magic Kingdom, where rides are constructed to fit a whimsical, character-loving theme, Epcot's attractions began to take a more scientific and futuristic turn, often with an underlying message of environmental awareness. Even the park's most iconic attraction mimics the tone of many environmentalists who stress the importance of conserving the limited resources we have on our planet. The attraction takes its riders on a voyage through the history of communication, from the time when languages were first created to the modern age of high-speed internet connection. This journey takes place within a large, spherical structure,

mimicking the shape of our planet, and is called Spaceship Earth, which emphasizes that we are indeed on a planet of limited resources in the middle of a vast solar system. Throughout the years Epcot has become home to a number of other attractions focused around an environmental theme, and as the American environmental movement becomes more prominent these features have become more and more widespread. These rides and restaurants allow Disney the perfect opportunity to utilize green marketing strategies to advertise their environmental standards to the park's many visitors.

The first green marketing strategy I looked into for this investigation is green selling, in which a pre-existing green feature of a product or service is heavily advertised to appease eco-conscious consumers (King 2001). This advertising strategy is one of the simplest to adapt, because it requires little to no change in company action and relies only on clever marketing tactics to promote a pre-existing positive environmental action. This type of advertising is easily utilized by large companies in particular, who have access to a plethora of media outlets with which to display their good deeds. My investigation into this particular green marketing strategy is used to show that the Disney Company has used one of the simplest approaches to eco-advertising, adapting a marketing strategy that benefits the company's environmental image without requiring any permanent change in policy, output or action.

Green selling is prevalent among the rides and attractions in Epcot's Land Pavilion, an area of the park which hosts a variety of rides, shows, and restaurants all focused around the issue of environmentalism. The Land area is all confined to one large building, and each of the rides and restaurants found inside relate to this overall theme of human interaction with the environment. The cornerstone feature of the Land Pavilion is an experimental greenhouse, where a team of Disney scientists work to develop new methods of growing



food that are sustainable, practical and environmentally-friendly (Fan *et al* 2002). A “wide variety of hydroponic techniques, irrigation methods, and biological-control-based integrated pest management (IPM) strategies are used in the greenhouse operation” (Fan *et al* 2002: 161) and scientists utilize these methods to attempt the overall goal of growing healthy, sustainably food that can be harvested in any environment. This one attraction lends itself to green marketing initiatives throughout the rest of Epcot, all created from this one, pre-existing program.

Visitors can tour the greenhouse in several different ways; the first is by visiting one of the rides located in the Land Pavilion, the Living with the Land boat tour, which describes human relationships with the land and emphasizes the importance of sustainably growing food and other resources. Once aboard, riders are told:

“Of all the forces at work on the land, humans have had one of the most profound effects. The need to produce food for a growing world lead to enormous use, and sometimes overuse, of the land. In our search for more efficient ways to grow food we often fail to realize the impact of our methods. Today, we are learning to live with the land, discovering better ways to grow food that will ensure both human and environmental well being.”

Aside from receiving a quick recap of human civilization’s dependence on natural resources, the boat ride also gives visitors a peek into the greenhouse, where several experimental crops are on display. Melons grown in dry, sandy conditions, nine-pound lemons, experimental hydration systems, upward growing fruit vines and the world’s most abundant tomato tree are just a few of the experiments on display throughout the ride. This abundant show of accomplishments achieved with these experiments suggests to visitors that this greenhouse is truly a success.

Another way Disney allows visitors to experience the greenhouse is by participating in the Behind the Seeds tour. This walking tour is lead by a Disney scientist, and allows guests to view the greenhouse in close quarters. Participants can see firsthand how researchers are developing green growing technology and using eco-friendly methods of agriculture, including using natural pest control. While on the tour, each guest is given the opportunity to release a vial of lady bugs onto plant leaves as a form of natural pesticide; ladybugs are natural predators of insects that can be harmful to the fruits and vegetables that these plants produce. This interactive portion of the tour allows guests to not only

to partake in the care of a living, functional greenhouse, but also to embed in their minds the lengths to which Disney scientists will go to ensure environmental friendliness, as using natural pest control replaces the use of dangerous pesticides. Visitors are not likely to forget the image of Disney as an environmental hero after experiencing this positive initiative firsthand. The company achieves this outcome by simply adding an additional marketing element to a pre-existing attraction, making use of the green selling strategy.

