

Environmental Friendliness (30/5/2017)

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- MOST CREATIVE PEOPLE

How The Honest Company Nailed The Formula For Eco-Friendly Products

Here's a maddening problem (and how to fix it): Your products are better than everyone else's, but aren't perceived that way.



[PHOTO: FLICKR USER [MARK SEBASTIAN](#)]

BY REBECCA GREENFIELD 3 MINUTE READ

When [The Honest Company](#) created the first version of its sustainable, chemical-free baby wipes, they worked as well—if not better—than anything on the market. “The wipe was a wonderful wipe,” Sean Kane, president and

cofounder (along with Jessica Alba) of the eco-friendly baby and household product retailer, told *Fast Company*. “We had received such good reviews about it.” Mothers whose babies had sensitive skin were especially appreciative of the chemical-free cloths.



There was one problem, though: The wipes didn’t look or feel as high quality as other products on the market. They were thinner and more transparent than other options. That didn’t change the efficacy, insists Kane. “It was thinner *and* it was more effective,” he said. Yet, people complained about the feel. Despite the positive reception, the wipes didn’t meet the company’s standards to make safe, sustainable, and high-quality product

The Honest Company, [valued](#) at almost \$1 billion last week, has succeeded by offering high-quality products, even while boasting the green label. Its diapers, for example, while made of wheat, corn, and wood-fluff mix, achieve up to 35% more total absorption than conventional and other eco-friendly diapers, the company claims.

But Kane was learning that with green products, perception is as important as effectiveness. People already assume that anything labeled “green” doesn’t work as well as chemical-laden products. One [study](#) found that a third of consumers believe that all things green don’t work as well as “regular” products; another poll asked people why they don’t choose eco-friendly products and 21% said: “They do not perform as well as conventional products.”



Sean Kane, president and cofounder of The Honest Company, with his family PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HONEST COMPANY

Even if green products do, in fact, work better than ultra-toxic options, people won't buy them unless they look and feel high quality—especially because eco-friendliness typically means a higher price tag. In another survey, 75% of respondents rated price “extremely important” when purchasing paper goods, compared to 15% who mentioned “environmentally friendly” as a factor.

The Honest Company's wipes aren't exactly cheap, at \$4.95 for a box of 72. (Walmart sells a pack of 62 Pampers wipes for \$2.37.) At that price and

with the green label, to get consumers to bite, The Honest Company's products have to be superior in every way imaginable.

Kane decided to rework the too-thin wipes. “Even though the wipe was extremely well received, we went back and revised,” he said. The wipes now come in at 60 grams per square meter, [the standard measurement of thickness for wipes](#). “It is probably the thickest, most effective wipe on the market today.”

In addition, on top of touting their wipes as “all-natural” and “plant based,” The Honest Company emphasizes the thickness. The first bullet point under the “About” section on the website reads: “THICKER, stronger, more absorbent, & softer, Oeko-Tex® certified medical-grade cloth.”



Jessica Alba, founder, and Christopher Gavigan, cofounder and chief product officer of The Honest Company PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HONEST COMPANY

Customers who initially didn't like the wipes changed their minds. "I have to admit I tried to cancel your services due to the poor quality of the Wipes, but the lady I spoke with sent me a sample pack of the new & improved Wipes and I love them," reads one review on The Honest Company website.

Going forward, as The Honest Company preps for its IPO and expands into other product areas like skin care and beauty, Kane now understands that forthcoming deodorants and face lotions have to have the right look and feel, in addition to working well. "Before we release any new vertical," he says, "we are going to put it through the ringer."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rebecca Greenfield is a former *Fast Company* staff writer. She was previously a staff writer at The Atlantic Wire, where she focused on technology news.

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