

Grow Your Green Business

RUNNING A GREENER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS IS INCREASINGLY NECESSARY, BUT IT CAN ALSO CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITY, SAY DUNCAN GLENDINNING AND STEVE ALLEN.

Is your business keeping abreast of the environmental agenda, and the opportunities and threats it poses to you? Do you know the true costs of your resources and waste, and how they affect your financial performance?

A rising tide of organisations of all sizes are focusing on such issues, and in the context of national, legally-binding CO2 emission reduction targets, public awareness of environmental issues, and rapidly rising energy prices, such issues are likely to factor increasingly into (successful) business life.

Simon Forsyth, environmental business mentor and organiser of two local resource efficiency groups, explains: "Small businesses [in particular] are caught between ever growing expectations, stipulations, and regulations on the one hand, and increasing resource costs on the other".

But with these challenges comes an abundance of opportunity. Becoming more resource efficient can give competitive advantage to your business through reduced costs, while genuine environmental and social responsibility improves public reputation. Both aspects increase prospects for generating new business success in the future, not to mention strengthening your present position in the market.

The key to resource efficiency is in the questioning, measuring and monitoring of your use. Obvious as it might sound, it's amazing what can be achieved. We spoke to Kerry North, environmental consultant at 'Engolve, Partnerships for Sustainability', who outlined some compelling local examples. These included a conference centre in Blagdon which reduced its electricity bill by an impressive 25% – a saving of £10K/yr – by running a simple 'switch-it-off' campaign; a manufacturing company in Devizes that replaced a malfunctioning urinal flusher and saved £6k/yr; and an electrical wholesaler in Trowbridge which, through improved logistics, reduced its vehicle size and in doing so halved fuel consumption and costs.

Such significant savings can often be made in multiple areas at once, as in the case of a brewery in NE Cornwall that saved a total of £19k with a combination of reduced energy, waste and water bills.



Green columnists Steve Allen (left) and Duncan Glendinning

In the longer term, change can either threaten a business, or catalyse creativity and open up new possibilities. A striking example of the former is that of an electronics supplier that, when unable to meet a new requirement from its contractor demanding that the solder used was lead-free, lost the contract.

In contrast, a lamp company from Plymouth saw great possibility in the changing environmental regulations, and created a spin-off company tasked specifically with lamp recycling. This new company ultimately expanded to cover disposal of all forms of IT equipment.

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A final, fantastic example of adaptation to change comes in the form of a Denmark-born engineering company (now also UK-based). In the face of slumping sales during the 1970s' oil crises, it saw the potential for alternative energy sources and diversified into wind turbines. The company is now one of the world's leading wind power suppliers, with an impressive 23% share of the global market.

MOVING FORWARD

So what are the first steps? Whether you can make time to address these issues yourself or have the budget for outside



consultancy, there is a wealth of information available.

First, no- and low-cost resources. On a national level, Envirowise offers free government-supported environmental advice and documentation for UK businesses. This includes, for example, the Green Efficiency Toolkit and a web-based environmental performance 'indicator' tool, both useful guides for monitoring and improving your environmental performance.

The Carbon Trust, a national, government-funded independent company, helps businesses and the public sector with free resources that include an explanation of carbon footprinting, a carbon calculator, and an energy walk-round guide for your office.

NetRegs, a partnership involving the Environment Agency, provides free, industry-specific guidance for small UK businesses on compliance with environmental legislation and regulation. At a regional level, OurSouthWest is a one-stop-shop for news, information, events and data for the South West.

Next: local consultancy and training. We spoke to Veronica Parsons, business team manager at Engolve, who said: "The Engolve Business Team can offer practical and strategic advice to organisations wishing to reduce their environmental impact and costs. We can help you to increase your competitiveness and open up new business opportunities".

Support is offered through a variety of channels. Engolve offers bespoke consultancy and in-house training. Where appropriate, it will point you to the 'Wessex Environmental Business Network' (WEBN), which offers resource efficiency tools, seminars and support. They also provide delivery of 'Envision', for specific areas of Bristol and West Somerset. This is a SW Regional Programme that offers subsidised support for Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), given qualifying criteria.

Running a greener and more sustainable business is increasingly necessary, but it can also open up a world of opportunity for those who rise to the challenge. Will this be your business? ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Register at www.envirowise.gov.uk to access Envirowise's resources and indicator tool.
- Access the Carbon Trust's resources and tools by visiting www.carbontrust.org.uk/solutions
- Get free advice on environmental legislation and regulation at www.netregs.gov.uk
- Bookmark www.oursouthwest.com for the latest regional news, events and other information.
- Get local training, consultancy and advice through Engolve by visiting www.engolve.co.uk /tel: 01225 787910.
- Envision: www.envisionsw.org.uk, tel: 0845 456 9350.