

Achieving Sustainability For You and Your Business

By definition, to sustain means to give support or relief. So it's no surprise that sustainable businesses support or improve the current and future quality of people's lives. Many architects, builders, interior designers, and others are frequently asked to use natural products that protect and improve the environment. And in many industries, special designations exist for recognizing these certified companies.

Cleveland is one of the few cities in Ohio that is taking strong strides to make a difference in the U.S. Delicious Living Magazine voted Cleveland as one of the top five most impressive cities in the U.S. for this reason. Yet, according to the recent Ohio Health and Wellness Report produced by The Marketing Insider, Ohio still has some catching up to do. Mindset is where it needs to be in regard to an overall understanding of sustainability, yet this is not translating enough into action for both businesses and consumers.

Although sustainable businesses represent only a small percentage of the business community, it is a fast-growing part of the marketplace. It is expanding at a healthy pace and is projected to reach \$1 trillion annually by 2020. Over 27 large U.S. corporations, including Nike, Estee Lauder, 3M, and Hewlett-Packard, accounting for over one billion dollars of the annual U.S. market for paper, pulp, and packaging, have made a commitment to stop selling products or using packaging made from old-growth trees, and to influence their suppliers to do the same.

The sustainable economy is one of the five main LOHAS (Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability) markets. It includes:

1. Alternative transportation
2. Green building and goods
3. Renewable energy
4. Resource-efficient products
5. Socially responsible investing
6. Environmental management

LOHAS is a \$230 billion (and growing) U.S. marketplace for goods and services that appeal to consumers who value health, the environment, social justice, personal development and sustainable living. Of this \$230 billion, \$76.5 billion is comprised of sustainable economy.

Understanding overall sustainability is one thing, but doing something to be a part of it is yet another. It's important that you use this information to empower you toward action-to effect change. The Sustainable Style Foundation of Seattle, Washington, puts it succinctly, "look fabulous, live well and do good." Many of us recycle, something that may seem commonplace, yet is one step toward helping to protect the environment.

From a business standpoint, business owners can use this information to become sustainable and provide a better place for people to work and live. Companies can be sustainable even through their internal marketing and communications efforts. By using electronic formats to deliver collateral material and presentations to their internal and external audiences, they can minimize waste. In addition, professionally printed materials can be created on recycled paper with natural inks. Many companies that use catalogs to sell their products use print-on-demand to print only necessary pages, and use a searchable online catalog as their main catalog. Other companies, such as Interface Flooring Systems, offer users the opportunity to order samples directly from their website and return them in a prepaid package when they're finished.

Sustainability extends much further than the physical environment. It encompasses the social sphere as well. Many companies choose to be sustainable by effecting social change. Sometimes it's as simple as getting many groups to work together toward a common goal or effort that will impact the community. It allows everyone to make a difference.

Ben and Jerry's is a well-known company that promotes a variety of causes, including rainforest protection, world peace, and community economic development. The company established a foundation that donates a percentage of its profits to charities all over the world. In addition, ingredients for its ice cream are purchased from companies that employ homeless people, recovering alcoholics, and drug addicts, as well as from developing countries.

By making a commitment to honest and accessible public relations, a company can be sustainable. Many manufacturers have established toll-free numbers to sell merchandise and respond to customer inquiries. When staffed by courteous and knowledgeable associates, these companies are able to fulfill their commitment to being accessible with the right information that will help the consumer successfully use or safely dispose of a product. A company new to an area, or one that has developed an innovative solution to help solve an environmental problem, should consider an open-house policy to build support and trust in the company. Consumers and communities need to be given a reason to feel proud about companies. The founder

of Body Shop International did just that when she opened their new Canadian headquarters in 1993. She generated favorable press by explaining to invited guests that the building was the most environmentally sound in Toronto. This naturally boosted sales and created customer loyalty.

Sustainability will only be achieved by a cohesive effort among individuals, companies and communities. Through this cohesive effort, companies of all sizes can truly practice sustainable business and instill trust and loyalty in both its employees and the consumers it serves.

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