

Have confidence in certifications

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ADA Cosmetics International chief developer Claudia Raatz delves into what it means to offer 'natural' amenities and advises hoteliers to use products with recognised seals of approval.

The natural cosmetics industry is booming. Recent estimates for 2009 sales reflect a 13% increase. In 2010, the market value for Europe was expected to reach €2 billion.

Worldwide, the US and Asia continue to have the markets with the highest demand. This comes as no surprise, since green cosmetics have, in recent years, made a successful image shift and became a trendy product with celebrity appeal.



The growing popularity of natural cosmetics is due to the products' credibility and the general tendency to a natural lifestyle, and also to the improved quality, assortment range and product availability.

At the same time, consumer awareness for ecological concerns has further increased. Particularly where bodycare is concerned, consumers want products that harm neither their sensitive skin nor the environment.

An ever-growing number of hotels has, in the meantime, ventured into the green arena by offering green bodycare alternatives in their bathrooms and spas. But take caution: not every product that is offered as a 'natural cosmetic' is solely natural. The term 'natural' is not legally protected and, hence, often misleading.

As is the case with all cosmetic items, these 'natural cosmetics' are subject only to the requirements of the respective, country-specific cosmetics legal regulations.

It is quite possible that a body care series that is labelled 'natural' has been produced with the same conventional raw materials as regular cosmetics. In addition, a multitude of synthetic additives is used.

These are products that may appear to be green but have little to do with real natural cosmetics. This type of 'green washing' increasingly is coming under fire.

Certification seals provide clarity

A number of ecological certification seals like EcoCert, CosmeBio and NaTrue are trying to offer more transparency. Their regulations differ from each other in specific details.

For that very reason, consumer protection organisations would prefer a single and legally binding standard certification, similar to the European Union's (EU) organic seal for food products.

Credible seals (see box out) do ensure that certified cosmetic products contain only natural and plant-based ingredients. Further, the formulations must be free of parabens, synthetic preservatives, dyes and fragrances, paraffins and other petroleum products as well as any animal-based additives.

Therefore, the certification of natural cosmetics unquestionably clarifies the evaluation criteria and, thus, helps hoteliers make a conscious product selection.

As Vision Hotel Apartments in Abu Dhabi general manager Richard Haddad says: "The common perception that plant based cosmetics are automatically environmentally friendly is wrong".

"Customers are not driven merely by the need for self-indulgence. Ethical values have become a significant and strong driving force in customer purchasing decisions."

Important certification seals

EcoCert is administered by Europe's largest environmental governance and certification association. Since 2002, EcoCert also evaluates cosmetics with regard to 'ecological and biological' and 'biological' quality respectively.

The EcoLabel is the environmental label of the EU for ecological products. It is issued only to products with a minimal environmental impact.

Certification takes into account the entire life cycle of a product: from the extraction of raw materials to the manufacturing process to distribution, including packaging, use and disposal.

The latest European seal for natural and biological cosmetics is NaTrue, launched in 2008. The statement of requirement, with its three quality grades, precisely determines for each grade the allowable minimum amounts of natural ingredients, the maximum quantities of near-natural raw materials as well as bio-content.

Soil Association is the leading private certification organisation for organic products in Great Britain. Ninety-five percent of its agricultural ingredients must be certified organic.

The French association for ecological and biological cosmetics is CosmeBio. They market cosmetic products with natural ingredients (or of natural origin) and organically grown raw materials.

In Germany, the Federal association of German trade and industry for drugs, health foods, dietary supplements and body care products (BDIH) founded the International Organic and Natural Cosmetics Corporation (IONC GmbH). All raw materials for 'Controlled Natural Cosmetics' must originate from organically farmed or controlled wild harvesting environments.