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Campaign Spotlight: Hewlett-Packard Promotes High-Tech Recycling

By JANE L. LEVERE

Hewlett-Packard is tweaking the \$400 million branding campaign it introduced last November by running an ad promoting its personal computer recycling program rather than one of its corporate customers.

Part of the continuing "Everything is possible" campaign, which has featured Hewlett-Packard customers like DreamWorks, FTD and Amazon.com, the new ad first appeared last week in The Wall Street Journal and will run indefinitely in other news and business publications.

Established 11 years ago, Hewlett-Packard's recycling program was praised in a report issued last month by the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, an environmental group. The coalition commended Hewlett-Packard -- which has recycling plants in Roseville, Calif., and LaVergne, Tenn., and plans to open others in Toronto and Europe -- for using "state of the art" practices.

The coalition also criticized Dell's recycling program, which employed prisoners. Shortly after the report was issued, Dell canceled its contract with Unicor, a branch of the Federal Bureau of Prisons that hires prisoners for electronics recycling, and replaced it with two other companies.

Hewlett-Packard's new ad, which runs a full page in color, shows a computer monitor that gradually is transformed into a red tricycle.

With a headline that says, "Yesterday's computers, tomorrow's tricycles," the copy reads, "By 2010, an estimated 350 million outdated computers will end up in landfills worldwide. HP began its first PC recycling program 11 years ago. Today we process 6.5 million pounds of product each month globally, turning old PC's into material that can be used to make new PCS, car parts and even bright red tricycles."

The ad -- which will run indefinitely in publications like Time, Newsweek, The Economist, Forbes and Fortune -- also lists the URL of Hewlett-Packard's Web site that tells computer hardware owners how to recycle their equipment.

According to Gary Elliott, Hewlett-Packard's vice president of global branding and marketing communications, the company initially recycled only its own computer equipment; it began offering these services to its corporate customers and to consumers three years ago.

"We look at this as a complete chain of interaction for customer satisfaction," he said, adding, "We do this because it's something we care about doing. We set the bar for recycling. We're not doing this because we have to, but because we want to."

Besides running the new ad, Hewlett-Packard has promoted its recycling efforts in other ways: In April, with the Starbucks Coffee Company and Best Buy, it held Earth Day events in Seattle and New York where consumers could bring in equipment to be recycled. And it is currently

running a promotion that gives consumers an e-coupon redeemable for up to \$50 on the purchase of HP equipment when they recycle through Hewlett-Packard.

Steve Simpson, partner and creative director of Hewlett-Packard's ad agency, Goodby, Silverstein & Partners in San Francisco, a unit of Omnicom, said the new ad has two purposes: to tell the story of the company's "technology innovation and state-of-the-art facilities" and to increase public awareness of recycling.

"The ad has the feel of ecology posters from the 1970's," he said. "It's a call to action to just do this. It's very telegraphic visually, simple. It's easy to get without reading the body copy. You see the monitor morph into something entirely different."

Mr. Elliott said the ad would appear now only in the United States and in other countries during Hewlett-Packard's fiscal fourth quarter, which ends Oct. 31.

Paul Saffo, a director of the Institute for the Future, a Menlo Park, Calif., think tank, said Hewlett-Packard's new ad follows the tradition of the "HP way" established by the company's founders, William Hewlett and David Packard, who he said had a "long-term commitment to environmental sustainability."

"HP is going to put pressure on other computer manufacturers to similarly respond," he said. "That's a good thing; it helps keep the recycling ball going faster."

He added, "I'm delighted they're doing an ad like this as part of their branding."

And he noted that recycling "is a practice the entire electronics industry has to adopt. It has to close the recycling loop, because the prospect of what this stuff does to landfills is terrifying."

Tim Bjarin, a computer industry analyst based in San Jose, said that not only Hewlett-Packard but also Dell and I.B.M. have recycling programs, which he said all use to show they are "good citizens."

He said these manufacturers are concerned the government might become more aggressive in mandating recycling, and that environmentalists could file class-action suits against them for being "irresponsible."

"While there have been no lawsuits in this space, the way you deal with it, you take the offensive," he said. "I believe these companies are taking this kind of offensive position to literally make sure no suit of this kind is filed by the government or environmentalists. They're taking the offensive early on in order to preempt" legal action, he said.