

Consumer First

- Environmental Research Summary

Consumer attitudes and awareness of green issues and energy

As part of our Consumer First initiative we have put together this factsheet outlining some of the latest research drawn from our own studies and from external sources. It highlights consumers' attitudes towards the green agenda and the confusion that they feel. It also recognises some of the hurdles that organisations need to overcome to engage the customer in this area of the market.

More people are becoming accepting of the reality of climate change, the impact humans are having on the planet and the realisation that something needs to be done to improve our natural environment. But what can we actually do, who exactly is responsible for making change happen and how much do we think it will cost us?

Key Facts

There is a general belief that a personal responsibility exists. 53 percent disagree with the statement "it's the government's job to tackle climate change, not mine as an individual".

67 percent of people agree that "humans are capable of finding ways to overcome the world's environmental problems" (2007)

Britons are the worst energy wasters in Europe with 71 percent admitting they leave electrical appliances on standby (2006)

Nuclear energy is still a major sticking point for a lot of customers in relation to low carbon tariffs

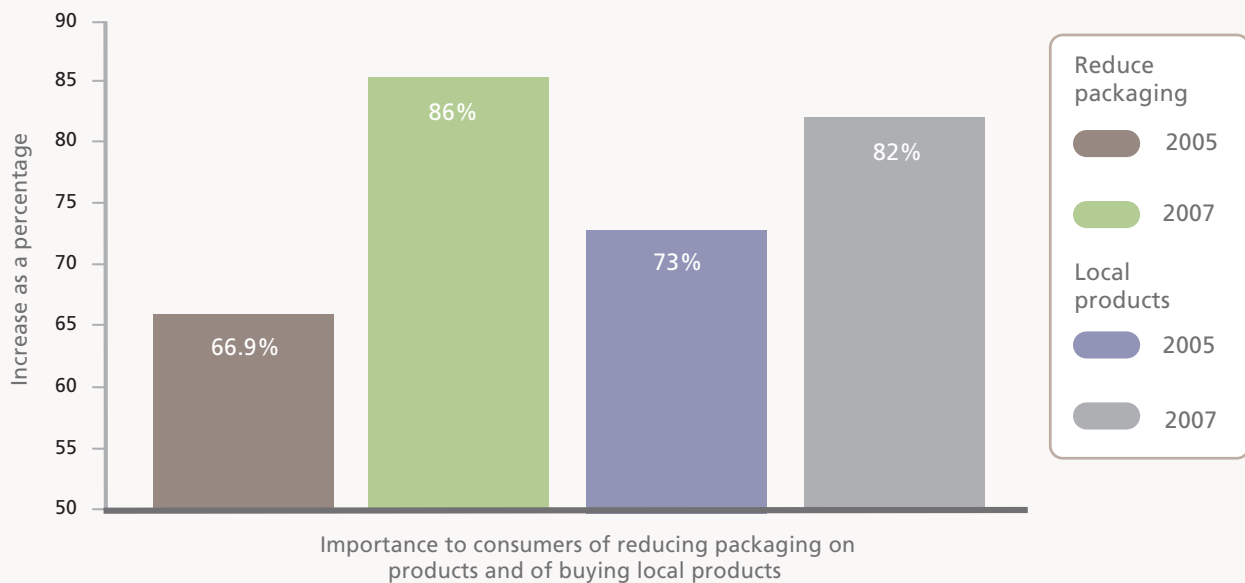
Overall awareness is increasing

Research carried out by Henley Centre Headlightvision in 2007 found that 62 percent of British adults agree that they had become more environmentally aware during the previous 12 months.²

There is evidence of an increasing awareness of seasonal and weather changes. Consumers believe that there is an obvious link to climate change caused by our individual lifestyle. There is also less denial that climate change is man made.¹

Only a quarter of people agreed with a range of non-environmentally friendly statements such as, "I don't believe my behaviour and everyday lifestyle contribute to climate change", or, "The environment is a low priority for me compared with a lot of other things in my life". 18 percent agreed that "It takes too much effort to do things that are environmentally friendly".³

