

Local Product Protects Skin and Seas

By JIM WITTERS
Senior Business Writer
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HOLLY HILL -- Daniel Knorr's leap into the eco-friendly marketplace may appear to be just another attempt to capitalize on a hot trend.

But his line of reef- and ocean-friendly Beach Buff sun-care products has been in development since 1995, so Knorr said the marketplace is just now catching up with him and his business.

"'Green' was not a real hot topic in 1995," said Knorr, CEO of Tropical Seas. "Being a smaller company, cash flow is an issue. We needed the money to pay for the tests at an independent lab to prove our products are environmentally friendly."



A California lab conducted tests on samples from the Pacific Ocean and from San Francisco harbor.

The results: Beach Buff products are 99 percent biodegradable within 90 days and pose no threat to reefs or the ocean waters.

With those test results in hand, Knorr is launching an aggressive marketing campaign, joining a burgeoning group of businesses and products claiming to be socially conscious and ecologically sound.

Nancy Costopulos, chief marketing officer of the American Marketing Association, said "going green" and demonstrating an awareness of environmental issues is becoming a part of businesses large and small.

"It's becoming the cost of doing business," she said. "Most companies at least have it on their minds."

And consumers are beginning to seek out products from the companies that say they care and take action to show it.

"The timelines are merging," Knorr said of his research and marketing efforts coinciding with the surge in eco-awareness. "If we had this ready two or three years ago, there wouldn't have been as much demand."

Knorr is a veteran of the skin-care products business and a former Hawaiian Tropic employee, who said he worked on the first sunscreen product -- Hawaiian Tropic's Baby Faces -- with an SPF rating higher than 15.

Tropical Seas, which he has owned for 21 years, also produces spa products, non-aerosol hair spray and specialized skin-care items for the dermatology and podiatry sectors.

One of the company's more unusual products is a hand soap for children that changes colors as they wash.

Knorr said the idea for reef-friendly products struck him once when he went swimming in the ocean.

"You could see this 'oil slick' when people jumped into the water," Knorr said. So he began formulating what he calls "a more elegant product, one with more efficacy."

Translated, that means he combined three or four waterproofing ingredients to the typical sunscreen's one, but used less of each substance. And he tested for water resistance and "rub resistance," to counter some of the effect of toweling off after a swim.

"If the product stays on you, it isn't getting into the water and onto the reefs," he said.

Knorr's primary market for the Beach Buff line lies on the islands of the Caribbean Ocean -- resort patrons and cruise ship passengers.

One of Tropical Seas' distributors is Dan Dougherty at Global Resourcing & Trading Services Inc. in Ormond Beach. Dougherty sells sun-care and spa products in the Caribbean.

"We are very excited to represent the product line," Dougherty said. "It's a perfect match. The tourism in the Caribbean is based on the ocean and the reefs. Our customers there have been looking for a reef-friendly product, but we haven't been able to source anything until now."

Dougherty sent samples to his clients in the Caribbean and is awaiting feedback.

"We hope to start shipping in the next month or so," he said.

Meanwhile, Knorr is working with a large-scale Southeast retailer he declined to name for his first foray into mass marketing. Next month, he is attending a convention in Miami, where some of the nation's large chains will be represented.

"We've flown under the radar for years," Knorr said. "Now it's time to get the word out."