Beside the boat ride and walking tour, Epcot has yet another way to advertise its green crops: restaurants. Many of the foods grown in the greenhouse are served at restaurants all around Epcot, particularly the catfish, which are harvested in the aquaculture lab. By advertising its own “green growing” practices with rides and restaurants, Disney promotes not only that Epcot is working toward environmental friendliness, but also ensures that visitors are aware of these practices and perceive the park as an eco-friendly environment. Similar to the ladybug release in the greenhouse, having guests consume food that is locally and sustainably grown allows them to feel as though they, along with Disney, are making a positive impact on the environment. By advertising the pre-existing good deeds of the greenhouse’s work in restaurants separate from the attraction, Disney makes good use of the green selling strategy.

Another way for Disney to utilize green selling is by promoting an environmental theme present in a popular animated film whose characters are already beloved to park visitors. This serves as a perfect example of the green

marketing strategy- creating a positive environmental association by relying on one pre-existing environmental theme, and not creating any new positive environmental initiatives or policies (King 2001). In the “Circle of Life” movie, also located in Epcot’s Land Pavilion, Timon and Pumba, of Disney’s popular movie “The Lion King,” decide to build a dam to block off areas of their savanna’s river and keep the water for their own personal use in order to create the Hakuna Matata Luxury Resort and Spa. Luckily enough for the rest of the animals who live at the Savannah, Simba, the movie’s main character, comes to show his friends the error of their ways. He explains that each creature should only take from the land what it needs to survive, and explains that one species has done much harm to the Earth by not abiding by this rule: humans. A quick rundown through the history of civilization recaps human dependence and eventual overuse of natural resources. But certainly the attraction cannot end on a sad note. Simba continues to explain that some humans have realized their mistakes and have begun to give back to the environment by recycling, conserving water, cleaning lakes, and stressing the importance of having everyone do their part, however small, to help the planet. In the end, Simba convinces his friends that having a monopoly over the savanna’s water supply is not in the best interest of the entire ecosystem. Timon and Pumba decide to remove the dam and allow the water to flow; after all, they are each part of the circle of life.

The “Circle of Life” attraction exemplifies Disney’s portrayal of itself as an environmental hero. When things go wrong in the ecosystem, Simba jumps in to save the day as only a Disney character could do, at least in the context of a

Disney attraction. Once again, visitors leave this attraction having had a pleasant and entertaining experience, while also keeping in mind the positive environmental message that Disney is sending not only to tourists in general, but specifically to children. While the attraction certainly portrays a message of environmental consciousness, the theme is not a new one. The plot is created from pre-existing characters and themes present in the popular “Lion King” movies. Once again, Disney has created a new environmentally-conscious attraction from a pre-existing positive initiative, making use of the green selling strategy.

These occurrences are just a sample of the many instances of green selling found throughout Walt Disney World. In the Land Pavilion in particular, it is important for the Disney Company to portray an environmentally friendly image that will give substance to the themes of the rides and restaurants of that particular attraction area. By putting an environmental spin on pre-existing attractions, restaurants and movie characters, the company is able to create a positive environmental association with its visitors without initiating any permanent policy change.

Green Marketing Strategy: *Partnerships*

Since the rise and expansion of the American Environmental Movement, many companies have been “increasingly partnering with environmental groups to find mutually beneficial solutions to environmental issues” (Wigder 2007).

These partnerships yield positive outcomes for both the companies seeking an

image of eco-friendliness and the environmental organizations that can benefit from the financial backing and power of a larger corporation.

One such example of green partnering occurred between US Computer Company Advance Software Applications (ASA) and the American Forestry Agency, “whereby ASA arranges for ten trees to be planted by the AFA in the name of each of its clients” (Mendelson and Polansky 1995: 7). Another example, one of the most widely-publicized partnerships, is that of McDonald’s and the Environmental Defense Fund. In 1990s, McDonald’s partnered with the well-known environmental organization by signing onto a one year agreement to monitor and reduce waste in its many restaurants throughout the United States (Freeman and Androif 2002). As a result of this highly publicized partnership, McDonald’s was ranked the number one most environmentally-friendly fast food chain by American consumers in a 1991 Gallup Pole (Freeman and Androif 2002).

