

By BRR senior Writer Mike Hodge – 3 December 2008

# A New Respect for Nature

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# A New Respect for Nature:

## GOOD REASONS TO EMBRACE THE SWING TO NATURE

**Business and nature can seem awkward bedfellows. But in the current 'greenified' atmosphere, it's not as polarised as some of the protagonists would have you believe. Business is not the embodiment of rampant swaggering consumerism any more than the green faction are all hair, hugs, muslin and sandals.**

For one thing, businesses these days can't afford to be complacent. Their consumers are increasingly demanding environmental, sustainable and broader ethical integrity in the products and services they purchase. So whether businesses have a natural affinity with the green cause or not, the groundswell is sufficiently advanced that they have little option but to bolster this aspect of their business.

Many, it's true, have tried a little 'greenwashing' to create a veneer of respectability. But this is a rapidly disappearing option because savvy consumers, with the aid of internet-based communications, are rapidly seeing through it and openly talking about it.

Market researchers and brand advisors are also telling businesses that the needs and wants of their consumers have taken a 'natural' turn. For the first time in human history more than half the world's population now lives in cities. To many of these urbanites, the more they are caught in the daily haze, hustle and noise, the more they value the counterpoint of nature.

In western markets particularly, the green themes of sustainability, naturalness, environmental integrity and product renewal are playing an active part in purchasing decisions. For food and health products especially, consumers increasingly want first-hand knowledge of efficacy along the entire value chain from origin to final purchase.

**Sustainability, as many businesses have found, is a complex moving target. Companies are being challenged to apply higher standards of truthfulness. The more astute ones are going beyond image marketing to creating truly sustainable brands with strong competitive advantage.**

Recent research in the US and UK shows that people expect and are willing to pay a bit more for green options because they consider them better quality. And there are 60% plus who would welcome a convenient substitute that happens to be green. 80% say it is important that companies they buy from are environmentally friendly. A green agenda is no longer on the lunatic fringe for most people.

Nature is also entering the business bloodstream in other ways. In the rapid beating hearts of today's major cities, the monuments to human cleverness are all too evident. But one brief glimpse through a microscope at an everyday living organism reveals a complexity and precision that makes human ingenuity pale by comparison. Not surprisingly after three billion years of R&D, nature has managed to hone an innate wisdom and cleverness that we are only now beginning to grasp.

Nature's understated intelligence is everywhere you look. Imaginative by necessity, nature has already solved many of the problems we are grappling with in the modern world. Animals, plants, and microbes are consummate engineers. They have found what works, what is appropriate, and most important, what lasts here on Earth.

**This is the real news of bio-mimicry: after 3.8 billion years of research and development, failures are fossils — what surrounds us is the secret to survival. The conscious emulation of life's genius is a survival strategy for the human race, a path to a sustainable future. Bio-mimicry introduces an era based not on what we can extract from the natural world, but what we can learn from it. Sensible businesses are taking note and tailoring their thinking accordingly.**