

Can you go green, too?

by Karlis Bryan

Going green has gone mainstream. From Al Gore's award winning *An Inconvenient Truth* and large corporations touting their new environment conscious efforts to your local grocery store offering reusable shopping bags, the environment is taking center stage. Try to think of a day when you haven't heard new research about global warming. So with seemingly everyone going green and doing their part to protect our Earth, you may be wondering, "Can going green fit into my company?"

There is no debate around the fact that people, including your customers and prospects, are looking for small ways to decrease their impact on the environment. According to recent studies, 93% of consumers "believe companies have a responsibility to preserve the environment." Eight out of every 10 consumers believe it's important to buy from green companies. So the question is, can you afford to ignore this new trend in consumer perception? From personal experience, I can tell you that seeing a "green approved" symbol on a product or in an office sparks consideration and sometimes loyalty in my mind. Environmental responsibility is becoming a standard part of decision making (value driver) of the younger generation – your soon-to-be clients

Here are some guidelines for integrating your new green initiatives into your business:

- **Don't overpromise.** Your company is not going to save the world. Don't oversell it. Don't make promises that, if challenged, you can't support. You wouldn't promise a client that you could solve all their life's problems in three easy steps. The same principle applies here.
- **Keep your promise.** If you commit to reducing paper waste, you must deliver on it. Think of this as another part of your customer service promise. It's just as important.
- **Understand that this is a long-term investment.** Going green is a commitment. It will take some work, and it will take some time. But the benefit outweighs the cost. You may not be able to measure the impact it has on your bottom line, but when a client can talk to your efforts as a part of your business they truly appreciate, you've received your reward.
- **Tap into your internal resources.** There may be people in your office who have ideas on how to become more environmentally responsible. Bank of America created an Environment Team whose mission is to "integrate environmental sensitivity into operational processes and decision making." Each department has an Environmental Team representative who reports back to management about best environmental practices.
- **Being relevant to shareholders.** Thinking outside of your client base, going green can give you an advantage when seeking investments or trying to expand into new towns or states that give weight to companies that are consciously running their business with the environment in mind. It can also help build morale among your employees.
- **Take a risk to be a leader.** While consciousness about the environment is rampant in the consumer market, it's not as prevalent in the business services sector. Going green can be a differentiator for your company. Take a chance.

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There may be some misconception that going green – opting for recycled paper, replacing light bulbs in your office, arranging for recyclable waste to be collected – takes too much time, effort and resources considering possible effects on your bottom line are inconclusive. The fact is, there are little, almost effortless changes that you can make to turn your company green. For example, you can make small adjustments in your direct mail strategy that will not affect the frequency or quality of your communications: keep your database up to date to avoid waste; reduce the size of the mailer by mere inches; use recycled paper; communicate electronically.

Once you've made these minor changes, don't be afraid to announce them. They can be talking points that spark discussion or consideration of your company over another among your clients and prospects. It will also help your clients feel good about their decision to work with you, an environmentally conscious company.

It's not easy being green, but it's manageable and worth the time and effort to build loyalty to your brand.