B4 Brands Takes Environmental Approach

John Rhomberg and three partners saw a unique business opportunity in 2002. Hand hygiene products were gaining wide recognition as a tool for infection control. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had just begun recommending that health care workers routinely use high-quality alcohol-based gels instead of soap and water on their hands when moving from patient to patient.

Chemical companies were developing such products using fossil-based ingredients, but nobody was producing environmentally sensitive—i.e., green—products. Iowa offered the perfect place to develop infection-prevention products using ag-based ingredients such as ethanol. From that concept, B4 Brands was created. The first product—Avant Hand Sanitizer—was launched in 2003.

Rhomberg and his partners made a timely decision. The demand for hand sanitizers and cleaners has increased rapidly as awareness about how to effectively prevent germs from spreading has grown. B4 Brands has been successfully marketed to health care centers, schools, corporations, and consumers. The company now has 14 different formulas, including sanitizers, cleaners, and lotions, in 70 different sizes.

The product line is marketed as the environmental choice in hand hygiene. “Everything we have done from the very beginning has been based on green, and it remains the hallmark of our company today,” says Rhomberg, B4 Brands CEO.

One way for companies to gain visibility for their products and their environmentally friendly ingredients is to earn the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Certified Biobased Product label. CIRAS, which manages the USDA labeling program, worked with B4 as the formulation was developed and helped with paperwork in preparation for the certification process. Biobased products are defined as containing significant amounts of carbon from renewable biomass such as soybeans, corn, and other agricultural resources rather than fossil-based carbon.

CIRAS has also helped B4 Brands break into the government market. Winning federal, state, and local contracts require targeted marketing, according to David Bogaczyk, CIRAS program director. “The number one complaint we get from government agencies is that a company didn’t respond to what they were being asked,” he says. “We provide one-on-one assistance with creating a capability statement.”

Staying up to date on the many changes in federal regulations is a constant challenge as well. Bogaczyk and Julie Fagle, CIRAS government contracting specialist, work with these regulations on a daily basis, and their goal is to help companies stay ahead of the curve so that appropriate changes are in place before submitting a proposal.

B4 has won several Blanket Purchasing Agreements, which are agreements negotiated with the General Services Administration saying it will make B4 products available to agencies. Rhomberg says government sales have accounted for 15–25 percent of B4’s sales in each of the last three years.

B4 launched six new formulations and a new dispensing platform in spring 2012. Branded as their “Eco-Premium” line, the products bring a new level of quality, safety, and green chemistry to schools, health care and industrial facilities, and government agencies, according to Rhomberg.

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