

Going Green and the Entrepreneur

By Brad Schmett

The expectation of businesses by numerous stakeholders - society as a whole, governments, employees, clients and customers - is that they operate in ways that are not harmful to the environment. While that may not be completely possible, there exist many avenues for businesses to reduce their environmental footprint and function in less harmful ways than their predecessors.

The large scope and vast number of environmental issues and opportunities are staggering. The concerns of energy efficiency and recycling are commonplace and are just the first step towards environmental awareness. The next steps are bigger and more complex: green buildings, cleaning, design, procurement, marketing as well as environmental management systems, supply chains and water conservation. This is the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, but this one isn't getting any smaller.

Where to start making a difference can at times be overwhelming, but it's certainly not impossible. Entrepreneurs are known for their innovation, new ideas, and creative thinking. This is probably one of the best groups to lead the way and make a significant impact on how businesses operate.

The benefits to businesses that operate in the green are numerous. Begin with the three R's: reducing, reusing and recycling. Each one cuts costs to varying degrees. Out-green your competition and give yourself a competitive advantage: when your clients and customers are expected to be environmentally aware, they'll look to their suppliers to be so also. For the innovative entrepreneur, create new or better products that are sensitive to a particular green issue and you've got yourself another market to sell to.

Even though the benefits of going green are attractive, it's not always easy to home in to the initiatives that provide the most efficient green results. Given the massive amounts of information, resources, and programs to assist the entrepreneur in integrating environmental methods into their overall business strategy, it's evident that there really is no right way - or one way - to do it. "Ways" can overlap and the "right way" is actually a mix and match of environmental programs that complement one another, depending on the type of business or service offered.

Sometimes we convince ourselves that our individual efforts have little impact on the whole. Once we understand that caring for our environment is a group effort, we can see how our own professional and personal efforts really do contribute to the whole - negative or positive.