

**Green is the New Gold –
“Go Green” or Lo\$e Green
by**

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Everything changed in 2009...budgets tightened and all expenses, especially “new items”, are closely scrutinized. Companies obviously are now concerned about more urgent issues than sustainability and all the hype about “going green” appears to be fading, right? Not so fast! Here’s what’s still going on:

- Oil prices continue to fluctuate and we probably will never see gas prices consistently below \$2.00 per gallon. Will we all be driving subcompacts as they do in European countries? Probably not, but we will continue to move toward more fuel conservation.
- Water, often taken for granted, continues to be a precious and endangered resource. After years of severe drought and three weeks away from water rationing in December 2007, my home town of Atlanta just recently was able to lift water restrictions. Other sections of the country, such as Texas, are now experiencing severe water shortages.
- Although “less paper” initiatives are now in vogue, over 40% of industrial wood harvest is used to make paper. Additionally, paper and paperboard make up over 30% of the waste stream in the United States.
- Finally, the fact remains that the highest mountain south of Maine on the East Coast is the Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island.

The same plethora of problems that brought us to the point of environmental instability has not changed or magically vanished during this challenging economic downturn. The good news is that the sustainability movement also has not vanished. Federal, state, and local governments are actively involved in developing sustainability models. As a direct result, one of the few areas of employment growth is in “green” jobs.

The corporate world clearly envisions sustainability as being both profitable and a key component of corporate responsibility. Their commitment is phenomenal. For example:

- Coca-Cola is constructing a 100 million lb. recycling center in South Carolina.
- Nike has committed to being carbon neutral in its offices, retail stores and business travel by 2011.
- Wal-Mart has committed to a zero waste goal by 2015.
- Subaru is working toward “zero landfill” status at its Indiana plant – 99.8% of refuse being recycled or reused.

Why are these and many other firms taking or discussing steps to “go green”? Because:

- it’s good for the environment
- clients are demanding it
- it makes economic sense
- corporate responsibility and image

We all know “going green” is good for the environment but are clients really demanding it? The answer from many firms is a resounding “**YES**”. You can bet the companies like the ones mentioned above are seeking business partners who have sustainability programs to support their efforts. One executive director told me his firm received an

RFP asking each firm to discuss its sustainability program. Partly because the firm had adopted a successful “green” program, they gained a new corporate client who has generated significantly more incremental revenue than the total investment in their sustainability program. Additionally, the sense of pride and enthusiasm within the firm has been extremely rewarding. This story is not unique. More firms are receiving requests for information about their sustainability programs...and their positive responses are making a difference.

In the legal industry today, however, going green is as much about saving money as saving the environment. Most law firms are not acknowledged as being agents of change. Therefore, it is surprising to see how many law firms around the country have enrolled in the ABA/EPA Law Office Climate Challenge. The program, initiated by seven law firms in March 2007, now has over 200 firms and 600 locations enrolled. Many firms have been amazed to learn how many things they were already doing to support the environment when they evaluated the requirements to enroll in the program. To learn more about the program and see who has enrolled, visit www.abanet.org/enviro/climatechallenge/overview.shtml.)

If these initiatives were not fiscally responsible, firms would not be implementing programs. Unlike the local and national green rush of 2007 with pricey roof-top photovoltaic systems and LEED certification, the new green reality is more about the small stuff, switching out light bulbs and turning off air conditioning, areas where significant investment is not required and cost savings can be realized.

Law firms still use an extraordinary amount of paper, a major area of opportunity. Paper purchased for printers, copiers, and marketing materials now has higher post consumer waste content. Printers are being defaulted to duplex printing. Documents are transmitted electronically whenever possible. Clients are billed electronically unless a paper invoice is requested. And the most exciting news...attorneys are actually using an entire legal pad before requesting a new one!

Recycling is another area embraced by firms. Recycle containers are placed in every office and bins are located strategically throughout the firm. If their building does not have a recycling program, firms are leading other tenants to have one established. Firms are using recyclable plates, cups, and utensils...or even better, china. It's difficult to believe but many firms have even eliminated bottled water. That action alone could have a major impact on the economy!

Firms are carefully evaluating energy usage. Everything is under scrutiny - turning out the lights when a room is empty, turning off computers at night, modifying the office temperature (especially on the weekends), using video conferencing, and telecommuting.

Through their efforts, firms are not only doing their part to help the environment, but also strengthening the business partnership with their clients and, in many cases, increasing firm profits.

Clearly green building, energy efficiency, recycling and other green efforts are here to stay. Don't wait for your clients, prospects and employees to ask you to take action – exhibit your industry and community leadership position...**"GO GREEN"** now! If your existing program has stalled in 2009, now is the time to get it recharged. If you would like to receive my detailed list of over 100 specific things law firms are doing to "go green", email me at marshall.fletcher@dtiglobal.com.