Certainly McDonald’s is not the only major corporation that has partnered with an environmental organization to increase public approval. For instance, the Disney Company serves as half of another highly publicized green partnership with The Nature Conservancy, and has advertised this partnership throughout Walt Disney World’s Animal Kingdom.

In April of 1998, Walt Disney World’s fourth and largest theme park opened its gates to the public with one main goal – “to open people’s eyes to the beauty and wonder of nature and to foster an appreciation for the creatures that share our earth” (Clark and Smith 1999). The park’s scenery, attractions, dining

options, merchandise and advertising are all filled with rhetorical devices geared towards proving that the Animal Kingdom is not only a place for families to enjoy a vacation together, but also where environmental education and conservation are of high importance. The presence of environmental partnerships strengthens the park's eco-friendly atmosphere.

Upon entering the Animal Kingdom, guests first come face to face with the park's most iconic image: the Tree of Life. Disney describes the tree as a "swirling tapestry of 325 animal carvings" which "create a staggering spectacle that is truly a sight to behold" (Disney). The "tree" is actually a huge sculpture created "by more than a dozen artists" that stands 50 feet wide and 14 stories tall (Disney). By using this image of natural beauty to market their park, Disney has attempted to embed into visitors' minds that this is a place for celebrating the "circle of life," and not necessarily a place where you can simply visit to ride some roller coasters and go home with a few souvenirs. Visiting this park is meant to be an experience in environmental understanding and education, and this image is furthered by partnering with the Nature Conservancy for several of the park's attractions, particularly at the Conservation Station.

The first step visitors must take to visit Conservation Station is to board the Wildlife Express train, where they can find a behind-the-scenes look at how the animals are cared for at the park. Upon arriving at the Conservation Station, "the discovery has just begun as you visit the center of Disney's efforts to promote wildlife conservation awareness" (Disney). Before even entering the building,

guests are provided with tips from The Nature Conservancy for becoming better environmental stewards:

- Create Habitats! Create backyard habitats that provide food, shelter, water and places to rear young.
- Purchase wildlife-friendly products! Look for shade grown coffee, buy recycled paper.
- Reduce harmful pesticides, please! Try natural pest controls, such as ladybugs. Use safe insect controls, like mild soaps, for your garden.
- Compost! Turn yard waste into nutrient-rich mulch.

Once inside, visitors can tour preservation labs to view what Disney scientists are doing to help conserve and protect a variety of different species in different environments. Large-scale, global problems are described simply so that children (and their parents) can understand the issues, and tips are given about how visitors can make a difference. A variety of pamphlets and posters spanning many environmental issues are present here. A large map titled “Where is your Local Wildlife Refuge?” encourages visitors to locate and visit a wildlife refuge center near their own homes. An area titled “Rainforest Riches” features a quote from Harvard University entomologist, Edward O. Wilson:

“Destroying rainforests for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.”

The area informs visitors of the threat to rainforests through a poem:

“A place exploding
with green and thunder
Filled with secrets
and living wonder.

Where treetops tower
a hundred feet tall
And amazing wildlife
reigns over all.
Vast acres of rainforest
vanish each year
Then flowers, insects
and birds disappear.
This realm of riches
Let's strive to protect
It's a treasure we cannot
afford to neglect."

Focusing on a more local issue, the Conservation Station also features a poster about one of Florida's oldest native creatures. "Conserving the Gopher Tortoise" gives tips to local families about the proper treatment of gopher tortoises, which include putting your dog on a leash, providing native trees and shrubs in your backyard for suitable habitat, and observing the creatures from a safe distance to learn more about them.

While much of the information provided in the Conservation Station is geared toward informing visitors of local and global environmental issues, there is also plenty of information provided about the Disney Company itself and the positive



Fig. 3. Photo: Piccirillo, 2007.

environmental projects they have undertaken. A large sign greeting visitors upon entering the conservation area brand the message "Cast get involved. Disney's Animal Kingdom cast is helping to save wildlife through conservation, fieldwork,

emergency rescues, scientific studies, and public education.” Once inside, many more examples of the company’s green initiatives are hung like trophies to help prove to visitors that Disney truly is a company of eco-heroes. Among these plaques and posters is a presentation explaining Disney’s partnership with The Nature Conservancy, which tells visitors that:

“The Disney Wilderness Preserve, owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy, is the result of an innovative partnership among private business, government, and environmental organizations. In a precedent-setting move, Walt Disney World opened a whole new chapter in ecosystem protection and management. And showed others the way to the preservation of our natural systems through off-site mitigation. In an ongoing commitment to the environment, Walt Disney World purchased 8,500 acres of environmentally sensitive land and donated them to The Nature Conservancy. Disney is committed to restoring and rehabilitating this land and helping to protect one of the largest concentrations of nesting bald eagles in the Southeast. This living laboratory, The Disney Wilderness Preserve, is an innovative approach to ecosystem protection and management; an approach that embraces natural systems as a whole. Only through preservation can we look forward to the future” (Disney).

