

# Earth Marketing and Product Development

Boutique Fashions, May, 1973

## Spreading the Ecological Gospel

By Alan Cartnal

LOS ANGELES: Straw spills out of the door of their rusted, recycled old Oldsmobile. On the front seat lies a piece of sharkskin which has been transferred to leather in Mexico. Sneakers, printed with various endangered species symbols and batik-printed T-shirts, line the floor of the back seat.

Earth capitalists, you say, who have come to the big city to sell their wares.

Well, not exactly.

Neal and Steve Pargman are marketing psychologists who have formed a licensing operation in Carmel, California, known as Earth Marketing and Product Development. The samples in the car are already into production by four firms, all of which have volumes between \$5-\$10,000,000 (sneakers for Newport Rubber Company, batik designs for Manchester Shirts, belts and sandals for Seville of California, and batik women's and girls' jeans for Lucky Girl of California).

The pair may look Rocky Mountain High, but beneath the grubby Mexican gunny sack shirts and faded Western attire, they aim to become Space Captains for Rocketship Earth.

Specifically, ecology-minded youth.

Youth? Hasn't the fashion industry relegated them to flash, trash, and campus clean-up campaigns? Not according to the Pargman Brothers. "Our research indicates that the heaviest involvement of youth is still in the grubby looks. They're still playing fashion down. But, they've replaced the peace movement with the ecology thing," declares Neal Pargman, twenty-eight.

"Listen to the music right now," he insists. "It's all about returning to the earth and nature. The city is no longer a creative center for youth. It's happening out in the mountains. Youth realizes that their survival is tied up with ecology. And we realize it too. That's why we can work twenty-two hours a day to make this a success. We're doing something to make money, but also, something that is going to help."

The help that the Pargman Brothers and their entourage of under-thirty marketing staff and volunteers (ecology groupies continually follow them around wanting to do anything to foster the movement) hope to bring are clothes that tell America to get its "you-know-what" together.

Clothes that are as comfortable and as healthy as a daily dose of Vitamin E.

Can it work?

"We don't know," ventures Steve Pargman, twenty-five, a former accountant, "but, we're doing what we feel. We've gotten so much energy together that things just keep falling into place."

How can two guys who look like the cover of a Flying Burrito Brothers album walk into the business world of California fashion and come off with four top contracts?

"That's not hard to do," states Neal. "The manufacturers use us as a think tank. They see by the way we talk and dress that we can find out more about the head of youth than a guy in a Cardin suit."

At the same time, they have also benefited from California merchandising methods. They cite Stan Foster, the president of Hang Ten, as a genius. They hope to make their Estar (a Mexican word meaning to be; to become one) trademark a world symbol like the tiny surfer feet for "more aware, nonsports-minded youth." Their operation is purely ideas. "We got into manufacturing with the Vote campaign promotion, but it didn't work out for us," they say. "We aren't into retailing."

What they are into is first-generation ideas dealing with ecology. Next season they will do second-generation ideas for manufacturers in all parts of the world giving them the current ideologies of youth. They have just returned from Mexico and Brazil where manufacturers will also carry their trademark ideas. And next on the schedule is Canada, France, and, possibly, Spain. They will hit New York for the Boutique Show in June.

"We're saving all our heavy ammunition for then." Heavy ideas seem to abound with the two of them and their creative expert, Hal Zimmerman.

On Advertising: "People don't want to see a lot of print. They don't believe in the messages. They just want to see beauty. That's what we're giving them. Just nature. Not a lot of merchandise."

On Trends: "According to our research, batik is starting another cycle. It's big in France right now. We are able to photograph any ecology print we want onto fabric."

We will be the first to be able to give people batik at mass-merchandise levels.

"Stars are coming back big. Not red, white, and blue, but cosmic things. The kids are into science-fiction related to ecology. We'll be doing a lot of that. We're relating to all minorities. They need identity clothes."

On Involvement: "In each country where we sell ideas, we're setting up a trust fund. Ten per cent of all proceeds from the sale of our ideas will go to set up ecology departments in major universities."

On Boutique: "Boutique means new. It's not a dead idea at all. It's just rechanneling into a new spirit at the present time."

On Ideology: "Clothes are media. They are communication. We are telling each other who we are by our clothes. They are political statements. Our clothes tell people subtly that we need ecological change. We're selling a life outlook."

"Some self-centered, egotistical buyers and manufacturers don't like our act," admits Neal Pargman. "They say the grubby look is over. But, what I hear is that they don't like young people taking over. They fear their jobs and their own competence. Most people, however, see that we're plugged into the right electricity. Older companies and stores want that important youth dollar. They just don't know how to relate and they see that we do."

They've learned to be tough in the business world. But, they've also learned that, by playing the system, they can spread the ecological gospel. And, as they say, "make a few bucks along the way."