

Forty shades of green: the trends explained

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Following the famous Irish song, we can close our eyes and picture a vast forest of cosmetic products on the market, a wooded landscape made up of many shades of green. Which one is the greenest?

The answer depends on many factors such as the product application, brand concept and also the packaging. In fact, saying a product is "natural" or "organic" has become too generic, and green positioning has evolved into a complex and fascinating matrix involving several environmental aspects. This is why, when starting a new project, it is important to define exactly what green shade the brand concept fits with.

Here I shall list the latest, as well as the classic shades.

The organic shade

Certified Organic cosmetics are certainly growing in number, for example Cosmos Organic products, USDA organic certified cosmetics and Natrue organic cosmetics, plus other certified cosmetics. In the consumers' mind, the higher the organic percentage means the purer the product. This can become quite a challenge for the formulator, depending on the application, because different standards have different ways of calculating the organic content of ingredients and finished products. For example Cosmos Organic requires a minimum content of 20% of the total product for leave-on products and 10% for rinse-off ones; the USDA system has 3 levels, more in line with the food approach, going from 70% to 95% over 95% and 100% all excluding water and salt.

This "shade" could become so much more popular if there was a harmonisation across all the standards in the way of calculating the organic percentage and the minimum organic percentage to establish a claim that a particular cosmetic is organic.

While we wait for that to happen there is a calculation tool provided by the ISO 16128, which the industry could use.

The vegan shade

Vegan cosmetics are becoming more and more in demand; the consumers love the



idea of not hurting animals, and so it would seem to be an easy accreditation to get for mainstream cosmetics that are based on synthetic ingredients.

On the other hand getting vegan accreditation for a completely natural product can turn into a rabbit warren experience for the formulator and client due to the level of detail requested about the manufacturing process of naturally derived ingredients. An example of this is with animal derivatives that might be used during a fermentation process or any manufacturing process, these can become an obstacle to the achievement of vegan accreditation.

So even if this would seem to be a relatively easy shade to achieve, unfortunately there is no official positive list of acceptable vegan ingredients. This means that it is best to check each individual ingredient's vegan status at the beginning of a development project.

The sustainable palm shade

The increase in deforestation due to the growing demand for biomaterials (from woods, to pastures and edible oils), and through clearances and the fires – such as

the recent fires in the Amazon rainforest - is putting more and more pressure on the cosmetic industry to address the challenge of using naturally-derived ingredients that are linked to deforestation. The cosmetic industry is not the major user of palm oil derivatives, but it is the sector where - for some mysterious reason - there is more awareness about it. The food industry is a much greater consumer of palm oil than cosmetics.

The cosmetics industry has answered the concern by making greater use of mass balanced palm kernel oil derivatives, from emulsifiers to surfactants, which are now considered mainstream and easily available. Even Cosmos has a list of compulsory palm kernel oil derivatives which need to be at least of a mass balanced grade. Natrue are to follow soon with their new standard and mass balanced requirements.

The farm-to-face shade

Many people have a romantic vision of growing one's own organic or wild herbs and plants and of using them to make their own extracts or oils. This would also mean that there is a transparent supply chain and more stories could be told about the place

where they are farmed, and there can be detailed tractability, even down to itemising the particular field the crop is grown in.

This is something that not every brand is in a position to do, however there are a few premium ones in Europe and the US that are tapping into this trend. This is a lovely green shade to have, but it is "posh".

The alternative is to use raw materials suppliers that have established a transparent supply chain, and are happy to share such stories with their customers. At the sustainability corner at in-cosmetics Global I saw several examples of suppliers, from actives to functional ingredients, doing a lot of work to manage their supply chain, which can be complex but also very interesting, and ultimately it is where the market is moving towards - accountability, transparency and traceability.

The waste-free shade

This can relate to the packaging (is it reusable, biodegradable or compostable?) or the lack of it or is it making use of waste materials from other processes. It is a fairly new trend but big and small brands are wisely moving into this important area, which is increasingly driven by the consumer expectation and pressure as well as by moves to create more stringent regulations.

