

## Innocent Drinks Stays in Touch

In the summer of 1998, three Cambridge University graduates spent about £500 on fruit, used it to make smoothie drinks, and sold them from a stall at a small music festival in London. Customers were given the option of putting their empty bottles in one of two rubbish bins. Beside both was a sign that said 'Do you think we should give up our jobs to make these smoothies?' and on one of the bins was printed 'Yes', and on the other 'No'. At the end of the day, the 'Yes' bin was full. The three promptly resigned their jobs and formed Innocent Drinks, manufacturing pure fruit smoothies. Their business attitude is based on five ethics:

1. Making 100 percent natural products that are good for people.
2. Buying all ingredients ethically.
3. Using ecologically sound packaging materials.
4. Reducing carbon emissions across the entire business system.
5. Giving 10 percent of profits each year to charities in the countries where its fruit comes from.

One of the founders, Richard Reed, said 'right from the outset we have always been looking at how we can use technology to help the human, not to replace the human; to engage with consumers, to get feedback from retailers to make sure that ordering goes seamlessly behind the scenes, that we can communicate office to office. There are a million different ways that technology can support and enhance the human, and that is where we try to use technology to further our business internationally.' He suggests that executive sponsorship from the very top is key: 'you can give all this technology to people, but if you give them a decision-making tool on their desktop, do not assume they are going to make better decisions if you have not told them what to do with that information', and sees technology as a communication tool to communicate with fruit growers, agents and customers throughout the world. Innocent Drinks have a 'family': anyone can join by e-mailing them. The 'family' is Innocent's way of staying in touch with the people who drink their products. Each week they e-mail 'family members' with news and competitions. If you join, according to their website, they will also 'invite you to nice events like Fruitstock (our free festival) and maybe send you the odd present if you're lucky. Finally, we'll very occasionally ask you what you reckon we should do next, as we sometimes get confused.'

### Questions

1. How might Innocent use technology to help maintain its five ethics?
2. Explain some ways technology could help Innocent stay in touch with fruit growers.
3. Why do you think executive support so important in technology development? Could a project go ahead without it? What would such a project look like?
4. Do you think the 'Innocent Family' is a good idea? Explain your answer.

SOURCES: Innocent Drinks (website), <http://www.innocentdrinks.co.uk>; Glick, B., 'Keep the Customer Satisfied', a Computing web seminar that looked at how small firms can attract and build custom, *Computing*, March 15, 2007.