



It's Getting Easier—and Increasingly Important—to Be Green

By David Krohto

You may have seen the recent IBM television advertising campaign espousing the economic value of developing a “green” corporate strategy. It’s the one showing a skeptical board of directors—obviously focused solely on the bottom line—being educated to the potential cost savings by a top manager (himself recently educated to this fact by a Gen-X subordinate). When the economic benefits sink in, their world (the boardroom) explodes in an animated profusion of colorful characters and a joyful Disneyesque sound track.

If you missed that one, maybe you’ve noticed that every petroleum company, from BP to ExxonMobil, is promoting their eco-friendly strategies. Oil companies being green? And how about the Major League Baseball All-Star game this past summer. The MVP of the game was awarded a Chevy Tahoe Hybrid, the (you guessed it) “Green Car of the Year.” Finally, it was announced recently that the first eco-friendly billboard is coming to Times Square in New York City—powered entirely by the sun and wind.

It is obvious that environmentally friendly products and processes have the attention of the American consumer. Consumer products and services companies are managing their product lines and marketing communications accordingly. Whether being green is purely the result of a company’s attempts for revenue growth by latching onto this trend or a bona fide effort to be a good corporate citizen is not the point. The real point is that smart companies today have, or are developing, an eco-friendly strategy.

So what exactly does eco-friendly mean? Simply, it is the conservation of the natural environment. But hold on a moment! We’re in business here and concerned with profitable revenue growth. Coupling conservation with economic growth, the term “sustainable development” emerges. A basic definition of sustainable development was provided by the Brundtland Commission in 1987: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

So we have the concept of sustainable development being comprised of two distinct components, natural resource conservation (including energy savings and reduction in the use of hazardous chemicals) and procurement (business development). Conservation includes the obvious tactics your business can implement. To name just a few: increased use of e-mail to reduce paper consumption, encouragement of the use of recycled paper and using both sides of paper, turning off electrical devices when not in

use, installation of displacement toilet reservoirs to reduce water usage, replacing Styrofoam coffee cups with ceramic mugs, and employment of alternative fuel technology to a fleet of delivery vehicles.

The idea of sourcing product that abides by sustainability guidelines is a bit more complex. The primary raw materials used by the wall art industry include wood, paper, plastic, metal, and pigments. Each has idiosyncrasies relating to sustainability. As a moulding supplier, my company deals with issues like forestry practices, moulding manufacturing, and finishing techniques. The use of harvested finger-jointed pine from New Zealand forests that adhere to sustainability principles and hot-stamp foils that simulate the aesthetics of exotic wood species resulted in the launch of our newest eco-friendly collection called NatureWoods™. The important aspect of recycled content is demonstrated in our Valucore™ line of polystyrene moulding, where recycled polymers account for upwards of 90 percent of the raw material used in its manufacture.

So how would a wall decor company benefit by incorporating eco-friendly products and processes into its business model? First, it might prove to be a positive thing from a cultural perspective. Employees, both current and prospective, as well as other stakeholders are likely to view it in a positive way. In other words, it makes good PR, plain and simple. But most important is the way your customer base responds, and in this respect there should be great value. Consider the design-oriented market to which we are appealing. Aside from social advocates, this is the audience that really has led the charge towards being green in architecture and consumer products. This is perhaps best illustrated by the non-profit U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program, which promotes the use of sustainable building construction and design. If you are dealing with the design community, they’ll understand and appreciate your efforts to offer green products.

The value of incorporating a “green” concept into your business strategy is apparent. Sure, it requires an effort on your part. But the economic benefits to your organization, along with just knowing you are doing something good, should make it all worth the endeavor. ■

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