



Why Greening Your Business Might Make Money

Lower costs, better marketing, new customers, and more green to you?

In response to mounting public concerns about global warming and other forms of environmental damage, many companies are launching initiatives to “green” their products, services, and operations. But whether or not you agree that taking steps to reduce your company’s carbon footprint is the “right thing” to do – adopting environmentally friendly practices can lower operating costs and help your company stand out in a crowded marketplace.

Going green may even bring in a new set of environmentally aware customers, enhance your company’s image, and improve morale among your employees.

It Makes Business Sense

“Sustainability” may appear somewhat optional at the moment, but a combination of public pressure, rising energy prices, and the enactment of tighter regulations may soon force businesses to drastically reduce their energy consumption and alter the types of materials they use. Moving toward adopting more environmentally friendly practices now may put you ahead of your competitors in the race to meet rapidly evolving market demands and regulatory standards.

Producing excessive amounts of waste is intuitively not just bad for the planet; it is also bad for your bottom line. For business reasons, your company should seek to reduce the amount of waste it produces, and recycle as much of the remaining waste as possible.

For example, if your company uses a lot of paper, employees should discard the paper in separate bins for recycling, rather than throwing the paper in the trash. In addition, paper made from recycled materials can be used not just within the office, but also for advertising and marketing materials. While recycled paper is often no more expensive than conventional paper, you may have to seek out a vendor that carries a good selection of recycled paper lines at reasonable prices.

How to Start

To get started on a recycling program, ask a manager or employee to serve as your company’s “recycling coordinator.” The coordinator’s job will include identifying what materials are recyclable, and in what areas of operation waste can be reduced through changes in working practices.

The coordinator may, for example, be responsible for placing and emptying recycling containers throughout the workspace, and for educating other employees about recycling procedures and ways to minimize waste. You may also want to put the coordinator in charge of sourcing recycled materials and setting up relationships with haulers and recyclers. With the help of the coordinator, get employees involved in the process of conserving resources, encouraging them to participate in the recycling program and offer their own suggestions for reducing waste.

If you are building or remodeling your facilities, consider hiring contractors that are committed to sustainable construction practices and installing highly efficient heating & cooling systems. Green building often costs little more than conventional forms of construction, and can produce substantial energy savings over time.

There are a number of tax breaks available to companies that invest in certain types of green energy technologies, such as wind, solar, or geothermal systems. Organic building materials also tend to produce better indoor air quality, resulting in a healthier and more pleasant working environment. Even if you are not currently considering a major overhaul of your facilities or equipment, conducting an energy audit can help you identify simple ways to conserve energy, such as using highly efficient fluorescent bulbs, or establishing a policy of turning off lights and equipment when not in use.

Many business owners and their employees do a lot of driving. If you are thinking about replacing some of your company vehicles, consider buying or leasing the most fuel efficient cars or trucks. If you buy hybrid or electric vehicles, you may qualify for tax credits. Consider, too, whether routes can be made more efficient to reduce the amount of driving necessary.

If your business manufactures products, there could be many ways that you can reduce the environmental impact of the manufacturing process, the products themselves, and the packaging of the products. While changing the way you make your products may require some research and involve developing new relationships with suppliers, the amount of money that can be saved by adopting more efficient processes can be substantial. And, as consumer concerns about the use of potentially toxic materials in the manufacturing of products spread, using safer or organic materials can become a major selling point.

It's About Marketing

Once you have made a genuine commitment to adopting greener practices, don't be shy about sharing your goals and achievements with your customers. Younger Americans, in particular, are attracted to companies that care about sustainability: according to a Maritz poll, half of consumers between the ages of 18 and 30 are more likely to buy from an environmentally responsible company than from a firm that does not make that commitment, and nearly half of Generation Y consumers are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products or services.

Include information about your company's sustainable products and practices in your marketing and advertising messages, as well as in your recruitment materials. You may be able to generate media coverage of your green initiatives by calling or sending press releases to local and trade media.

And as trite as it sounds: going more green might bring you more green.