

BioCanadian—Green and Clean

BioCanadian doesn't think it's particularly glamorous. After all, it's a small Montreal-based company that micro-blends and distributes sustainable cleaning products in the Canadian industrial marketplace. Regardless of what BioCanadian believes about its sex appeal, it's clear this company is making huge strides in the environmental movement—something pretty thrilling if you're talking to someone like David Suzuki, which BioCanadian President, Marc Trudel, actually gets to do.

BioCanadian is a key player in the chemical industry with a broad range of third-party-certified, plant-based cleaners, solvents and specialty chemicals. Their products can be used across a sweeping collection of industrial applications.

Before assuming that all chemicals are inherently bad and cannot possibly do the environment any good, consider that water is a chemical. In fact, the value of effective, naturally occurring chemicals is exactly what BioCanadian bases its entire business around. "We replace hazardous chemicals in the workplace," says Trudel. "That's our tagline."

Taking the safety angle—as opposed to the green one—proves a lot more effective in the BioCanadian sales cycle, as does cost efficiency. Not surprisingly, the industrial market's immediate concerns are not always about environmental friendliness.

"It is 100 per cent about cost savings," explains Trudel. "No matter what environmental interests people have, it's all about saving money. Employee health and safety is also a big incentive. So we sell our products as inexpensive replacements for tried and true, but damaging chemicals."

It's not just the plant-based chemicals that are environmentally sustainable; it's also shipping and plastic use that is factored in. BioCanadian sells concentrated cleaning products to reduce the amount of packaging and travel. The way Trudel sees it, other cleaning products are often selling companies 90 per cent water. Allowing the companies to do simple on site proportioning through inexpensive but reliable equipment also represents another cost saving opportunity.

BioCanadian also tries to reduce the amount of products customers use. "We have effective surface acting agents and solvents that sometimes replace three to five products," says Trudel. "We want to lessen the amount of products these facilities have and replace them with as few products as we can. It's not that our products are necessarily cheaper when you compare them gallon to gallon, but the total cost of ownership is way less expensive, especially when you account for liability and safety."

Walking the talk

As an environmental company, BioCanadian is all about change. They live it. Trudel might be the best testament to how passionate the company really is about what they do, as well as the green movement itself. As an active member of the David Suzuki Foundation and the Climate Project, Trudel does a lot of presentations within Canadian industrial organization circles.

Out of thousands of applicants, he was picked to take part in the non-profit volunteer organization. Trudel's connection with BioCanadian probably helped his case. "I was selected as one of 200 people to meet Al Gore and David Suzuki for a three-day retreat on how to mobilize action in our communities," he explains. "So now I travel to businesses and do multimedia presentations explaining some of the basic climate change science and try to focus on solutions from within the organization. It's a continuing effort. The presentations

don't have a lot to do with BioCanadian, but it's a great segue into how my company can help."

Trudel has always been interested in environmental issues, so his involvement with the Climate Project is just a natural extension of his fascination. "I'm basically an entrepreneur and a lifelong supporter of environmental initiatives," says Trudel. "When I started BioCanadian from ground zero, it was essentially looking for an opportunity within the environmental industry where I could affect positive change in the business world. There's still as an obvious gap in the business world when it comes to sustainability."

Meeting the challenge

You have to admit, there's no shortage of competition in the chemical industry. There are plenty of publically traded, deep-rooted, multinational companies out there—each with green cleaning initiatives. But to BioCanadian, the other products don't tackle the issues in the same way they do. So they press on.

"It's a long sales cycle," Trudel sighs. "Everyone seems to be resistant at first. In an industrial setting, people are reticent to change. I look at it as opportunity to show people how they can improve their operations. If you assume that greening your operations is a necessary shift in your business strategy, then probably one of the single easiest decisions you'll make is to replace hazardous chemicals. You immediately lower your costs and improve your environmental footprint. You could do it overnight."

Trudel finds he gets the most out of an opportunity when it involves replacing hazardous solvents, as opposed to the straight cleaners. "Some hazardous solvents out there are still legal but highly taxed for their toxicity, such as trichloroethane. People think that just because they have been using the product forever, it's fine. So when we go in and replace those solvents, we have more space there to showcase other products. Solvents are a big focus because I think we can make a bigger difference there."

As time goes on, Trudel believes it will become a lot easier to sell BioCanadian products. As government incentives and regulations increase in their favour, the better situated they will be in the market. For example, BioCanadian was recently applauded by the IRSST (Quebec Research Institute for Occupational Health and Safety) in a report for specialists in the field of industrial hygiene conducted by the University of Montreal's Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Faculty of Medicine, "to inform Quebec companies and workers using organic solvents for cleaning or other applications that *less dangerous alternatives are available* and tell them *where to find these alternatives*" says Fatim Diallo, M.Sc. As for the competition's green labelled products, they don't hold the same weight; it's just a matter of showing customers why BioCanadian is better.

"Companies are being bombarded with information from suppliers trying to help them go green. Our competitive advantage is that we come to the table with years of third party lab testing behind us. That allows our customers to focus on effective solutions, without having to worry about who they can trust." Trudel beams, "Sometimes the simplest thing, like the lack of familiar but caustic smells, needs to be overcome before our customers feel comfortable. At the end of the day it's obvious that BioCanadian is more sustainable—both environmentally and economically."

A greener future

Something the company is considering is branching out to the consumer market through private label. "It's a long process," he continues. "We're a small company too so to take a retail angle is whole other focus. We could easily compete with other products because

we're certified, but it's not our immediate focus. It's just something we're thinking about."

Wherever the future takes them, BioCanadian can be sure of their success. As partners in the growing environmental sector, it's only a matter of time before more Canadian industries catch on and prioritize safe and sustainable chemicals in the workplace. "BioCanadian intends to be around for a long time," smiles Trudel. "We are excited to see where we will be in a few years' time."

Reprinted with permission from The Canadian Business Journal, written by Jennifer Sorlie.