By donating land to the Nature Conservancy and initiating a high-profile partnership, the Disney Company gained a valuable asset in the arena of green marketing without having to initiate any permanent policy changes. The land donation was a one-time event that led to a positive association that is visible to the approximately twenty-five million guests who visit Disney World each year (Disney). By working with the Nature Conservancy and displaying the fruits of

this high-profile partnership, Disney makes use of this effective green marketing strategy.

Green Marketing Strategy: *Green Harvesting*

One of the most popular green marketing strategies among companies has been “green harvesting,” which emphasizes financial gain not through boosted sales, but by utilizing environmental policies that help save money (King 2001). “Short-term profit has remained the key objective of many firms and marketing managers. Not surprisingly then, when it started to become apparent that greening could create cost savings, many marketers became enthusiastic about the environment” (Peattie and Crane 2005: 362). This enthusiasm for change often comes in the form of very conservative policy modifications: adjust the thermostat a few degrees, turn off lights and computer monitors when leaving a room, reuse the back side of paper. In a typical office this policy adjustment will make for a small environmental impact that will simultaneously provide positive press while saving the company money on energy-related expenses. Larger companies find even more benefits with this program than smaller ones because their energy expenses are so much greater, and cutting back even just a small amount can add up to major financial savings. Disney is one such company that has utilized this tactic to their advantage, extending their energy-saving campaign past office employees and including visiting guests, via the Florida Green Lodging Program.

The Florida Green Lodging program was first established in 2004 by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The program was developed with “the intent of recognizing and rewarding environmentally conscientious lodging facilities in the state” (FDEP 2007). Because travel is such an important source of income for Florida’s economy, using the many hotels and resorts throughout the state as examples of eco-friendliness has a significant positive impact on the environmental image of the state as a whole. Among the benefits listed for hotels in compliance with the program are protecting Florida’s resources, saving money and garnering good publicity. Visitors staying in these hotels can expect to see “recycling in guest rooms, the lobby, vending or eating areas; compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL’s) throughout the hotel; low flow toilets, showerheads and faucets; linen and/or towel reuse programs; the use of “green” cleaners and Energy Star rated electronics and appliances” (FDEP 2007).

Of the nineteen Disney hotels on Walt Disney World property, ten are designated Green Lodging hotels: Animal Kingdom Lodge, BoardWalk Inn, Caribbean Beach Resort, Contemporary Resort, Coronado Springs Resort, Old Key West Resort, Pop Century Resort, Port Orleans French Quarter Resort, Port Orleans Riverside Resort, and Saratoga Springs Resort and Spa (Disney) . These hotels account for over one fifth of all

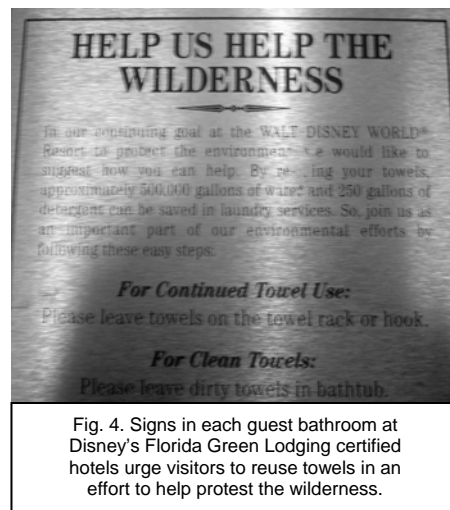


Fig. 4. Signs in each guest bathroom at Disney’s Florida Green Lodging certified hotels urge visitors to reuse towels in an effort to help protect the wilderness.

