

Going Green Doesn't Have to Break the Bank

By Joseph Maguire
Feb. 3, 2011

Multiple green certification programs are now available for business and property owners beyond the big names who have led the industry in the past. Nimble new certification programs have clear and easy-to-follow standards. They're leading the way in today's green climate, engaged in providing knowledge, designs and operating solutions that benefit all types of business.

Choosing the right program is only the beginning. Cost effectively meeting the standards and promoting your sustainability to your employees, customers, tenants (and prospective tenants) produces the payoff.

Earn Your Stripes

Businesses need to commit to environmental responsibility. Do not mistake the push for sustainability as a fad. It is the new cultural ethic and it isn't going away. Earning a green certification will reduce a company's carbon footprint and foster a healthier work environment. Most importantly, businesses should be green because it makes them more efficient.

Establish Clear Goals

Even with recent cost-saving advancements in sustainable building practices, a well-planned budget is crucial. Clearly establish how going green fits into your long-term business plans and how it will affect your bottom line.



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- Map out scope, investment and timelines for each certification project.
- Determine all costs of certification. Required payments to third parties often dwarf a certification's 'sticker price.'
- Inquire about your company's ability to use certification imaging on your property and in print and electronic media. Some certifications offer low cost marketing aids to certified properties — ask about them.
- Compare all options; remember that using sustainable products and methods will cost slightly more than their traditional counterparts, but using recycled and salvaged materials can be extremely affordable.

- If your business has multiple versions of the same prototype building, ask about a general certification and a volume discount.
- If environmentally responsible renovations have recently been made, determine whether they are already eligible for certification.
- Remember that cost matters. Not all certifications involve the same level, and layers, of fees and ancillary expenses, such as multiple and redundant consulting and inspection by ‘certified’ experts. The reality is some certification programs are orders of magnitude less expensive than others. The easiest way to increase — or even achieve — your return on investment is to cut that investment by half — or even up to 90 percent. That is the discrepancy in the cost of certifications in the market.

Understand the Guidelines

Certification programs each have their own set of standards, and some are difficult to navigate. Business owners who want to renovate their building, but don’t comprehend industry terminology, should contact the program directly. Often, a specialist will be available to guide you through the process. If one is not available, consult with a green industry expert and ask that they explain the program guidelines.

Low-cost or free tutorials and e-books are available online for the more difficult certification programs. Following these tutorials can help you prepare to apply for certification, but should never take the place of reading and following the official guidelines.

Small Steps, Big Results

Little changes to your building can produce big results in efficiency and energy reduction, which are two major components of most certification programs. Buying Energy Star rated appliances and fixtures, installing light-resistant blinds, using organic and recycled materials and supplies, implementing company policies for reducing water and energy usage, and establishing recycling and carpooling programs are all practical, frugal means of achieving certification standards.

Larger projects, such as HVAC installation, sewer and water management systems and building construction,

will certainly cost more and take longer. Make small changes first and put efficiency measures in place to prepare your company and employees for bigger investments later.

Follow a Marketing Plan

So you’ve earned a certification, now what? You made the investment, devoted time and money to adhering to guidelines and ensured that your building runs more efficiently than ever before. The next thing to do is develop — and follow — a marketing plan.

- Be proud of your accomplishments. Display your certification in the entrance, and have a fact sheet ready for customers who inquire about it.
- If being certified comes with educational materials, seminars or invitations to trade shows, take advantage of these additional offerings. Bring your customers into the conversation by educating them, as well.
- Write a press release to include in your online news room and submit to local media that covers business updates and green topics.
- Write a blog or newsletter about why your company chose to go green, the steps you took and how this will affect your future.
- Engage social media. Focus on your shiny new green certification, and like-minded people are more likely to do business with you.

It’s time for all business and property owners to acknowledge that a sustainability ethic is expected of all of us. Practical, cost effective certification — effectively communicated to your customers — consistently demonstrates that good stewardship is good business.

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