

CATEGORYREPORT

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Green, Convenience Items Drive Business

A category that traditionally drives the automotive retail channel, lubricants is growing in home centers and hardware stores. New environmentally friendly and time-saving products are fueling sales.

Plews/Edelmann, a division of Tomkins AMG, has introduced LubriMatic Green, a line of oils and greases made from renewable resources that include U.S.-grown vegetable oils.

Gordon Hoffman, director of marketing at Plews/Edelmann, says LubriMatic Green products "have a higher natural viscosity than petroleum-based products, which means they're less likely to thin down at high temperatures, providing reduced overall operating temperatures and a higher degree of lubrication safety in high-speed applications." He adds the line is zinc- and chlorine-free, as well as "readily biodegradable."

After years of offering new can and container sizes for its eponymous product, WD-40 has launched several new delivery systems, says Tim Lesmeister, vp marketing. They include Big Blast Can, a wide spray applicator

that covers large surface areas; No-Mess Pen, a convenient, affordable pen-style package that can be stored in tool boxes and kitchen drawers; and Smart Straw, its most comprehensive solution to-date.

"Losing the little red straw is the only consistent product complaint we've had over the years," Lesmeister says. "We've seen a favorable response to this delivery system so far."

Liquid Wrench ChainLube, a new offering from Radiator Specialty Co., is a specialty formulation that penetrates the gaps between the links of a standard chain. "There's a misconception that there's an all-in-one product that can handle all lubrication jobs," says Aaron Martin, director of marketing. "Consumers need specialty products that are formulated for specialty applications."

Jig-A-Loo, launched in the U.S. nearly three years ago, combines lubricant and repellent applications in one can. Cindy Sutton, vp sales & marketing North America at Jig-A-Loo USA, says the silicone-based product does not contain petroleum distillates; it also doesn't leave odors and stains.

Jig-A-Loo will introduce five new products next year, Sutton adds,

including Graphite EXTREME, an aerosol that can be used at temperatures up to 986 degrees Fahrenheit. "We have partnered with Home Depot to bring this product to consumers nationwide."

Marketing, Promos Focus on Education

Increasing consumer knowledge of lubricants is central to marketing and promotional strategies.

"Plews/Edelmann has developed quarter-pallet and counter displays that do an excellent job of selling the merits of our bio-based lubricants," Hoffman says. "In 2010, we'll launch an aggressive consumer advertising campaign."

WD-40 features more than 2,000 product uses on its Web site, which further emphasizes the need for education, Lesmeister says. "When developing our marketing campaigns, we look at each delivery system and its target audiences to determine how WD-40 can provide the most value per end user."

Earlier this month Radiator Specialty launched a new Web site for Liquid Wrench. Martin says the site is similar to Google, as its "Wrench Finder" option lists products for applications, such as removing rusted nuts, silencing squeaky windows, and protecting garden tools from becoming rusty. "We also shot 30- to 45-second videos with Larry Beaver, our vp research & development, in which he walks users through how each product is used."

At the store level, Liquid Wrench is wrapping its products around a text messaging campaign. "On the side of each can, there is a code such as PO for penetrating oil," Martin notes. "Consumers who text PO to 25827 will find a list of about 15 applications for the product."

Hoffman is bullish about the lubricant category's future, citing the economic slowdown and its impact on capital expenditures. "We also like the timing of our LubriMatic Green program, which complements many corporate initiatives."

After nearly three years of growth, Sutton expects Jig-A-Loo to continue taking share in the hardware and automotive channels. "We'll likely offer a green alternative in the near future."

Retail Programs, Expansion Opportunities to Spark Future Growth

Some lubricant vendors are seeing their fastest growth from the home improvement channel. Others see it from various channels and foreign markets.

Radiator Specialty Co. is offering a number of Liquid Wrench multi-packs at retail to get the message out that one product doesn't work for all applications, says Aaron Martin, director of marketing. The company is also launching new aisle violators and shelf danglers late in the fourth quarter. "We do this so the products and their features and benefits can be showcased at no charge to retailers that we consider good partners — including Wal-Mart, Lowe's, and the auto stores."

All of Jig-A-Loo USA's 2010 marketing efforts will be focused on in-store promotions, says Cindy Sutton, vp sales & marketing North America. "We are not commanding premiums for our products. This allows our retail partners to hold costs down for consumers."

Plews/Edelmann, a division of Tomkins AMG, has made significant inroads in the hardware/home improvement market in the last six months, according to Gordon Hoffman, director of marketing. "Our marketing efforts will remain on selling the performance advantages of our new environmentally friendly products."

Overseas markets present a further growth opportunity for WD-40, notes vp marketing Tim Lesmeister. "We're currently in 160 countries worldwide and actively working on the other 30-plus nations. As long as there's rust in Russia and squeaks in China, there's room for category growth through education."