

## Brian Keane of SmartPower, Renewable Energy Marketer: "Our Thinking is Twenty Years Behind"

by Alex Pasternack, New York, NY on 04.16.09



Few would disagree with the idea of clean energy: it can help reduce global warming, air pollution, energy shortages, the national debt, and our reliance on foreign oil. But America isn't exactly putting its money where its mouth is. How to get average people to know that "clean energy is here, and it works," is the task of Brian F. Keane. The head of [SmartPower](#), the country's leading non-profit devoted to marketing clean energy, Keane is using Madison Avenue thinking and grassroots efforts -- like giving away thousands of dollars to the [greenest college campus](#) or to [the best homemade ad](#)

-- in order to hawk clean energy "like it's [Coke](#) or McDonalds."

### How did SmartPower start, and where has it gone?

**BK:** It was started about seven years ago by a group of private foundations. Our charge was to market clean energy and energy efficiency like it's McDonalds. To get regular people who don't care about clean energy and the environment to buy clean energy and be clean energy conscious.

Today, 84 percent of people in the United States say they want to buy clean energy. Less than 3 percent of people do. Therein lies our challenge and also our opportunity. Our job as marketers is to find out why they're lying to us, what are the mental blocks, and then to create messages that address those barriers.

### What tend to be our most common hang-ups about clean energy?

**Brian Keane:** For thirty years, clean energy has been sold in this country because it's good for the environment. The challenge is what are the motivations, what will make people want to be energy efficient. In the same way that McDonalds or Coke tries to find out why their customers are buying