Green Lodging hotels in the state, which currently has 48 hotels participating in the program (FDEP 2007). This certainly is an impressive statistic, one that is simultaneously saving the company money and also has a positive impact on visitors, leaving guests with a positive environmental association of the hotel and the Disney Company.

To investigate the level of environmental friendliness necessary to become a certified Green Lodging hotel, I looked into the application process and requirements from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection website. There are several steps that must be taken to initiate the process, including identifying an environmental coordinator on staff, creating a “green team,” conducting an environmental assessment, establish goals and identifying possible environmental improvements, and continuing to monitor the environmental progress of the establishment throughout the years after joining the program (FDEP 2007). Once these processes are complete the hotel may fill out an eleven page application that specifies required environmental practices necessary to receive a one-, two-, or three-palm certification. The categories for improvement are communication, water conservation, energy efficiency, waste reduction, and clean air policies, and each category has guidelines specifying how many of the listed practices must be followed. In the energy efficiency category, for example, a minimum of two of the following efforts must be implemented:

- Use Energy Star-rated equipment (other than lighting).
- Use programmable thermostats.

- Use sensor lighting indoor/outdoor.
 - Use high energy efficient lighting (must be front-of-house).
 - Use a computerized Energy Management System.
 - Support green power: Either install renewable energy generating equipment (e.g. solar water heating system), purchase at least 5% green power through local utility, or purchase green tags (renewable energy certificates) from a green power generation source in Florida.
- (FDEP 2007)

Once all the necessary actions have been taken, and the management has signed the commitment statement, the hotel may then schedule an environmental assessment with one of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's trained evaluators. Upon completion of this application and inspection process, the hotel's Green Lodging Certification become official.

The standards set in place by the Florida Green Lodging Certification Program are certainly beneficial steps towards eco-friendliness in hotels for a state whose economy relies so heavily on tourism, and also work toward reducing the hotel's water and electricity bills each month, saving the company money. The creators of this program recognize the motives behind companies who choose to initiate the program's standards:

"Hotels will seek *Florida Green Lodge* certification for different reasons. Some will implement environmental improvements to reduce operating costs. Others will recognize an opportunity to generate additional revenue by attracting environmentally-conscious business travelers, meeting planners and vacationing families. And yet others will regard it as simply the right thing to do" (FDEP 2007).

By asking visitors to reuse towels and linens between washing, adjusting the thermostat a few degrees, and purchasing Energy Star appliances, hotels involved in the Green Lodging program are promoting their own positive environmental impact while saving money. This win-win situation has made green harvesting one of the most popular forms of green marketing, and this example certainly fits the description of the green marketing strategy highlighted by Peattie and Krane. The Disney Company has exhibited “deep cultural fixations on cost reduction, short-term profitability, and shareholder value” that characterize companies reliant upon this green marketing strategy (Peattie and Krane 2005).

Analysis/ Conclusion

In looking at these three examples- green selling, green harvesting and partnerships- it is apparent that the Disney Company has utilized green marketing strategies throughout its parks of Walt Disney World. The question remains as to whether or not these examples of environmental showmanship are well deserved, or if this is merely another example of a large corporation pulling the “greenwash” blanket over the eyes of the American public.

Through its partnership with the Nature Conservancy, the Disney Company boasts of its 7,500 acre land donation. This land accounts for over 25% of Disney World’s 25,000 acre property, a fact which is not readily shared with the public in the partnership display in Animal Kingdom (Braun 2003). By setting aside this land, Disney is not only preserving a portion of a natural Florida

ecosystem, the company is also giving up a possible financial gain that might be attained through expansion upon the land. If it had not been deemed a nature conservancy, the 7,500 acres might otherwise have been used to create a new theme park, hotel, parking area, or any number of other tourist areas that would benefit the company financially. In this instance, there is substance behind the green marketing, and Disney's partnership with the Nature Conservancy is truly beneficial for the environment, not just an example of greenwashing.

