

The Star, 25 Oct. 2008: Small steps, monumental move

Tuesday, 04 November 2008

Simple concepts that don't require much effort - these companies are making it easier for people to go green.

Yes, we know we should recycle. Yes, we know we should save energy. We know our world is in trouble but what are we doing about it?

Small steps, monumental move Stories by JOLEEN LUNJEW, The Star, 25 Oct. 2008

Simple concepts that don't require much effort - these companies are making it easier for people to go green.

Yes, we know we should recycle. Yes, we know we should save energy. We know our world is in trouble but what are we doing about it?

The companies below have come up with creative, innovative and convenient ways for us to contribute towards sustainable living. Whoever said going green is difficult?

O'sBON

According to stationery company O'sBON, an area of rainforest the size of 20 football fields is cut down every minute, partly due to the creation of wooden pencils. Shocking?

Born out of the need to provide consumers with an environmentally responsible choice, O'sBON developed a revolutionary process in pencil making. How? Simple, actually.

All they did was to roll a sheet of used newspapers around a stick of graphite, dry it with water-based glue and cover it with vibrant designs and there you have it - a pencil made out of recycled products.

According to O'sBON Malaysia directors Alicia Tan and Aaliyah Ng, their pencils are of better quality and last two to three times longer than ordinary wooden pencils.

"When creating wooden pencils, sticks of graphite are inserted into the middle of two blocks of wood and sealed together. This process causes air bubbles to be trapped inside, making the pencil brittle.

"Our patented process of rolled newspapers creates a very compact environment around the graphite so the lead does not shatter easily," says Aaliyah Ng.

Their products are also educational and suitable for children as they are designed in a variety of colours and patterns. Wildlife motifs are very popular and children can learn about the different animal stripes and patterns. The packaging has information on the animal featured and it can be recycled as a bookmark as well.

“Our philosophy is simple: to incorporate ‘green’ knowledge into a fun product. We transform a common school item such as a pencil and turn it into something special. Children just love sharpening our pencils as they get to see real bits of newspaper unravelling.

“Oh, you might be interested to know that there are 36 layers of newspaper rolls in one pencil. One sheet of The Star newspaper can produce three pencils,” smiles Ng.

“BON uses the same process to produce professional art pencils from 1H to 8B, popular with art students, and pens that reduce plastic usage to 50%.

They also have a variety of notebooks made out of sugarcane pulp which reduces the need for wood.

“What most people don’t know is that recycled paper has a mix of new paper as well. The higher percentage of recycled paper, the higher the price. What we have done is to use a mixture of 82% sugarcane pulp and 18% new paper to create our notebooks. Our covers come in bright, refreshing designs and are made out of recycled cardboard.

Malaysian Nature Society (MNS) has ordered our feather print notebooks from us for their upcoming bird watching event and they are selling our products at their office. MNS members get a discount on our products so not only are we promoting ‘green’ products, we want to encourage a ‘green’ lifestyle as well,” says Ng.

Tiny Tapir

Tiny Tapir is the sustainable living effort of two sisters who thought that they could make a difference in the way we consume products.

Reducing waste and using chemical-free products were top on their list so they set about sourcing for products that are reusable or environmentally friendly. They now have a respectable range of women, baby, home and personal products.

According to directors Li Chan and Jamie Ong, their objective is to promote reusable products so waste is reduced.

“Tons of rubbish end up in our trash everyday, most of it recyclable goods. We want to tell Malaysians that if you use one less plastic disposable water bottle a day or one less disposable diaper a day, that’s a lot less waste ending up in our land fills,” says Ong.

Take for example their baby diapers which come in a variety of cute, colourful designs that are soft and comfortable.

“Did you know that baby diapers take 100 years to biodegrade? And did you know that you are supposed to wash off the poo before throwing away the diaper as the waste will create a toxic mix with the chemicals in the plastic which will eventually seep into our earth once it is thrown away?

Our reusable diapers are fun and easy to use. Granted it takes a little more effort as you have to wash and dry the diapers but think of all the waste that you have saved! And you'll save money in the long run as disposable diapers are not cheap. Our company buys and sells used diapers as well," says Ong.

Another product with a similar concept is the cloth sanitary pads which come in various colours and designs. The pads are soft and comfortable, using absorbent bamboo fibres with waterproof lining at the bottom.

"Disposable pads are filled with chemicals which might have an effect on our body.

"We also have an alternative to tampons called the Mooncup. It is a bell-shaped cup made from soft silicone that is worn internally, collecting menstrual flow without leakage or odour. It is so comfortable that you will forget it is there.

"It is hypoallergenic and you can sterilise it in boiling water every now and then," says Li

Other products available are trendy reusable bags, reusable baby wipes, reusable bottles, reusable collapsible containers and chemical-free shampoo and soap. The soap is sourced from a housewife in Johor who makes it herself.

EcoGreen

The Wong family's love for all things organic began in 1997, through a chance encounter with an organic farmer. They started the brand EcoGreen to sell organic vegetables from their 8ha organic farm in Rembau, Negri Sembilan and soon opened their first organic retail shop, and later a café and restaurant in Taman Tun Dr Ismail.

"Organic food is divided into two categories "one has to have at least 95% organic content and the other is cooked with organic content, making it 86% organic," says Sherene Wong, EcoGreen director and chef.

"There is a strict guideline when it comes to farming organic produce. Basically, the vegetables and fruits must be free of chemicals. We only serve chicken and fish here. Our chicken is considered "clean" as they are free-range chickens which have not been injected with any hormones.

"Our fish are preservative free, sourced from Semporna Island in Sabah. We have a supplier who delivers fresh fish to us every week."

The café serves delicious organic drinks such as Lemongrass & Honey, Passionfruit & Honey, soya and fruit juices. They also have organic desserts such as sweet broth, tau fu fah and natural yogurt.

"I have a passion for healthy cooking. We want to give people an option for cleaner, chemical-free food. Take for example the recent milk scare. You never know what kind of toxins get into your food," adds Wong.

EcoGreen's menu is tailored to both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. They adhere strictly to their policy of no monosodium glutamate (MSG), no microwaving, no transfat acid and no artificial preservatives, colourings, flavourings and enhancers.

> These three companies are part of the exhibitors that will be showcasing their products and services at the upcoming Eco Film Fest 2008 from Nov 1-Nov 2, 10am to 7pm daily at the National Arts Culture and Heritage Academy (Aswara), 464, Jalan Tun Ismail, Kuala Lumpur. For more information, visit www.ecoknights.com or call (03) 7727 6563.