Packaging is such a focus at the moment that refills, either in a pouch or direct from a big container, are popular. However, from a microbial safety point of view there are issues of contamination and safety, and time will tell if refills will be around for long or not.

Ingredients-wise there is both a great demand and an opportunity to transform waste into a sellable commodity. A few indie brands are tapping into this with great stories to tell and strong consumer engagement. There are also raw materials suppliers that are transforming food waste into precious cosmetics ingredients, which can also provide a great marketing narrative. This concept of waste becoming a resource for the production of cosmetic ingredients has a huge potential and can really become a rich field of potential ingredients and great tales.

The coral reef friendly shade

There is great concern about the environmental impact of sun protection products and sun filters on the seas and coral reef. Hawaii was the first US state to ban oxybenzone and octinoxate (the ban will be effective from the 1 January 2021), and this year it was joined by Key West in Florida.

This is a controversial topic. There is



clearly a great need for new sun filters to deliver effective sun protection but without negative environmental impacts. At the moment some brands are offering a solution based on using mineral sun filters and calling their products "reef friendly" but they are doing this simply based on the fact that they use mineral filters.

Other brands claim to use non nano mineral filters and to have their products tested by a third party laboratory, but as no indication is given about the type of tests or results, it does not come across as convincing. This is a very tricky claim to validate at the moment, nevertheless the use of it is growing in popularity.

The plastic-free shade

Plastic is everywhere, the question is, can we avoid it in cosmetics? The Plastic Soup Foundation has launched the seal "zero plastic inside" which is based on avoiding a list of micro-plastic ingredients, over 500 of them and all of synthetic origin. It is surprising to see green beauty brands such as Weleda and the Beauty Kitchen go for this seal, but it shows how this has become a major issue for consumers.

This shade of green might have major implications for colour cosmetics, especially the ones that make use of micro-plastic precursor glitter. Luckily there are already some eco alternatives in the market place, and more will become available. It will also be interesting to see how this trend evolves at a regulatory level, as the restriction on D4 and D5 for rinse-off products will be enforced next year.

This trend will also have a major impact on packaging, which needs to evolve in order to reduce its environmental impact, either via new materials or by innovating new designs that make recycling possible or plastic waste a thing of the past.

The water-free shade

Not only are forests and seas precious and

endangered, but water itself is a precious product. Products containing less or no water, from solid shampoos to all sorts of other solid cosmetics, like hair conditioners and deodorants, are becoming more popular. Even products requiring less water for them to be rinsed off are appearing on the market place, with the benefit of saving also on CO₂ emissions. This has the potential to change the way we formulate and use cosmetics and will require some engagement with consumers to educate them about this new type of products. The British brand Lush has been a pioneer of the solid cosmetics trend and of providing the education to support it.

The minimalistic shade

I am sure that you would agree with my experience of often being asked by a client to create a product with a maximum x ingredients. The concept behind this is to simplify and to strip ingredients down to what are considered to be the essentials, which is really appealing these days as it is in line with lifestyle choices. The news increasingly features stories of young families downsizing and sticking to a few clothes, or even people living off the grid, partly pushed in response to austerity, partly driven by an ideology of sustainability and environmental harmony. This is a call for simple living and for a cosmetic product to adapt to that ethos.

The Fair for Life shade

This is not a common "shade" of green at the moment, nevertheless it is one to watch. The Fair for Life certification, a scheme focused on a socially responsible supply chain, is becoming quite popular for organic ingredients and some brands, such as Dr Bronner's magic soaps make a feature of this. On the Fair for Life website, it is possible to view a detailed rating associated with each product, going from fair trade sourcing to traceability and product handling, partnership and favourable trading terms etc.

Conclusion

These are the green shades I have seen on the market place and that I discuss in my bespoke workshops on brand and concept development. As you can see "I want an all-natural product" can relate to all sorts of environmental or even social values that need to be unravelled and translated into the formulas and products so that the green shade can have a message of higher impact in the market place. I find this very fascinating and I cannot wait to see more shades to appear on the market place to enrich this thriving market place and expression of green trends. PC