

Embargoed until April 14

Consumers prioritize sustainability, despite recession: *Planet Care* survey

Eight in ten Canadians see corporations as lagging in sustainable practices.

Toronto, April 14, 2010 – Canada's economic troubles have not dampened consumer enthusiasm for companies that demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability, despite the potential for higher prices, according to a comprehensive consumer study of attitudes about sustainability.

Called *Planet Care*[®], the survey found that the importance placed upon sustainability issues by consumers has actually grown since the recession's start.

Nine in ten consumers (91%) see sustainability issues as being just as important as before the recession and 19 per cent believe that sustainable business practices are now even more important. Only nine per cent believe sustainable development is less important than it was prior to the economic downturn.

The *Planet Care*[®] study suggests that consumer support for sustainability is highly resilient and likely to increase in importance as the recovery quickens and consumers become less distracted by short term economic worries.

"It seems that one of the less obvious side effects of the recession's harshness is a widespread value shift towards a more sustainable way of living," says John Ball, Chief Operating Officer for Ilop North America, the research firm that conducted the study. "Consumers also have high expectations of corporations as key players in advancing sustainability, and nearly two thirds of Canadians want companies to step up and play a leadership role."

Key findings:

- Canadians are significantly more aware of sustainability issues than Americans (75% versus 63%).
- 85 per cent describe sustainability as very important.
- 56 per cent say sustainability guides their everyday behaviour,
- 43 per cent often pay more for products and services from companies that display sustainable business practices.

Consumers most often cite actions to protect the environment and conserve resources when asked to define their vision of sustainability. But substantial numbers of consumers also place a high priority on efforts to make progress on social and economic issues, such as ending injustice and discrimination and corruption in business and government (74%); the use of fair trade practices (68%), and job creation and economic development at home and abroad (65%).

The *Planet Care*[®] study, which asked consumers to evaluate the sustainability performance of industries and individual corporations, also underscored major branding opportunities for companies that engage in sustainable business practices.

The survey found that Canadians generally believe that corporations are lagging in efforts to advance sustainability, compared to citizens and not-for-profit organizations. Only 21 per cent of Canadians think corporations are on the right track when it comes to sustainable business practices, and 93 per cent believe that business leaders should not put financial goals ahead of sustainability programs.

Another striking finding is that most Canadians are unaware of the sustainability efforts of companies, and 80 per cent of consumers want more information from corporations about their sustainability programs. Four in ten consumers (43%) cannot identify a sustainable brand or company, while 20 per cent cannot even identify a single sustainable industry.

The *Planet Care*[®] study, says Ball, strongly suggests that the desire for knowledge of sustainability efforts, coupled with the belief that corporations should be doing more to protect the planet and people, has created opportunities for companies with strong sustainability platforms to win brand loyalty through consumer education.

“Consumers are hungry for information about sustainable business practices yet no single corporation or brand has captured the hearts and minds of Canadians as being highly committed to sustainability,” says Ball. “*Planet Care* sends a clear message to business leaders and marketers: a credible, well communicated commitment to sustainability is good for business. Brand territory regarding excellence in sustainable business practices is there for the taking.”

About *Planet Care*[®]

Planet Care[®] is a syndicated online survey conducted amongst a nationally representative sample of 3,200 Canadians and Americans. Its purpose is to examine consumer awareness, behaviours and attitudes towards sustainability and provide business leaders with an effective means to measure how their sustainable business practices are influencing consumer perceptions of their corporate reputation and brand. One of the most comprehensive consumer studies on sustainable business practices ever conducted in North America, the most recent *Planet Care*[®] study tracked consumer attitudes about the sustainability efforts of 16 industry sectors and more than 200 corporations and brands.

About Ifop North America

Ifop stands for *institut francais d'opinion publique* – the French institute of public opinion – and is France's most often cited public opinion polling firm. Ifop was founded in 1938 and is recognized as an international leader in sustainability research. Headquartered in Toronto, Ifop North America has been servicing the marketing research and business information needs of companies in the United States and Canada since the mid-1970s. Ifop also has offices in Buenos Aires and Shanghai.