Comparison of environmental awareness 2005 to 2007²



Responsibility to change

There is a widespread belief that action is needed. 61 percent disagree with the statement that "changing our lifestyles will make no difference to climate change...".¹



But there is confusion about **who** should take the lead

85 percent believe that businesses should be doing more to tackle climate change.¹

Consumers have increasing appetite for government to take bad choices away (e.g. ban four wheel drive vehicles in cities, only allow the manufacture of energy efficient light bulbs.)¹

There is a general willingness amongst most customers to pay for government implemented energy efficient measures to the best of the individual's ability.⁷

There is a general belief that a personal responsibility exists. 53 percent disagree with the statement "it's the government's job to tackle climate change, not mine as an individual".¹

67 percent of people agreed that "humans are capable of finding ways to overcome the world's environmental problems". However, only 19 percent agreed that "Scientists will find a solution to global warming without people having to make big changes to their lifestyles". A similar proportion, 17 per cent, agreed that "Climate change is beyond control – it's too late to do anything about it".³

Barriers to change or barriers to act?

Many consumers do not make the links between their own lifestyles, energy consumption and the environment. Britons are the worst energy wasters in Europe with 71 percent admitting they leave electrical appliances on standby.⁶

There is also an issue of trust. Consumers don't know what they are getting from a green energy tariff and don't trust the suppliers' marketing of "green energy". There is no independent scrutiny telling them exactly what is green and how green it is. People are worried that they (consumers) won't make any difference.⁴

There is poor understanding of the science involved, and little sense of priority actions, (what is most important e.g. is it worse to fly or drive to Scotland?)

Increasing cynicism of "greenwash" (the perception of consumers that they are being misled regarding the environmental issues or the environmental benefits of a product or service).

Tension between intervention and the nanny state (e.g. 13 per cent of customers think the government should do nothing about plastic bag usage, 81 per cent think they should). Enforcement of environmental action invokes negative responses (enforced recycling).

Many feel it is too expensive to act, particularly in the current economic climate.

January 2007

14 per cent of people believed the economy was the most important issue.

30 per cent believed the environment was the most important.

This view changed with the onset of the "credit crunch".

March 2008

25 percent of people believed the economy was the most important issue.

7 percent believed the environment was the most important.

Low levels of awareness of some key developments, e.g. renewables, carbon capture and storage, as well as broader policy context e.g. Climate Change Bill.¹

There is a perception that a barrier to the uptake of green tariffs is the technology issue: many customers do not believe the optimum renewable technology has been established beyond question.⁴

Consumer perceptions relating to energy and the environment¹

Reasons for not saving energy

percentage agreeing with each statement

61% do enough already

50% not aware of energy used

49% believe that upfront investment is too high

46% perceive there to be no incentive from the government



Consumer perceptions relating to energy and the environment continued

Nuclear energy is still a major sticking point for a lot of customers in relation to low carbon tariffs⁴

70 percent of European consumers agree that they do a lot to reduce consumption at home, yet on average undertake 1.4 energy saving actions out of a list of six.¹

General belief of responsibility for future generation, some customers believe they should be on a Green Tariff. But Green Tariffs need to be legitimised by government promotion, not for commercial profit or competitive choice (a choice which some customers believe is based on incomplete information).⁴



What actions do consumers think they can take to limit climate change?⁶

44% Recycle more

28% Drive less

14% Reduce electricity consumption

7% Reduce heating at home

If you would like to learn more about Consumer First, then please contact the team directly.

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Sources

1 - Opinion Leader. Climate Change, Latest insights into public attitudes. April 2008

2 - Henley Centre HeadlightVision. Green Consumer, Green Citizen. 2007

3 - Defra/ National Statistics. 2007 Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Toward the Environment. August 2007

4 - Mori. Consumers' Views on Renewable and Low Carbon Supply Tariffs. Research Study Conducted for Ofgem. January 2008

5 - ICM Research, March 2007

6 - Department of Trade and Industry (2006) Energy - its impact on the environment and society

7 - Stimulating World - Consumer Attitudes to Energy and Environmental Issues. 2007