

LAST YEAR, when 15,000 people turned out for the inaugural sustainable living expo EPIC, the strong showing surprised even the event's optimistic organizer. Yet EPIC director Nancy Wright is confident that attendance for this year's eco-friendly consumer products show, which opens April 18 in Vancouver, will be even higher.

Wright is no stranger to green business trends. She is also vice president of the GLOBE Foundation, a not-for-profit that since its origin in 1993 has encouraged companies to embrace 'the business of the environment.' EPIC is GLOBE's baby.

Though companies ranging from upstarts to majors are launching green products, Wright says their moves are generally cautious. For good reasons, it appears.

Studies have shown that while affluent consumers, especially women in the 25- to 40-year-old range, are buying into green product lines, "Young people tend to say they support eco-sustainability, but aren't quite ready to put their dollars there," says Wright.

California-based corporate environmental strategist Joel Makower says there are other realities to consider. "When you point out what you are doing right, you illuminate problems the public might not have realized you had."

While he also says market shares of green products remain in the single digits, companies that embrace sustainability are benefiting through new product innovation, new markets and a better ability to attract and retain talent – "things you can put a number on."

Plus, he notes, "There's a pipeline of green products out there. The trickle is going to turn into a steady stream. It's no longer a fringe activity;

# Shades of green

While the undercurrents propelling a shift to greener products may be strong, the pace of change at the consumer level is gentler, and not without good reason.

it's companies like SC Johnson and Proctor and Gamble. These products are sold at Wal-Mart, Target and Home Depot."

Wright shares Makower's confidence that companies staking green turf today are positioning themselves to be tomorrow's big winners.

What Makower says is lacking in today's commercial environment, however, are green standards. "We don't have answers to questions like, 'what is a green product; what is a green company?'"

Mark Trotzuck, president of Vancouver-based Ecoapparel.ca and Boardroom Design & Creative, is the

first to admit his business isn't carbon neutral. "But I'm doing my best to get there."

The birth of Trotzuck's daughter, Rio Raine, inspired him to embrace green business practices. He has since discovered it's a high road.

While his Vancouver factory's socially responsible practices are independently audited, "I need to know that my supply chain is also environmentally friendly." That can be a tall order, especially when the supply chain is global.

Trotzuck isn't waiting for standards to be established in the textile industry. Like other pioneers, he is looking for solutions. He believes he has found it in

'bluesign' – a Swiss-based organization that verifies the social and environmental performance of textile supply chains.

"It's expensive, but now I can have the confidence with fair certainty that I have experts testing my products," he says. "I think this is where the trend is going."

While Trotzuck says style, quality and price remain dominant factors for consumers today, he is confident that eco-awareness is rising, and with it, opportunity. In addition to his Ecoapparel.ca division, Trotzuck is launching an eco-friendly apparel retail store, aptly named RIORAIN. ■