

Homecare is going vegan

By 2025, it's estimated that a quarter of people in the UK will have chosen a vegan lifestyle. As well as welfare concerns, growing awareness around the environmental impacts of the meat and dairy industries have accelerated the country's move towards veganism. But how are homecare brands responding to the challenge to find more ethical products?

Both larger brands and SMEs are looking to get involved in the plant-based revolution, so the vegan homecare market is becoming increasingly crowded. Consumers often stick with products that they trust, so finding a way to compete with these established names can be challenging for newcomers. Therefore, real innovation is needed to stand out.

Patent protection is essential in a growing market, offering brands a competitive edge. However, it will take more than switching out an animal ingredient for a known vegan alternative to obtain this type of commercial protection. To ensure their product is patentable, companies must be able to prove that it is truly new and inventive.

One way to do this is to start from scratch. Pipper Standard's European patent (EP3046425) uses fermented fruit as a cleaning formula. A pineapple solution is fermented in lactic acid bacteria, meaning the product is made entirely from natural vegan ingredients.

Other innovators have taken a more eco-friendly approach. Method's patented liquid cleaning products (EP2346976) for example contain plant-based ingredients and are not tested on animals. Comprising a surfactant system, water, a solvent system and an enzyme, these highly-concentrated formulations provide effective cleaning with lower doses of the active ingredients. Thanks to the reduced-weight formulation, less packaging is required and energy consumption during transportation is also reduced.

Solid versions of homecare products are also being created to benefit the environment. Blueland's pending US patent application (US2020/377827A1) for a laundry detergent in a concentrated tablet form uses entirely vegan ingredients and removes the need for single-use plastic. At three times smaller than average laundry detergent pods, the whole-life carbon footprint of the product is significantly lower than non-vegan alternatives. Solid formulations require a considerably different approach to liquid solutions, making the innovation truly inventive.

Every brand should have an IP strategy, and patent protection is an essential part of this, offering a 20-year exclusivity period during which a company can recoup its upfront investment



in R&D. However, when competition is high, a more multi-dimensional IP approach may be necessary. For example, trade secrets are sometimes used in partnership with patents to protect the innovation in the early stages of development. To ensure the secret's safety, non-disclosure agreements can be implemented, and the trade secrets stored in a tamper-proof and time-stamped digital form to prove their existence at a certain date.

A strong brand identity is also particularly important in a crowded market. For larger companies, this can involve acquiring smaller, more established vegan businesses to avoid competing with them when bringing new products to market. These SMEs are likely to have a cruelty-free record, meaning consumer trust will be secured more easily.

Nevertheless, new larger brands are also evolving rapidly, developing new vegan formulas for a variety of consumer products. A range of alternative ingredients are already available, making product development a fairly straightforward process. However, the challenge comes with proving that the brand is now dedicated to a more ethical approach to business. Trade marks can be an important part of this change, with new slogans and logos aligning the brand with veganism. Seeking accreditation from associations such as the Vegan Society, can also enhance the company's credibility in this space.

Should a new product be inventive enough to be patentable, an application must be filed as early as possible. Doing so minimises the risk of early disclosure, and helps to give the business a competitive edge. If the innovation holds an environmental benefit, which vegan products commonly do, the UK's Green Channel could be used to accelerate the patent application process. In a dynamic market, speed to market can be critical as competitors may be working on something similar, for example.

With many consumers now favouring cruelty-free products, businesses must get creative to meet this demand. As such,

the development of a comprehensive IP strategy is more important than ever for homecare brands that want to win a place in consumers' shopping baskets in the future.



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