



MediaPost's  
**MarketingDaily**

## Pilot Aims To Make Back-To-School Even Greener

by Sarah Mahoney, Monday, Feb 25, 2008 5:00 AM ET

**PITY THE POOR BALLPOINT PEN.** Chewed on, drummed on conference tables, left behind at the bank or carelessly discarded, the humble writing instrument hasn't ever been touted as an agent of environmental change. Pilot Corp., which is bringing its BeGreen pens to the U.S., hopes to change that.

Pilot's BeGreen has been available in Europe for three years, and other companies already offer writing implements made from recycled materials in the U.S., including Paper Mate's Earthwrite pencils and Zebra Jimmie Clips recycled retractable pens. But Pilot says BeGreen is "the world's first full line of earth-friendly writing instruments," including refillable gel ink pens, ballpoint pens, rolling-ball pens and mechanical pencils, all made from at least 70% recycled content, and packaged in recycled materials.

Americans spend anywhere from \$4.8 billion to \$5.2 billion a year on writing implements, says Robert Silberman, VP of marketing for Pilot Pen Corp. of America, based in Trumbull, Conn.--with ballpoint pens, markers, gel inks and mechanical pencils among the biggest sellers. And for all "paperless society" predictions that get tossed around, he says, "we buy more pens than ever. There are a lot more choices, in terms of types of pens and colors of ink."

And increasingly, because the business focuses so heavily on students, environmental issues have become more important, whether that means kids buying solar backpacks, recycled bulletin boards, or energy-saving computers.

But for Pilot, owned by the Japanese Pilot Corp.--a relatively high-end disposable pen--an earth-friendly brand has been a little tricky. "We position ourselves as the Mercedes-Benz of disposable pens," he says. And many Pilot pens cost around \$2, when consumers can buy a dozen basic Bic pens for \$1.49. "But our research has shown that while people are interested in greener pens, they're not willing to pay more for it. They want it at the same price."

BeGreen seems to be the answer. "But availability of quality recycled materials is an issue," Silberman says. "We were determined to make sure pens from these materials are as high-quality as our regular pens. We wanted them to have that same Pilot writing feel." He says the company soon hopes to expand to other products as well, including highlighters, "but a lot of those decisions are going to be driven by how much material is available for manufacturing."

Marketing support, including print and online, will be timed for the back-to-school season. About 35% of writing-implement purchases occur in the six-week period just before school starts.

While BeGreen is in its infancy in the U.S., Silberman believes sales could eventually account for 15 to 20% of Pilot's sales.

*Sarah Mahoney can be reached at [sarah@mediapost.com](mailto:sarah@mediapost.com)*