



The Origins of Green Seal

A word from the founder, Rena Shulsky David

I have been an environmentalist since childhood. I was a founding member of the Social Venture Network (SVN), a pioneering group comprised of heads of corporations committed to running their companies in a socially responsible manner. I recruited my friend Lisa Rideout and her husband Michael Foley to join SVN, since Lisa was in charge of socially responsible investing at Bank of Boston. One day while visiting their home in Boston, the conversation turned to how to move environmental issues forward. And suddenly an idea came to me. How about a "Green Seal" along the lines of Underwriters Laboratories (UL), or the Kosher Seal, or the Good Housekeeping Seal? People shopping for all kinds of things could look for the Green Seal that would certify that the product is approved as environmentally preferable or environmentally sustainable. For this to work, it would be critical for the Green Seal to stand for absolute integrity. I felt strongly that this kind of mark could help shift the marketplace toward environmental sustainability. The organization had to be a nonprofit, so it could not be tainted by the profit motive, and it had to be independent of other organizations. At the time, there was nothing like it. There were no other environmental certification programs or environmental certification organizations in the U.S. On my return to New York from Boston, I discussed the idea in general terms with some leaders in the developing socially responsible movement whom I knew. It was greeted with great enthusiasm as an innovative and substantive idea. Somehow the advertising industry trade publication *Ad Age* learned of my idea and wanted an interview with me and ran a very positive story about Green Seal.

Suddenly I was deluged with calls from design firms wanting to design the seal and major PR firms wanting to represent Green Seal *pro bono*. At the time, I was contacted by the founder and head of the Marketing for the Environment practice at Ruder Finn, Inc., one of the largest and most respected independent public relations firms in the world. The practice's leader Executive Vice President Ellen Schaplowsky and I discovered we had a shared vision about the great value Green Seal could contribute and the agency came on board to do PR *pro bono*. I made the work of the design firms easier by designing the Green Seal logo myself while sitting in my real estate office one day!

Around that time in 1988, I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Alan Kay, a brilliant scientist and self-made entrepreneur. Alan, who has a long history of commitment to social issues, is also a pioneer of the computer age and founder of two public companies. He immediately joined the Green Seal board contributing his time and brilliance to its goals. Together with Alan, we recruited Carol Goldberg, former president of Stop and Shop companies and a legendary business woman. Carol was one of the first women at Harvard's Business School, and despite being a busy board member of several major companies she gave her enthusiastic support and business acumen to Green Seal. I am endlessly grateful that she chose to devote so much of her time to help Green Seal grow. Alan Kay also helped me recruit Henry Hampton, well-known and highly respected producer of the acclaimed PBS TV series "Eyes on the Prize." Despite his busy schedule, Henry too chose to join the board of Green Seal. His amazing kindness and support were true gifts. The concept of Green Seal was able to advance, thanks to the wisdom and support of this extraordinary group. With all this momentum and Green Seal established and nationally known for more than a year, we hired Denis Hayes, executive director of the Earth Day organization, to help Green Seal liaise with other environmental groups.

In 1990, Ruder Finn engineered a masterful press conference for Green Seal. All three TV networks (Yes, there were only three at the time!) covered this never-before-tried environmental evaluation *effort* on major morning shows and national evening news. All the women's magazines were there and ran articles. *BusinessWeek*, *Time*, *the New York Times*, *the Wall Street Journal*, and many other media outlets attended the press conference and generated some amazing news coverage. As ever, *The New York Times* and *the Wall Street Journal* hotly competed for this story, which they perceived would have a major influence on business. *The Wall Street Journal*, wanting to scoop every other media outlet, called my father (yes, my father!) several days before the press conference to try to get an advance copy of the seal. GREEN SEAL WAS VERY BIG NEWS!!

THE ORIGINAL GREEN SEAL OF APPROVAL SINCE 1989

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