

Sustainability is here to stay

The business case for sustainability has arrived. Sustainability is emerging as a major mainstream trend, and be certain, it is here to stay.

The question is.... How is your business positioned? Resisting? Complying with the regulations? Or, seeing sustainability as a business opportunity?

In the words of Edgar Woolard, Jr., Chairman of DuPont, "During the next quarter century, the most significant net contribution to a greener world will be made by industry. Not every company is there yet, but most are trying.... Those companies that take such principles seriously will do very well.... Those that aren't trying won't be a problem simply because they won't be around long term".

Taking on, or not taking on, sustainable practices is a strategic business choice and one that will ultimately affect both the performance and culture of your business.

Typically, businesses who begin to look to improve the sustainability performance of their product get a new appreciation of what their business does, and in the early stages discover a number of initiatives that they can take on very easily and at negligible cost, often with substantial business benefits.

Benefits to the business include being able to offer a more functional housing product, increased competitiveness, being a preferred product provider, being able to be responsive rather than reactive to newly introduced regulations and market demands, and from the point of view of corporate responsibility being able to reduce the sustainability footprint of those who do business with you.

Currently on my desk is the GreenSmart Magazine 2005 edition and also the latest Building Connection magazine. Looking through these industry magazines, it is clear that the business case for sustainability has arrived. Many of the houses and products profiled in these magazines have embraced and are delivering market-friendly housing, materials, products, appliances and fittings that have been developed with sustainability performance in mind. Another excellent resource from which to learn is www.ecospecifier.org - an independently assessed eco-preferable materials and products database.

The companies behind environmentally preferred housing and products have made strategic decisions to differentiate their product on sustainability grounds (eg energy efficiency, water efficiency, waste minimisation, health preferences, reduced maintenance, lifestyle advantages).

Many of these same companies are also the winners on awards nights - and not only in the 'eco' categories but across the board.

These sustainability mindful businesses are the early movers and the current leaders in offering the products that underlain by the momentum being generated by the introduction of sustainability related regulations, together with increasing consumer awareness, will increasingly be needed, demanded and desired. This is not a risky business, but recognition of an opportunity to meet an increasing market demand.

In closing, it seems probable that in the housing industry, consistent with all other industry sectors – that those businesses that take the environment seriously will outperform those that do not. At the end of the day, it's a strategic business choice.

So when was the last time you incorporated an eco-marketing edge into your product?

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