

Environmental Analysis: Huggies Supreme diapers

By

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Kimberly-Clark, a multi-national corporation is one of the top manufacturers of consumer products. Kimberly-Clark's brands, recognized globally, such as Huggies, Kotex, and Depend, to name a few, capture a large market share in over 150 countries and services more than 1.3 billion individuals annually. Huggies, which was first introduced in 1978, is the number-one selling brand of diapers in North America; it also has a reputation for being highly competitive in the world market.

In June 2002, Kimberly-Clark provided us with their latest product, which is actually an improvement to an existing product: the Huggies Supreme diaper. The need for this improved design came after several studies of the current expectations of the consumers need to have a better fitting diaper with less leakage and more comfort, as well as ease of use for the parents and/or caretakers. Dudley Lehman, group president of Infant and Child Care at Kimberly-Clark stated the following: “Inspired by consumer feedback and backed by our nonwovens and absorbency expertise, we’ve produced a superior-performing diaper that’s like no other on the market”(Kimberly-Clark, 2002). This led to the improvement of having an entirely flexible outer skin in conjunction with an entirely elastic waistband. This particular product was not changed entirely and it kept “the Ultra SkinGuard Liner [which] contains the following mild cosmetic ingredients to help keep skin soft and healthy-looking: *petrolatum*, *ozokerite* (Melissa, 2001).

Studies in the environmental factors that make up the diaper market indicate that the improved design has the potential to capture a larger share than that of the original. The factors of demographics, economy, technology, natural, political/legal, and social/cultural variables will be considered in this paper.

The demographics that pertain to Huggies customers, in general, seem to provide support for new infant care products. The world population, today, is composed of approximately 6 billion individuals. Half of these individuals are under the age of 25 and nearly 1 billion of those are between the ages of 15-24 years of age. We, as a society of humans, are also aware that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) needs to be approximate 2.1% in order to maintain humankind. Inferred from this statistic, we can assume that there will always be at least 1% of the population in diapers, or will have the need for diapers. Some countries, mainly the industrial countries with much purchasing power, are at this level or below it while other countries, such as India, Yemen, and Nigeria are above this margin. Nearly a billion individuals are approaching, or have reached, child bearing or care-taking status (in terms of males who are not bearers, obviously). These are the future consumers, providing they choose to have children at some point in their life. At this point, we are taking into consideration the entire population of eligible people as markets; later we will discuss the actual purchasing power of these individuals.

The economic conditions that exist today, in the US, suggest that individuals and families have more purchasing power and disposable income than in the past. The Huggies Supreme diapers are priced at a premium, in comparison to other Huggies diapers and competitors products, which actually means that you get less product (in this case actual quantity) for more money. This pricing strategy could be attributed to the new product status and for the additional comfort and ease of use for the caretakers, opposed to the cost of actually manufacturing the new materials used.

However, even as disposable income increases, more and more individuals are budget conscious and expect their money to be stretched as far as possible and even though more people have more to spend, they also see that they must take control of their investments and retirement accounts—which ultimately reduces money in circulation. This, in turn, means that the benefit must be worth the extra price paid.

The natural environment is of major concern for some members of society that are opposed to disposable diapers in general. Huggies Supreme doesn't necessarily include any new or different chemical compounds that are not currently in use by many companies, but the criticism is still apparent. Disposable diapers are a large source of waste matter that must be dealt with by our current landfill systems. These systems are not designed to filter waste produced from human beings. In fact, as society is becoming more conscious of recyclable materials, the disposable diaper will feel more pressure from environmentalists. The following are a few concerns:

1. Over 200 lbs of raw fecal matter will be placed in landfill systems from each baby over the course of their diaper usage.
2. It takes 2.4 million trees and an additional enormous amount of chemicals to treat the wood to product 1.7 billion diapers.
3. The polyacrylate material used in diapers which has been the cause of various, supposed, ailments in babies and is the material that was removed from tampons—after determining it was the cause of toxic shock syndrome—is a source of major concern (Kimberly-Clark and other companies have their own reports that counter the above argument and prove it is safe, even if eaten by babies—in small doses I must assume).

These concerns and the fact that our resources on this planet are very limited will probably play a major role in the future design of diapers. The following quote from the Environmental Action Foundation in Washington, D.C. states that, "Parents have been deluged by confusing studies and

advertising from the "disposable" diaper industry. Parents should remember that reusing materials is the best way to prevent waste and conserve resources - PERIOD!"(McDiarmid, 2000).

The technology component of Kimberly-Clark's Huggies Supreme diapers is really more about making the product known to the consumers, more so than any new product enhancement on a dramatic level. Kimberly-Clark's website, in particular the Huggies website, allows for feedback and questions from consumers, signing up for parenting newsletters and Huggies product information, and for comparison of products. This portion of the Huggies brand is rather disappointing however. In fact they really have room for improvement regarding the specific details about the components that make up their product and safety information links in order to lessen the worry of some consumers.

The political/legal realm of diapers will, as stated under natural environment section, will be more about finding alternate sources for diapers and making sure that the product is entirely safe.

The social and cultural aspect, in the US, is geared towards making life, and all of its facets, as easy and uncomplicated as possible. The sanitary aspect of our culture makes disposable diapers the convenient alternative to cloth, especially when out on the town where it is important to be able to quickly change the baby's diaper and maintain a clean environment, and self. The advent of the stretch band around the entire waist is really the main selling point. This allows for less mess, and hopefully all mess, escaping from the diaper while it is in use. The soil remains in the diaper better and this better containment prevents the constant changing of the baby's clothing, and the caretakers for that matter.

Today, it is all about choices and Huggies Supreme offers a few minor changes in the design, which translates into major improvements both over the original product and the competition.

Kimberly-Clark. (2002). Kimberly-Clark Introduces Improved Huggies Supreme Diapers (pp. 1).  
McDiarmid, C. (2000). ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS.  
Melissa. (2001). HUGGIES SUPREME DIAPERS~~NOT WORTH THE EXTRA MONEY!