

## Clean, lean, mean and Green

The next time you look at money-saving and money-making initiatives in your business you may like to start by looking at the environment. For starters, according to the Carbon Trust, an average office-based business wastes £6,000 per year by leaving equipment on over weekends and bank holidays. As well as the financial benefits, evidence suggests that being “green” can help build better relationships with business partners, strengthen brands and increase employee and customer loyalty. Business is changing. “Green” credentials will increasingly be in the critical spotlight in the years to come.

One of the biggest benefits has to be in positive PR or “Social Marketing”; raising the profile of your organization and heightening your customers’ (be it retail or consumer) awareness that you are the sustainability king in your sector. In an era where differentiation is achingly difficult to achieve, this is where many companies can find a margin of difference.

Look around and you will see the numbers of companies and individuals in the food industry who are benefiting from positive PR associated with making an effort in the context of the environment.

Perhaps one of the most far-reaching examples of recent times is Adnams Brewery in Southwold, Suffolk. When Adnams needed a new distribution centre they went for a radically different approach, starting with locating the site in a disused quarry that drew traffic from the village centre. They decided to give the building a “living roof” consisting of grass that provides natural insulation and helps regulate the internal temperature. In addition to this, solar panels produce 80% of their required hot water and reed beds purify their waste water.

Waste and the environment is also starting to be a major selling feature for food sector customers, with M&S and Waitrose battling to be seen as the sustainability champions. Sainsbury’s latest initiative is to pack more than 500 of its own-brand products in compostable packaging. CEO Justin King states:

“We’re confident that putting our food, from ready meals to organics, in compostable packaging will significantly help to reduce the packaging that most threatens the environment.”

Tesco, meanwhile, have launched a £3.2m project with freight carrier Eddie Stobart to distribute cargo up and down the country using a “green train” that they say will replace more than 13,000 road journeys and save around 6000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Of course, not every company can plant grass on their roof or spend millions on a new logistics solution. But there are some quick wins that every company can implement and will bring returns from both an economic and PR perspective. One thing is clear, doing nothing will soon cease to be an option - so what can you do?

- Any business that spends over £50,000 per year on energy qualifies for a free survey from the carbon trust <http://www.carbontrust.co.uk>
- Look at your company car policy - the new Vehicle Excise Duty rewards buyers who choose cars with low, less harmful, carbon-dioxide emissions. [www.vcacarfueldata.org.uk/new-ved.asp](http://www.vcacarfueldata.org.uk/new-ved.asp)
- Join companies like BSKYB, Reed and Honda by becoming “Carbon Neutral” (offsetting your carbon emissions). The website: [www.carbonneutral.com](http://www.carbonneutral.com) will tell you more.
- Encourage your staff to cycle to work through the government backed “cycle to work” scheme - a tax free benefit to offer your employees. [www.bikeforall.net](http://www.bikeforall.net)
- Look at your entire effluent and water disposal system - if necessary bring in an expert to look at it. One of our interim engineering managers identified over £10,000 in annual savings just through proper water controls.
- Be a champion in your sector - look to your purchasing manager to use environmentally responsible materials and recycled or compostable packaging.
- Above all, ensure you publicise everything you do on your website and let everyone know what you are doing - raising your eco-profile might just raise your market share.

Scott Hutchinson, October 2006