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# Use Earth Day as a marketing opportunity

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By Stephen Ashkin\* April 22 is Earth Day, the annual celebration of our planet and a time for people

around the world to assess what they can do individually and collectively to keep our planet clean, Green, and healthy. In recent years, many businesses have joined in the celebration, emphasising the importance of Earth Day and making it a marketing event by showing what they are doing to protect the environment. This is certainly not limited to



large companies and organisations, however. Smaller companies, including cleaning contractors and jansan distributors, can take advantage of this holiday as well, demonstrating what our industry and your company are doing to protect the environment—while doing a little self-promotion as well. Before exploring these options, let's discuss briefly the history of Earth Day and how it came about. For centuries, in countries all over the world, people assumed the world's vast resources were limitless. As soon as one area had been grazed or forested, for example, another one was found right over the horizon. As to pollution, most people in the industrialised countries of the late 1800s assumed air and water pollution were the price of progress. Even when rivers were set ablaze by chemical waste, as happened in the United States in the 1930s and again in the 1950s, there was little or no public outcry and few seemed to even take notice. However, all that changed in the 1960s due to two key events. The first occurred in 1962, when Rachel Carson published her now-famous book, *Silent Spring*. The book, which proved to be a wake-up call heard around the globe, discussed a future without birds due to the long-term effects of highly toxic chemicals and pesticides used in industry and agriculture throughout the world. The second was less startling but powerful nonetheless. This was when the Apollo astronauts photographed the planet Earth as a whole for the first time. Throughout the world, people realised how small, fragile, interrelated, and beautiful our planet is. It became clear how air, water, or chemical pollution in one area of the globe could negatively affect life and ecosystems not only in that region but

in surrounding regions far and wide as well. Environmental awareness grew and by spring 1970, the first environmental 'teach-in' — a protest movement designed to bring attention to the ways humankind was harming the Earth—was held in cities and universities throughout the United States as well as in Australia. They called it Earth Day. Although enthusiasm for Earth Day ebbed and flowed, by the mid-1990s it came back in a big way and spread far beyond US borders, to cities and countries around the world. The reason for its resurgence is actually quite simple. At the time of the first Earth Day, concerns about human beings' impact on the environment were minimal. Two decades later, however, it became clear that the Earth's natural resources needed greater protection and the impact people have on the environment, whether through cars, chemicals, or industrial pollution, could have long-lasting and—if we are not careful—even dire implications.

**Conducting Your Own Teach-In** In years past, there have been Earth Day parades throughout Australia organised by people concerned about protecting Mallee, the semidry and very fragile habitat found in south and south-western Australia. 'Car-less' days honouring Earth Day have been held in Sydney, where large sections of the city are blocked off to auto traffic for a day. Instead of cars, these streets have become the site of Earth Day music, theatre, and educational exhibits — a welcome mat for our industry and an opportunity for us to have our own 'teach-in', discussing how the jansan industry is helping to protect our planet. How can you get involved? The following are tips and suggestions that cleaning professionals can use to honour Earth Day and to make it an effective customer event:

- \* **Organise your helpers.** Determine who and how many people can work a table or represent your company for an Earth Day event.
- \* **Make the booth.** A fancy booth is not necessary. In fact, the simpler the booth, the more impact it may have. Just make sure your company's name, Web address, and other pertinent information are clearly posted.
- \* **Select chemicals to display.** If your booth is to include cleaning chemicals, make sure they are Green-

certified cleaning chemicals. Provide simple, easy-to-understand information discussing what certification is, how a product earns certification, and why it is important to the health and well-being of people and our planet.

\* **Select equipment to display.** When people think about cleaning, the tool they most often think of is vacuum cleaners. Display a HEPA or other high-filtration vacuum cleaner and discuss how these systems help protect health and indoor air quality.

\* **Showcase Green paper products.** Millions of trees are harvested every year around the globe to make paper products for businesses and homes. Using recycled paper products can help protect these trees and the environment as a whole. To show how far the technology has advanced, display traditional as well as recycled paper products. In most cases the quality of the recycled paper products is so good users cannot tell the difference. Finally, don't forget to contact your customers and potential customers and invite them to your booth. There is certainly nothing wrong with using Earth Day as a marketing opportunity, as long as you remember the purpose of the day: a global celebration of the Earth and a commitment to protecting the planet we call home. *\*Stephen Ashkin is principal of The Ashkin Group*

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