

It's Not Easy Going Green

By Reg P. Wydeven
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My dad just stepped into a bold new world, as he bought an iPod. So far, we have loaded it with CDs from some of his favorite artists, such as Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins and Sonny James. He's completely hooked – he hits 'shuffle' on his 'Country Western' playlist and listens while mowing the lawn, and he even hooks it up to his car stereo.

Because he is old school, my dad was astounded that the iPod didn't come with an instruction manual. Apple makes their products so user friendly that operating them is almost intuitive. Plus, their products' sleek designs make them easy to use in addition to looking extremely cool. To be safe, though, my dad did download the manual.

Apple prides itself on the coolness of its innovative designs and their ease of use. Apparently, Apple prioritizes being user friendly over being environmentally friendly.

At the end of June, Apple decided to drop out of EPEAT, the Electronic Products Environmental Assessment Tool, which is an environmental certification program for electronics. The certification, which was created by Apple and other industry leaders, is awarded to electronics that are energy-efficient and also recyclable. When asked why Apple dropped out of the program, EPEAT's CEO, Robert Frisbee, speculated that Apple's "design direction" may be the culprit.

Frisbee told the Wall Street Journal that Apple's "design direction was no longer consistent with the EPEAT requirements." Frisbee elaborated by saying, "They were important supporters and we are disappointed that they don't want their products measured by this standard anymore."

Experts conjecture that the "design direction" referred to by Frisbee involves the "retina display" feature of Apple's MacBook Pro. The laptop's battery is glued to its aluminum case, making it difficult to disassemble for repairs, upgrades, and eventually, recycling.

Apple is obviously an industry leader, primarily due to its hip designs, so the loss of certification probably won't drive away many customers. The move may, however, cause the company to lose one huge customer: the federal government.

According to U.S. law, 95% of all electronics purchases made by federal agencies must be EPEAT-certified. EPEAT does not certify tablets or mobile phones, so while federal agents can still carry iPads and iPhones, only 5% can use Apple's laptop or desktop computers.

In addition to the federal government, many state, county or municipal agencies may have similar restrictions. San Francisco, for example, has an ordinance that requires the city to only purchase desktop and laptop computers that are EPEAT-compliant. So unless Apple gets back on board, the city can no longer purchase Apple computers.

In response to the withdrawal, Apple spokeswoman, Kristin Huguet, issued a statement to CNN saying: "Apple takes a comprehensive approach to measuring our environmental impact and all of our products meet the strictest energy efficiency standards backed by the U.S. government, Energy Star 5.2. We also lead the industry by reporting each product's greenhouse gas emissions on our website, and Apple products are superior in other important environmental areas not measured by EPEAT, such as removal of toxic materials."

Apparently Apple got EPEAT's attention, as earlier this week the electronic juggernaut returned to EPEAT. Responding to Apple's claims about their energy efficiency standards, Frisbee said, "An interesting question for EPEAT is how to reward innovations that are not yet envisioned with standards that are fixed at a point in time. Diverse goals, optional points awarded for innovations not yet described, and flexibility within specified parameters to make this happen are all on the table in EPEAT stakeholder discussions."

Reading between the lines, industry insiders interpret this statement that thanks to Apple, changes to EPEAT standards are coming.

I think Apple realized that the tremendous loss of government customers would have a huge impact on sales. Assuming plummeting sales would cause the company to go into the red, Apple decided to go green.

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