With use of green harvesting, the Disney Company uses the Florida Green Lodging Program to promote resource conservation among guests staying at resorts on Walt Disney World property. This yields financial savings for the company while promoting an atmosphere of environmental friendliness. While participation in this program is heavily promoted by the company, its own internal policies regarding resource conservation are not made widely known to the public. Through its Environmentality Program, Disney encourages visitors and employees alike to maintain an "attitude and commitment to think and act with the environment in mind" (Disney). Through the company's environmentality webpage, guests can view Disney's environmental policies and guidelines for conducting business and daily affairs. Water and energy conservation, environmental impact, greenhouse gas emissions and waste minimization are discussed here, along with a handful of other environmental guidelines enforced by the company's Environmental Policy Department. For example, "promote wildlife and habitat conservation through partnerships with the scientific and academic communities," "integrate natural resource conservation in all Disney's

planning, development and operations activities” and “include water and energy management as an integral part of all planning for future projects” are just some of the broader guidelines enforced by the company, with more detailed examples listed for each specific environmental initiative (Disney). Once again, the green marketing strategy used does actually reflect the company’s actions. The result is a reputation for resource conservation that accurately reflects Disney’s policies, and is not simply another instance of greenwashing.

When it comes to examining these instances of green washing in Walt Disney World, it seems that the positive reputation promoted through green selling, green harvesting and partnerships is well deserved. While these three examples cannot speak for each instance of green marketing throughout Walt Disney World, they do provide evidence to suggest that the Disney Company has earned the right to utilize green marketing, and has not been “greenwashing” the American public. However, the research done for this investigation covers only a small portion of the issues that make up the environmentality record of the Disney Company. Critics point out many negative impacts upon the environment by the large corporation, among them the widespread development of Central Florida and the company’s choice to invest in coal technologies (United Press International, 2007).

Before the development of Disney World, land in Central Florida was widely undeveloped and served as a natural scenic landscape (Foglesong 2001). When Walt Disney decided to build his theme park in this secluded area of the country, he impacted not only the thousands of acres upon which the park

would be built, but also much of the surrounding area. With the development of Walt Disney World came housing communities for the park's many employees, businesses and schools, and eventually many more tourist attractions. Now the Orlando area is host to a large number of hotels, restaurants, golf courses, water and amusement parks in addition to the many on-site amenities of the Disney World complex. What was once a natural Florida ecosystem now stands as a testament to humans' desire to be entertained. Blame for the devastation upon natural places in Central Florida is often placed on the Disney Company, for initiating the domino effect that led to mass expansion of the area. Many critics claim that this move led to such devastation upon the Florida ecosystem that the Disney Company can never regain a positive environmental image (Fjellman 1992).

Aside from its original mass land purchase in the 1960s, there are also much more recent environmental issues associated with the Disney Company that contribute to their negative reputation among environmentalists. In the summer of 2007, plans to build a new coal plant in Taylor County, Florida were rejected by the Florida Public Service Commission (United Press International 2007). The power plant's intended use was to provide Walt Disney World with up to one fourth of its future energy use, approximately 800 megawatts of power (United Press International 2007). Many critics question the legitimacy of the Disney Company's Environmental Policy Department when the corporation was hoping to invest its resources into purchasing energy from a coal factory, which

produces harmful greenhouse gases, instead of investing in more clean energy solutions.

In the course of my investigation, I looked into three examples of green marketing in Walt Disney World and discovered that there appears to be actual substance behind these marketing endeavors, not just an attempt to greenwash the American public by Disney executives. Though these three examples do show some positive correlation between the Disney Company's policies and relations to the environment, they are just a few of the many issues to be considered when looking into the environmental standing of the Disney company. Certainly there are both positive efforts, like the major land conservation area in Central Florida, and actions that have had negative environmental impacts, like partnering with coal companies. It seems the only way for consumers to invest only in companies whose environmental standards truly reflect their marketing strategies is through policy investigation and research.

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Figures



Figure 1. President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir discussed conservation efforts while visiting Yosemite National Park in 1903.
Photo: www.nps.gov.



Figure 2. A tomato plant grown using hydroponics at Epcot's Experimental Greenhouse. Photo: Piccirillo, 2007.

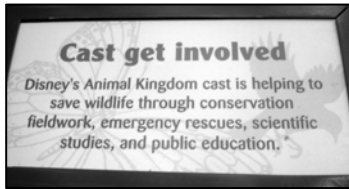


Figure 3. Sign at Disney's Animal Kingdom.
Photo: Piccirillo, 2007.



Figure 4. Signs in each guest bathroom at Disney's Florida Green Lodging certified hotels urge visitors to reuse towels in an effort to help protect the wilderness.
Photo: Piccirillo, 2007.